

USING THE VERBAIL POLE TRAP

By Stuart D. Henderson

Since my article on raptor trapping appeared in the Nov-Dec 1962 issue of EBBA NEWS I have received several letters from banders requesting further details of some or all of the traps mentioned in this article.

Further interest in the Verball Pole Trap has been almost universal, in spite of my notes concerning the disadvantages of this trap.

As many banders seem determined to "have a go" with the Verball anyway, I believe the following information on purchasing, preparation, and the safe use of Verballs is called for.

In addition to the information set forth here, any persons interested in using this trap should also re-read carefully the note in the Nov-Dec 1962 EBBA NEWS article, page 208.

Verball Pole Traps are available at \$6.00 each from the Animal Trap Co. of America (makers of Victor rat and mouse traps), Lititz, Pa. They are made in one size only which will take almost any size of bird from a Bluebird to a Golden Eagle. There is a high probability of injury to species the size of a Kestrel or smaller, and you will probably also experience injuries to larger species if you use the trap a good deal.

No instructions for setting are included, but this is fairly easily learned by trial and error. A fair number of these traps are received out of adjustment, and you may have to do a little bending here and there to make the trap operate properly. Setting off each trap with a stick held vertically will give a good idea of where the noose will close on a bird's tarsi; and whether further adjustment will be necessary.

Here are a few tips on preparing and using the trap:

The traps are delivered with a white cotton cord, and are painted green. We make these changes: Paint trap camouflage tones or flat black, and dye cord brown, black, etc., or rub with lamp black.

If traps are to be exposed to severe weather rub the springs with oil or paint with spar varnish to prevent excessive rust. Wax the cord or it will probably shrink so tightly to the outside of the jaws in wet weather that even if a bird lands on the perch the trap will not operate. Freezing rain or sleet renders the entire trap inoperative. Excessive wind will blow the cord loose from its proper position encircling the jaws, and cause it to catch the perch instead of the intended victim. This is easily cured with three or four small pieces of cellophane tape placed around the circle of cord. These pull loose harmlessly when the trap is sprung.

Large or aggressive captives sometimes bite at and fray the original cord, and eventually a replacement will be required. You will probably find, as we have, that nylon cord makes a superior replacement. Checking traps every few hours will largely prevent this condition as a bird generally does not begin to bite the cord until he has been in the trap for 2 or 3 hours. I firmly believe this trap should be either watched constantly or checked at least every 3 hours while in use.

Before using your traps set them and allow to stand for at least three days. Always follow this procedure before use! If you don't, you are almost certain to injure a bird as the springs are extremely powerful unless allowed to "season" in this way before use. A new set of springs will snap a 7/8" stick easily! Much of this tension is relieved by leaving the trap set for several days.

As a cord from the trap to the ground it is best to use nylon (dyed an appropriate color), as it is virtually impervious to rotting and stands up far better to biting or chafing than other cords. Always allow some slack cord at the base of the pole. Remove all irregularities or branches from the post, sapling, etc., so the cord won't become entangled and hang the bird.

It is also safer to choose a spot where there is grass, tall weeds, or other vegetation around the pole to give a captured bird some cover from prospective predators.

The post should be of small enough diameter at its base so that the spring and cord assembly, in the off position, is able to slide down over the pole and all the way to the ground. Occasionally, a captive bird carries the assembly forward and over the pole when the trap is sprung, instead of allowing it to follow its normal path down the cord. A pole larger at its base than the space between the cord and springs will hang a bird at a point part way down the pole.

Attempts on our part to build both a smaller, less powerful and larger, more powerful version of the Verball have been unsuccessful. The trap seems to work best in the size it is manufactured in.

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BLUE-WINGED WARBLER RETURN

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I had a return bird on April 29 which was most interesting. A Blue-winged Warbler that I banded on August 10, 1959. It returned in 1962 and again this year, making it at least four years old. Of the records I received for the Who Banded What department, there were only 61 reports of Blue-winged Warblers banded. This is a small number compared with other warblers.