

GATHERING CAGES SANITATION

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Many of us are still using the same gathering cages we used when we started banding, years ago. Without a second thought, we put bird after bird in the same dirty box, not realizing that we may be condemning the birds to death.

No doubt, you are wondering how your gathering cage can cause the death of a bird. The fact is that some of the birds are carriers of diseases, such as footpox. Birds can carry and transmit the disease without being visibly affected themselves. We know it happens, because we once placed a bluebird in a gathering cage for only a few minutes (after it had been used for a demonstration); within two weeks the bluebird had contracted footpox and was dead. We realized then, how dangerous the old, disease laden gathering cage really was.

I know a man who said that he had never changed "the grass" in his gathering cage; all he did was to "prop the top open." The box had been used for years. . . . He is an exception; we know that most banders attempt to clean the boxes, but if you ask your doctor, he will tell you that it is almost impossible to really clean a wooden container.

Better methods can be used to collect and hold birds before banding. Two are described below. They cut down the incidence of infection.

1. Headnets of the type used to keep mosquitoes from the face are good carrying bags. They can be bought from Surplus and Sporting Goods Stores for only 50¢ each, or 3 for \$1.00. Birds remain very quietly in them. The bags are washed daily, in a washing machine with good soap or detergent in very hot water. The high temperature of the dryer completes the disinfecting job. At a laundromat, the cost is only 25¢; at home it costs even less. - - Another advantage of these headnets is that a dozen of them can be hung on one's belt, or placed in one's pocket; they are not cumbersome. Compare that to lugging a big gathering cage all the time. One bag will hold a bird the size of a blue jay, or two the size of chickadees.
2. Paper bags. When marketing, ask for several size 12 paper bags instead of one large one, or buy sacks at 1¢ each. On dry days a sack will last all the day; in snow or rain, only a few hours. You seldom band in a heavy rain so you can usually get your full 1¢ for each bag.

It is our duty as banders to help control and prevent the spread of disease in any way we can; so let's try some other method than our old contaminated gathering cages. Just think! maybe that warbler will die because of your poor handling methods, and never have a chance to be returned or recovered.