

A RUBBER-TOPPED GATHERING CAGE FOR EVENING GROSBEAKS AND GENERAL-PURPOSE USE

By Robert P. Yunick

By their gregarious nature, evening grosbeaks frequently come in hordes. This winter's grosbeak influx brought storage problems for me at my feeder. A number of times I was in the midst of processing (banding, weighing, sexing, measuring, fat-classing and recording) 10-15 birds and more birds had to be gathered from the traps. Since the processing took time and I wanted as much data as possible on every bird, I had to have some provision for safely storing birds up to 30 minutes before I could get to them.

Experience dictated that the only safe way to use the four-cell rubber-topped gathering cage (RTC) was to put one grosbeak per cell. This was a lavish waste of space, for each cell measured 7X7X13". Besides, on one trip to the traps, two cases brought back only eight birds. I tried two grosbeaks per cell and found that under very careful surveillance, the birds were safe. Three birds per cell invited trouble. As one can imagine, when a bander is busy with loads of grosbeaks, a bander has all he can do to keep his fingers from being bitten, let alone keep an eye on what is coming to the traps and the local skirmishes in four gathering cages. More cages really would not solve the problem. A better cage was needed.

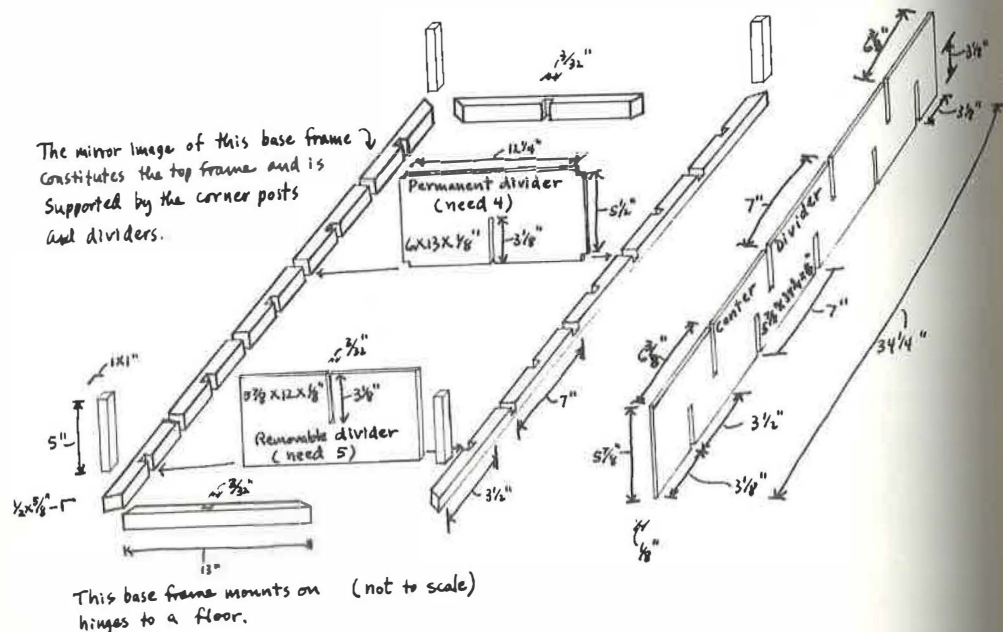


FIGURE I

Base Frame and Divider Construction Details

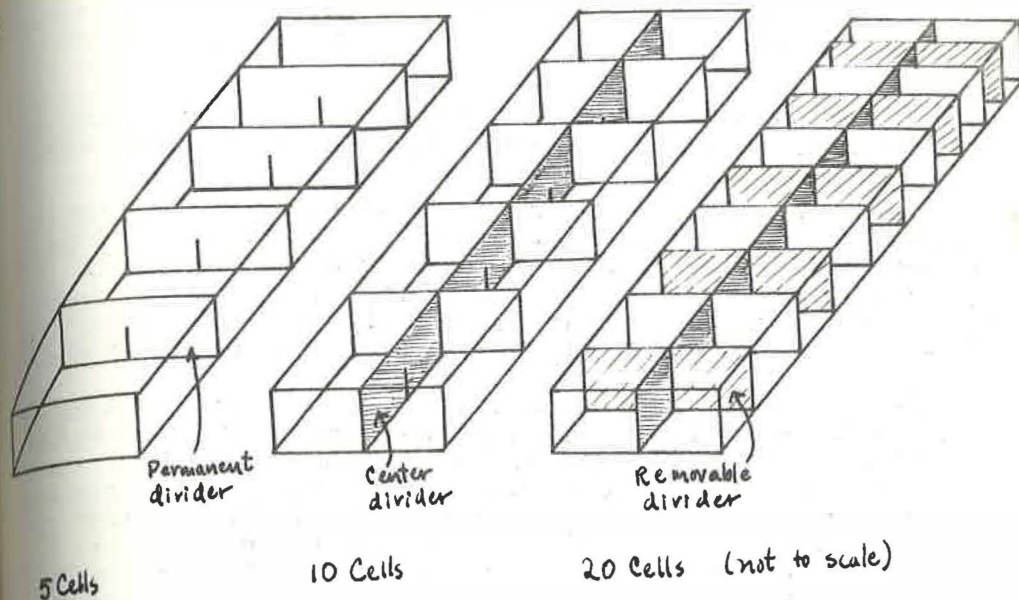


FIGURE II

Use of Dividers for 5, 10, 20 Cells

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My immediate thought was to make a gathering cage with many small cells, but it bothered me to think of spending the time making a cage that would be suited for grosbeaks only. For as such, it would be used about four months of the year and only every two or three years at that. Finally it occurred to me to make an RTC with removable cell dividers, so that with the dividers the cage would have numerous small cells for grosbeaks, and without the dividers it would have several large cells, or for that matter many combinations in between for general-purpose use.

The particular cage I made measures about 6X13X35". It has five permanent cells, however, can be divided lengthwise with a partition to give ten cells and each pair of cells can be further divided to give 20 cells. As such, each cell measures 6X6 1/2 X 3 1/2". In constructing a cage of this type, the length and depth can be varied somewhat, but the 3 1/2-inch cell width represents a minimum dimension. It is just sufficient for a grosbeak and the hand needed to remove the bird. Since the grosbeaks line up much like horses in stalls, they have very little opportunity to

bite when removed from their cells. The cage works wonderfully. The first time I really put it to the test, I found I had 21 grosbeaks - one for each cell and one for my free hand. Who could ask for a better trial run?

This particular cage is large and heavy, but I wanted it large and for work about the feeder, I do not mind its 12.5 pounds. Some weight

saving measures could bring it down to about ten pounds. It is not the sort of thing to be carried all day on the net rounds, however, I intend to make use of it for holding large quantities of bank swallows in spring and summer, and then use it for storage and peak periods during OR work in the fall. As such it will be used as a five-cell cage. Come winter, it will become a 20-cell cage once again waiting for the grosbeaks.

Some of the construction details are given in Figure I, and the use of the partitions in Figure II. Only five-, ten- and 20-cell divisions are indicated. By manipulating the dividers, one can make five-, six-, seven-, eight-, nine-, two ten-, twelve-, fourteen-, sixteen-, eighteen-, and twenty-cell structures. The four permanent, notched partitions are glued (resorcinol or epoxy glue) into place and provide considerable strength and rigidity to the structure. One needs a top frame (not shown), base frame (the top and base are mirror images of one another), four support posts, four permanent, notched dividers, five removable dividers, a center partition and a hinged floor (not shown), vinyl screening (not shown) on the sides and slitted rubber tubing for the top (not shown). This tubing should be layed as flat as possible without stretching, because if the rubber is stretched, the slits will gap and allow some of the larger, stronger species to escape. Both the tubing and vinyl screening are fastened with upholstery tacks. The partitions and floor are made of one-eighth-inch Masonite and everything well varnished to make it washable and weatherproof.

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