

MODIFICATION OF THE BAL-CHATRI TRAP FOR SHRIKES

By William S. Clark

The Bal-Chatri trap described by J. Douglas Whitman (EBBA News, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 5-11: Jan.-Feb. 1962) was constructed by the author and used for about two years with great success on Sparrow Hawks (Falco sparverius). More than 200 have been caught and banded. However, the Loggerhead Shrike (Lanius ludovicianus) is not readily caught by a trap of this design. His method of attack differs from the hawks in that he uses his beak to grab, kill and carry his prey. As a consequence, the shrike usually does not land on top of the trap where the nooses are, but beside it, and will walk around it trying to get to the bait through the sides. The trap described below was designed and constructed as a result of many frustrating experiences of shrikes coming to the trap and leaving without being caught.

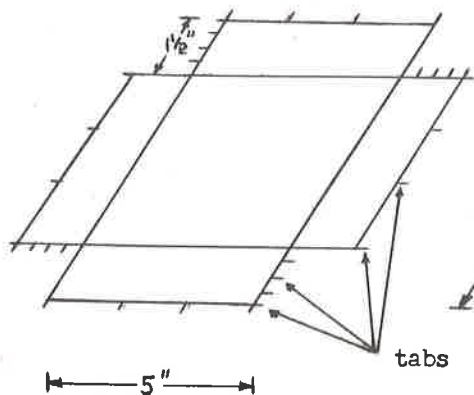


Figure 1. Pattern for the box

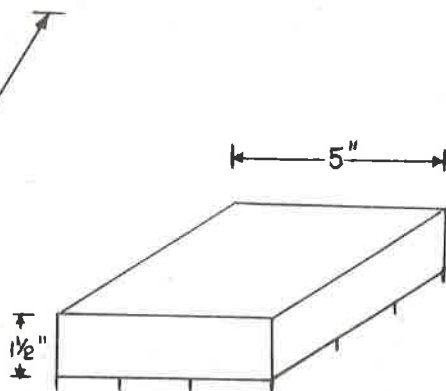


Figure 2. the box

This trap is similar to that described by Whitman but has the base extended to form a "skirt", to which nooses are attached. The basic material is $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch hardware cloth. A section 10"x10" serves as the base, then another section 8"x8" is cut and modified as shown in figure 1. Notice that some cuts leave a tab which will serve to hold the trap together. This modified square is then formed into a box as shown in figure 2. The tabs are bent around the joining sides as shown in figure 3 (at left) to hold the box together. The box is now placed in the center of the base and the tabs are used to attach the box to the base. A door hole, 2"x2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", is cut in the base under the box and the edges of this opening are filed smooth. The door itself is made from the same size hardware cloth and is one quarter inch longer and

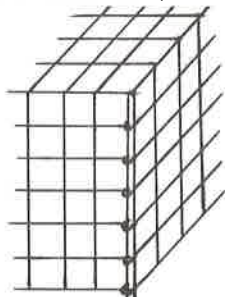


Figure 3.

wider than the opening. The hinges and clasp for the door are made using soft steel wire.



For weight I use two 4-ounce used tire balancing weights which are placed inside the box and secured using soft steel wire. The trap is now sprayed completely with flat black paint. When this dries, flat red and green are sprayed on parts of the trap to give a camouflaging effect. When the paint dries, nooses are placed on the trap.

The noose material I use is 8-pound test monofilament fishing line. Taking the loose end from the spool a square knot is tied and pulled tight around a small rod (I use a crochet needle) and the short end trimmed off. This forms the eye of the noose. The line is cut now to leave a piece about seven inches long. The bitter end is now fed through the eye to make the noose and tested to ensure that the noose when closed will spring back open. This is very important. If the noose will not spring open, then pull the noose apart and feed the bitter end through the other side of the eye and test again. If it still will not spring back open, throw it away and try again.



Next the noose is attached to the trap by three overhand knots and pulled tight using needle-nosed pliers, so that the noose is standing up. A noose that is lying flat will not catch. Put some Duco cement on the knot and clip the other end of the knot. The resulting noose should be between $1\frac{1}{4}$ " and $1\frac{3}{4}$ " in diameter. For a trap of this size, I find that 20 nooses on the top of the box and 20 nooses on the skirt are sufficient. Too few nooses decrease the chance for catching the bird and too many will cause severe tangling problems. In my

experience, the above number seems to be the optimum.

A few words about bait. Wild mice, especially the House Mouse (*Mus musculus*) work best. However, black or brown domestic mice are less likely to tire out and become inactive. I use both of the above. White domestic mice are least acceptable and my experience with them is that often they are rejected by the hawk; as a result I now do not use them. This trap will hold grasshoppers and crickets but I have never tried to use them.

I have used this trap on shrikes with much improvement in catch. It works equally well for Sparrow Hawks as the earlier traps I have used. The accompanying photographs will attest to its ability to catch these small predators.

The first time I used this trap for a shrike, I failed to notice a Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) which was close by, and by the time I had turned my car around, this large hawk was down on the trap. I hastily drove back in order to chase him away, and he flew and landed in a nearby cornfield. But he carried the trap with him. I ran after him on foot and after a 300-yard or so chase, the redtail dropped the trap and flew away. The hawk was later caught and banded, using a larger and more appropriate Bal-Chatrri.

I am very interested in what experiences other hawk banders are having and would gladly receive any suggestions, hints or questions.

10423 Reisterstown Road, Owings Mills, Md. 21117



PARTIAL ALBINO WHITE-THROATED SPARROW



Mrs. Dorothy L. Mitchell of Newport News, Virginia, writes, "We netted and banded this White-throated Sparrow last February (1966) and it is back again this winter. It looks completely white, except for the wings, at a distance." Mrs. Mitchell also sent a beautiful color slide of a Lazuli Bunting (which unfortunately would not reproduce well in black and white) which she also banded in February 1966. She says, "The Lazuli Bunting was seen several times and in two different places, and I finally netted it in the Riverside area of Newport News, the third day I tried to."