The vertical jumping capability of the grey squirrel appears to be about three feet at the most. The platforms must also be situated so that no tree limbs, poles, lines or other squirrel supports overhang them. Squirrels readily climb a tree and jump down on a feeding area when the opportunity presents itself. Ten to 15 feet appears to be a safe horizontal distance to place these platforms from overhead or horizontal access. The support pipes should be anchored about 16-20 inches in the ground to effectively support the weight of the platform. The ground is very soft when the frost leaves in the spring and a pipe buried only about one foot may lean and topple.

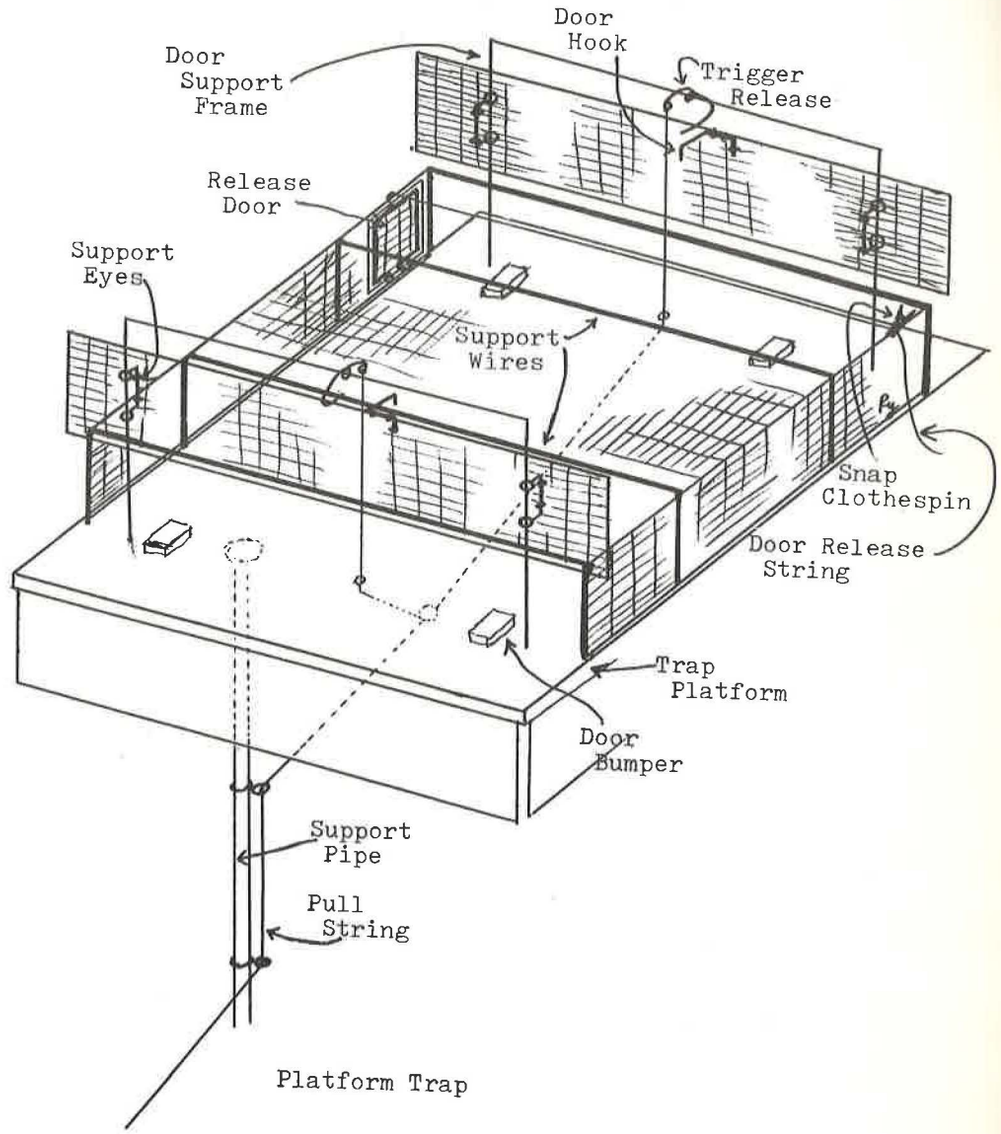
When not in use as trap supports, these platforms make excellent feeders. Thirty evening grosbeaks on a 30 x 40 inch platform is a pretty sight. Mostly they are used for dispensing sunflower seed, though cracked corn sprinkled on these platforms attracts mourning doves, juncos and other ground feeders. These platforms work their best on the winter finches, and the blue jay - chickadee - nuthatch tribes.

When snow is anticipated, the platforms are covered with polyethylene sheet which is held in place by snap clothespins at the corners of the flashing. This covering not only facilitates snow removal, it preserves for use in a dry state the food contained thereon. Without the cover, one has to sweep off the snow and usually sacrifices the food in so doing. An inexpensive automotive windshield brush with a scraper on the handle is an effective cleaning tool. Due to the extreme weathering these platforms must withstand, it is adviseable to provide them with the best of exterior coating. I use at least two coats of a soaking oil finish that saturates the wood well and then a finish paint coat for effect. Green is a quite pleasing color. Platforms which are ravaged all year by the weather last about three years. Those which I put out in November and remove in May are still in use after six to eight years' use.

A PLATFORM TRAP
By Robert P. Yunick

A trap design that has worked for me very effectively for the past six years is one I call a platform trap. It is especially effective for Evening Grosbeaks and the similarly gregarious species like Purple Finches and American Goldfinches. After building the first model on a trial basis, I built a second one two years later, and have used both ever since in my yard. I have passed the design on to one or two other banders who have contructed them and found them successful also.

The trap rests atop a wooden platform to eliminate interence from squirrels. The platform has been described serpately, so this description will center on the trap design and use. The trap consists of an open-ended cage having two drop doors triggered by a pull string as pictured in the accompanying drawing. The trap may be made of either ½ inch hardware cloth or ½ x 1-in. welded wire, the latter being preferred.



Platform Trap

The open ended cage is typically eight in. high, and the two I use presently measure 32 inches wide by 30 in. deep, and 36 in. wide by 34 in. deep. The cage is supported by three or four support wires made of 9-gauge galvanized wire. These wires are squeeze fitted into holes in the platform to anchor the trap in place.

A 6x6 inch door opening is cut in a corner of the cage. The door is a piece of hardware cloth or welded wire framed by 12½-ga. galvanized wire. The door is hinged at the bottom with wire eyes and is fastened to a pull string on the top. The string is fastened to the opposite side of the trap with a snap clothes pin. When the string is taut, the door is closed. The door drops when the string is released. The birds in the trap are motioned into a transfer cage (described separately) fastened to the trap opening.

The trap doors are mounted on wire door support frames made of 9-ga. galvanized wire. The frame is anchored in the platform. The doors should exceed the height and width of the cage by about ½ in. on each side. Since the door is somewhat flexible and has a tendency to bow at the center, thus allowing some birds to squeeze out, a door hook is placed at the center top of the door. When the door drops, the hook catches on the cage and prevents bowing.

The support eyes that slide on the wire door support frame are made of 12½-ga. galvanized wire and wired to the doors. Mounted on the wire door support frames at about the center of the door is a trigger release which is string-activated through the floor of the platform. The two trigger strings connect to a ring below the platform, and attached to this ring through one or two eyes on the support pipe is the pull string. Two polyurethane door bumper pads measuring about ½ inch thick are used to cashion the impact of the door. These serve two purposes: 1) They deaden the sound of impact, and 2) They provide a gap between the floor and door bottom so that should an escaping bird be caught by the falling door, it will not be pinned directly to the floor.

The trap must be made to fit the platform atop which it sits. It is necessary that the closed sides of the trap fit out to the very edge of the platform. Any ledge along this side will prompt some birds to attempt to feed along this edge rather than enter the trap from the open end. On the open ends of the trap, sufficient perching space must be provided for those birds which choose to procrastinate and inspect the scene before entering to feed. This perching area may be provided in two ways: 1) The trap may be recessed four to eight in. from the edge, thus providing a platform ledge; or 2) If the trap is placed flush to the edge, a simple wire supported perch may be attached to the end of the platform extending from it and in the same plane as the platform.

This trap, as most any trap, has definite advantages and disadvantages. It has the distinct advantage of being able to take large numbers of birds. Taking up to 20 grosbeaks with one pull of the string is not uncommon. When not in use, it doubles as a feeder. Using the trap as a feeder has the advantage of acclimating the local avian populace to the trap and minimizes trap shyness. Trap shyness is also limited by the wide open nature of the trap. Birds like Evening grosbeaks flock into the trap after the first bird settles on the platform. The would-be captives do not waste time seeking a limited or obscure opening. Also, this trap allows one to trap discriminately should it be necessary to do so. One may take specific individuals without having to take every bird that comes and worry about the interference caused by the occupancy of or removal from the trap.

The disadvantages, as I have experienced them, involve the following. The balance of the doors may sometimes be a little tricky, but time and patience solve this. It pays to lubricate the support frame with oil for fast, faultless response from the trap. Depending on how loosely one chooses to set the trigger, it is sometimes possible for a larger bird, like a jay or grackle, to rock the frame sufficiently on landing or take off to release a door. Since the second door could be similarly released later, while another bird feeds in the trap, resulting in the bird's capture, the doors of the trap are held open by snap clothes pins on the frame when no one is able to tend the trap for periods of more than one-two days. Only two or three times in six years has a bird been so captured in this manner.

Once in a great while, a bird will be pinned by a falling door. Most of the grosbeaks survive this experience, because their necks fit the ½-in. gap afforded by the door bumpers. To date only one grosbeak fatality, and one broken wing that healed with return of the bird to the wild, have been experienced. The smaller species fare less well than the grosbeaks when hit and four or five Pine siskins, Goldfinches and Purple finches have been crippled or killed by these traps. The mortality is of the order of 0.1% or less.

All things considered, the advantages of this trap far outweigh the drawbacks. Time and a little experience with it teach one how to handle the idiosyncrasies of it, and it becomes a valuable tool to the winter finch bander.

A TRAP TRANSFER CAGE

By Robert P. Yunick

In the course of removing trapped birds from a large trap, it is necessary to have some means of confining the captives into a smaller enclosure where one may manually remove them. The following is a description of a simple, handy transfer cage I use for removing birds from large Mason traps and the above-described platform trap.