

AN EASILY CONSTRUCTED HOLDING CAGE
By Valerie M. Freer

For many years I have belonged to the "milk carton" school regarding bird gathering cages. The photos on the opposite page show my latest version. The idea for a permanent frame came from that remarkable bander from Binghamton, N.Y., Harriet Marsi. She uses a wooden frame held together, I believe, by wires. When the cartons can no longer be washed clean, the wires are loosened and the cartons replaced. When I asked my husband to make such a frame for me, he demonstrated his administrative ability by passing the job along to his father, David Freer, Sr.

He produced this version, which he made from sheet metal. The back portion of the frame is attached to the side pieces and to the handle by 5 small bolts. Copper window screen is soldered in the front part of the frame; all other parts are also soldered together. I wash this cage by hosing it out from the screen side; after many washings, when the milk cartons need replacing, I remove the 5 nuts and take the frame apart. I use a single-edged razor blade to cut the tops from new half-gallon milk cartons and to cut into 3 sides of the bottom of each carton. Replacement of the cartons and reassembly of the frame takes only a few minutes.

No retaining wires are necessary on the back because the frame prevents the back flaps from opening out. The total weight is less than 2 pounds; the size could easily be doubled to 16 cartons without approaching the weight of the smallest wooden cages. Even in hottest weather, the birds inside remain comfortable due to the screening and light color of the milk cartons.

Another distinct and important advantage of this type of gathering cage is that since the cartons can easily be washed or replaced, the probability of spreading disease is very low.

Aggressive species such as Grosbeaks are always kept in separate compartments. In busy times, small calm birds such as Warblers, Kinglets, Bank Swallows and the like have been held in groups of up to 3 per carton. I have used two of these gathering cages for more than a year, holding nearly 2000 birds, with no casualties.

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