

## A Bird Bander's Diary

January 24, 1972 ..... A nice day here so I filled the bucket with water and put one of my all-purpose water-drip traps in operation. In my opinion, a water-drip trap is a must at any banding program along with grain traps and nets if the situation permits. I have noticed that some birds are "trap-shy" of the grain traps, but will readily enter a water-drip trap and many returns have been retrapped in water-drip traps that have avoided the grain traps.

But times have changed and most of the present articles on bird capturing techniques refer to nets ... how and where to place them, proper mesh size for different birds, etc. This is all well and good, especially at the former Operation Recovery stations where banders must travel to reach each in spring and fall. Also the permanent stations like Powdermill and Manomet where banders can devote full time to watching the nets.

For the average bander, nets are not always the best and easiest method of capturing birds for banding purposes and the resulting studies that can be made. It may be too windy or the weather too hot or cold. English Sparrows are a problem at some feeding stations and many are often too smart to go into grain traps, but are easily caught in water traps. Also, nets are often not practical near feeding stations as everyone knows who has lots of chickadees around.

From questions that are asked me, I am convinced that some of the newer banders do not fully realize the many advantages of some traps in certain situations. I'm sure that most of us started banding before nets were in common use, were impressed by the variety of traps used by the veteran banders we visited. One of the highlights of the EBBA meetings each year was the chance to visit banding stations in the immediate vicinity of the meetings and look at their traps. This was fun, and we "old timers" cherish many fond memories of these outings.

Of course grain and seed traps were at every station and to give variety and increase catches, some type of water trap was present

at almost every place we visited. Many had a water trap patterned after Raymond Middleton's Thrush Trap. This was an excellent trap and widely used.

Also, the single cell (or single compartment type of trap) is a must for a few species and the Evening Grosbeak is a good example. Anyone who has ever banded this species knows they will bite anything in sight and can easily maim or even kill another bird that happens to be in the same trap at the same time. They are also dangerous to other birds in a net if they are in close proximity.

Weeds and sprouting bird seed can be a problem with the all-purpose trap. Stephen W. Simon used roofing paper to combat this problem with success (Roofing paper Under All-Purpose Traps, EBBA News 21: 22). Some banders have made a concrete pad for their traps. Anything that discourages rodents and keeps grain off the ground to retard moulding is quite helpful. Certain type moulds may cause mortality among birds. In fact, I seldom use grain in my all-purpose traps anymore (except in real dry weather) and much prefer water as the attractor.

Personally, I prefer dripping water to still water and Merrill Wood wrote of an experiment (EBBA News 17: 2-3) about taking birds in traps equipped with a drip versus one without and found that the water drip took about 50% more birds. In the following issue of EBBA News (V. 18), Charles Blake discussed the data presented by Wood and concluded that the ratio in favor of dripping water should have been only 25%. Another long-time bander, John V. Dennis discusses (EBBA News 29:170-173) all this and concludes that in his own yard there was little difference in preference of drip over non-drip. He placed two bird baths in his yard only four feet apart and checked the results between a drip and a non-drip. Dennis alternated the drip daily to eliminate possible bias. In his test, the non-drip did attract a few more birds but 39 species went to the drip while only 28 visited the non-drip.

In my opinion, the dripping water probably attracted many of the birds in the first place - whether they used the pan with the dripping water or not. I do know that I have captured many birds in my all-purpose traps during a rain (and resulting ripples) when the drip from the water bucket was shut off. The degree of rapidity of the drip also may effect different birds differently, including the age of the bird, the species, the time of year and the temperature at the time. EBBA member Betty Downs is also a great believer in water as a lure and bands many birds each year without using nets at all (EBBA News 32: 235-6 [illustrated]).

Many types of dripping water devices are used from a dripping spigot to the use of a clamp on a small hose to produce the desired drip. One of my favorites is a screw in the end of a small hose and a slight turn will increase or decrease the speed of the drip.

In the September-October 1963 issue of EBBA News (V. 26:208-9), Frank Frazier had a drawing and materials needed for his Seth Low All-Purpose Trap. His dimensions are slightly different from those of my favorite trap but should work equally well. The article follows.

The Seth Low -- All Purpose Trap (By Frank P. Frazier) [reprinted from EBBA News 26: 208-9; 1963].

The Seth Low - All purpose trap shown on the opposite page is very like the one on Seth Low's farm in 1960 (although that one was set in concrete and only had one gathering cage - at the bottom.) I have found that a second gathering cage at the top helps collect birds that persist in keeping to the top of the trap. I have also used successfully a single gathering cage that is the full height of the trap.

I have found the 24" height to be most satisfactory, but others have had good results with traps from 10 to 18 inches high.

Heavy hardware cloth may be used in the construction, but the best and longest lasting material is 1 x 1/2" mesh 20 gauge galvanized wire net. (The top may be made from light poultry wire, 1" mesh or less, in the interests of economy but will have to be replaced in several years.) The base, if added strength is desired, should be reinforced with 1/8 to 3/16" galvanized fence wire.

Basic Materials Required for trap shown:

Sides -- 2 pieces 9 ft. x 2 ft.

Top -- 1 piece about 3 ft. x 7 ft.

Collecting Cages -- each - 1 piece 4 ft. x 1 ft.

Squeeze Klips, string, a spring clothes pin, galvanized fence wire

The removal door may be made from a scrap of the above, a piece of tin or other metal, or a piece of inner tube (as shown in the July-Aug. EBBA News page 145.) If a top collecting cage is used, a piece of wood (plywood will do) should be fastened underneath it to prevent the possibility of broken legs.

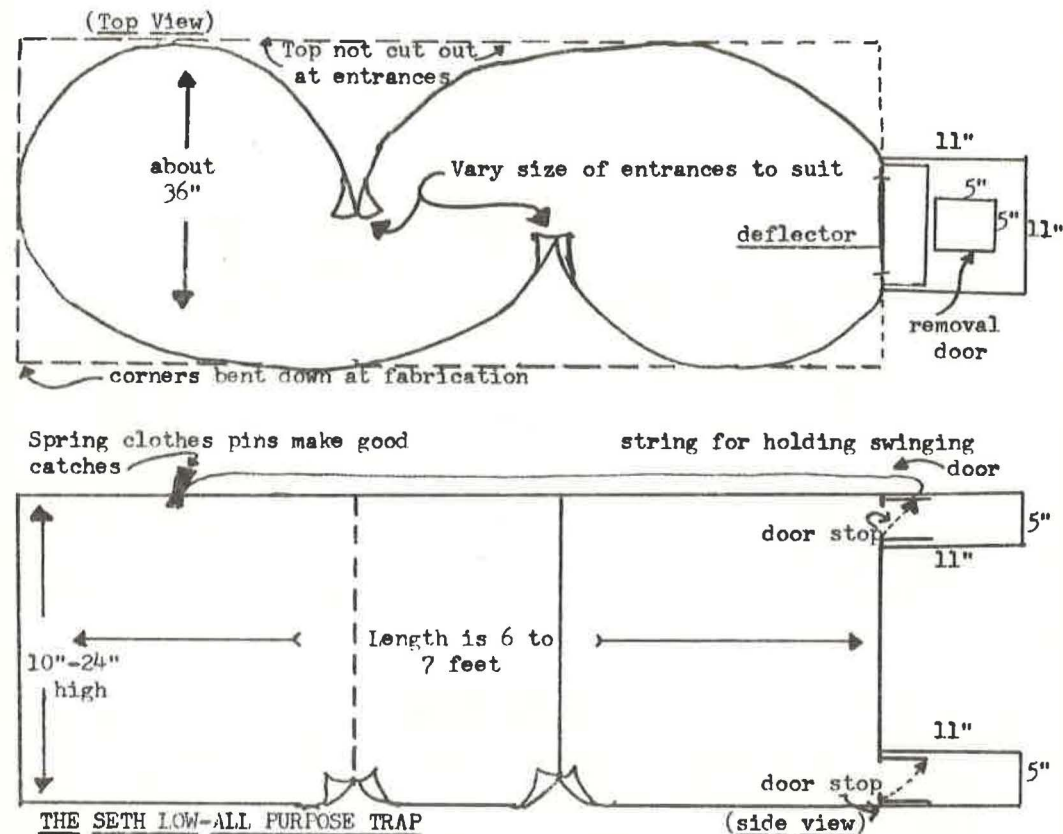
To de-activate the trap, an extra door or two may be inserted. Better yet, fix the top so that it may be rolled back to give the birds a big escape hatch.

To induce reluctant birds to enter the gathering cage, a deflector placed at right angles to the swinging door can be helpful. Leads are also found useful in trapping rails, shorebirds, and even Robins.

In addition to bait, a water drip or pan of water may be used as a lure.

If predators are a problem, a wire floor to the trap may be made and attached. The trap then should be sunk an inch or so into the ground, and dirt sprinkled on the wire floor. Perches, made from 1/4" dowels or from small branches, thrust from side to side through the wire mesh, help to keep birds from banging themselves up in the effort to escape.

(Trap diagram on p. 135 was redrawn since original too light for reproduction. Editor)

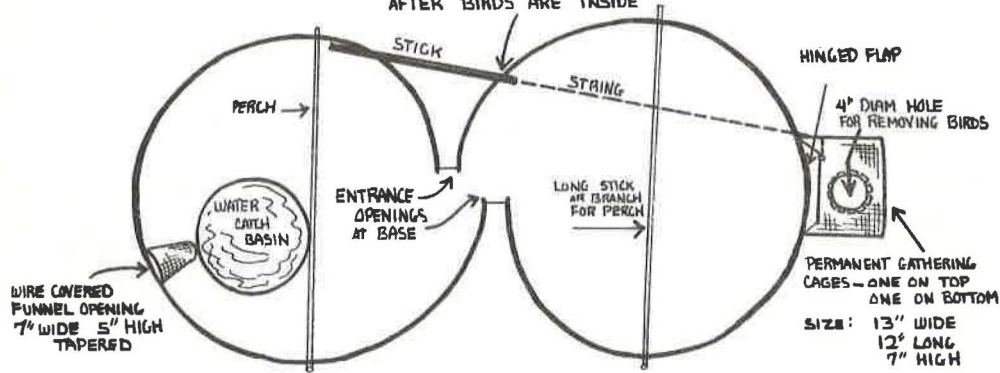


Since Frank Frazier's drawings did not include a water pan, I have asked Carol Rudy to draw a replica of one of my water-drip all-purpose traps. Please note the extra entrance near the water pan and in my estimation, this is very important for increasing catches. I do like the 30 inch height but doubt if it has any significant advantages. A small dead tree (with bare branches) placed near the trap in the summer time is very desirable as many birds like to land in dead trees where they can get a good view of the surrounding areas. They see the dripping water and are soon in the trap.

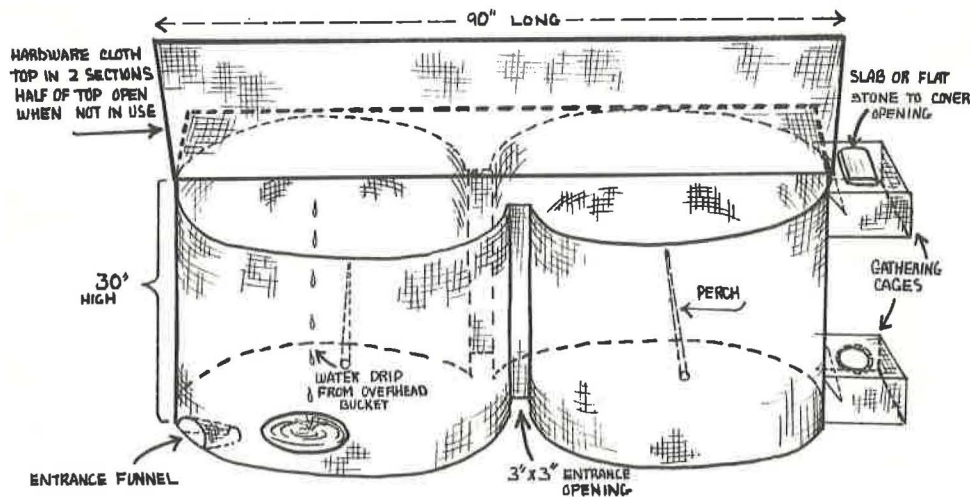
(Carol Rudy's drawings can be found on the next page)

**TOP VIEW**

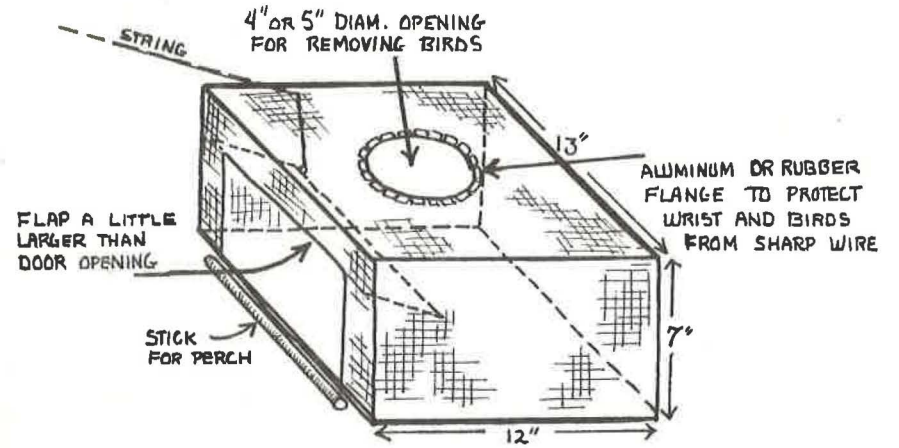
STRING LOWERS FLAP OF GATHERING CAGE AFTER BIRDS ARE INSIDE



**SIDE VIEW**



**DETAILS OF GATHERING CAGE**



A total of 91 different species have been caught in all-purpose water-drip traps here on our farm, plus a Sparrow Hawk that entered a trap once for some goldfinches. Most numerous species captured are the warblers, thrushes and sparrows. Chipping Sparrows really love the water drip traps. Some years more are caught in the traps than in the nets. A good example was in 1967 when 102 Chippies were caught and banded in water-drip traps compared to 51 in the nets.

Although I don't have it, a small funnelled hole in the top above the water pan will increase the take of birds (especially warblers) that walk around on the top of the trap looking for a way to get into it.

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