

MODIFYING SMALL RAPTOR BAL-CHATRI TRAP

By Gerald S. Mersereau

When I first started trapping small raptors as part of my banding activities I was introduced to two types of Bal-Chatri traps: a round one with a flat top, and a "Quonset Hut" shaped one. [Fig.1]. The monofilament nylon used for nooses was of a fairly heavy gauge, between 15-20 pound test and the nooses were small in diameter. While I enjoyed a fair amount of success in trapping small raptors with these two original designs, I felt that some modifications to them would be required to increase the number of raptors lured in and trapped.

At certain angles, due to the topography of the drop area, it became apparent that the raptor being pursued, did or could not see the lure in the flat topped trap. Similarly, in the "Quonset Hut" type trap, mice were known to huddle in a corner of a trap, making them much less visible to their hunter.

I decided to stay with the basic round base design for several reasons. Most of my bal-chatri trapping is done from a moving car. It is easy to flip this trap [frisbee-style] well off the road, a definite advantage. Thus, trap and raptor are removed from the hazards of traffic. The round based trap is more likely to remain upright when released in this manner. The "Quonset Hut" design cannot be thrown; when thrown, it will most likely flip over. This would require a second pass to right the trap or throw out another one, which is usually sufficient to spook the raptor.

Having decided to stay with the round based design, I next thought about changing the top of the trap from a flat to a more conical shaped surface. I felt this should increase the chance that the pursued hawk would be able to spot the lure through the hardware cloth. In addition, once the hawk came to the trap, it would have to work harder to get at the lure and so doing, increase the chance of it being caught. I've observed that raptors often try to work their way up the sides of a conical trap in order to get to the top of it. This is just the action the bander desires. The more the hawk moves about on the trap, the quicker it becomes noosed. A conical shaped trap also allows the bander to use House Sparrows for lures. The sparrow has room for vertical movement and is able to assume a more natural position than is possible in a flat-topped trap [Fig.2].

The second modification was made in the size of the nooses and the pound test of the monofilament nylon being used to tie the nooses. After trying various sized nooses on several traps, it became apparent that a noose with a diameter of 3 to 3-1/2" quickly ensnared a footing raptor. A quick decision was made to switch to a lighter size nylon. After seeing several raptors walk through nooses of 20 lbs. test and not become trapped, the change to a lighter gauge was recognized as a necessity. Using nylon in the 6 to 10 lbs. test range quickly lowered the rate of raptor escapes.

An additional change was made to overcome the problem of having the nooses mat down in handling. After the nooses are tied to the trap, they are held in an erect position while a large drop of household cement is applied to the knot where it is made fast to the hardware cloth.

I would appreciate hearing from and exchanging information with other raptor banders about their experiences with their traps. My address is mentioned below.

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EBBA NEWS would be happy to publish on other modifications or new trap designs of those traps that work well for you. Editor

