

Methods of catching and studying breeding waders – continued again

MIKE PIENKOWSKI

Department of Zoology, University of Durham, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE, UK

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The articles in *Bulletins* 16 & 17 by G.H. Green, P.N. Ferns & R.M. Bishop have continued to generate much discussion. R.W. Summers has kindly sent us a copy of his article on “Trapping waders at the nest” (*Safring News* 4(1): 18–19, 1975), concerning the use of the heart-shaped trap. We reprint part of this below.

“Find a wader nest and place the trap over it such that the nest is in the position as seen in Figure 1. This is critical. If the trap is placed over the nest so that the latter is near the back or sides, the bird may false-brood outside the trap. Also if the nest is in direct line with the entrance the bird will walk out again. The trap should therefore be placed as shown, and with the entrance facing the ringer’s direction of approach. The trap entrance should be adjusted so that it is just wide enough for the bird to get through. Pegs are pushed through the wire and into the ground keeping the trap steady. Then retire.

The “normal” behaviour to the trap by the nest owner is as follows (as seen in European Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*): once the ringer has departed from the scene the bird reappears in about 5 minutes and lands some 50 m from the trap. It approaches the trap and then starts circling at a radius of 25 m but getting closer and closer all the time. This circling may be interspersed with period of standing, or short retreats from the trap. After about 15 minutes the bird eventually concentrates its activities near the entrance, as the nest is closest to the trap wall at this point and about 20 from setting, the bird enters and settles on the eggs.

We gave the bird a moment or two on the eggs and then walked over to the trap. The bird rises from the eggs, moves

to the back of the trap and pushes the bill trying to effect an exit.

Only when the ringer is about 10 m from the trap does the bird panic and start to flap about, so the last few metres should be covered quickly and the bird subdued.

The usual trapping time was 20–25 minutes though four minutes was a record. If the bird is not showing signs of entry after 20–25 minutes (i.e. not concentrating its activities at the trap entrance), the trap must be removed, and 30 minutes must be regarded as a maximum for the bird to be kept off its eggs. Sometimes the drive to incubate will be low (e.g. before a clutch is in place or in hot weather) and one must accept failure.”

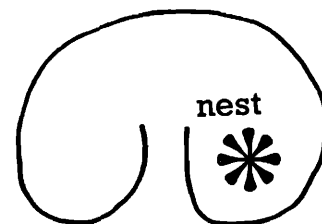


Figure 1.

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In my experience, there are tremendous variations in the responses of individual birds to traps at the nest, some keeping several metres away, while others walked in immediately. Some birds showed different extremes of behaviour on different days. In some cases it was clear that a bird would enter the trap only by walking directly towards the nest which, therefore, had to be in line with the entrance. As Harry Green and Peter Ferns pointed out earlier, this problem may be overcome by approaching the trap from the same side as the

entrance from as close a position as concealment will allow. Probably the answer is to recognise the differences in individuals and be prepared to try several trap positions as well as different trapping methods (see earlier articles) after a long interval to allow incubation to be re-established.

Finally, in reply to yet another query, it should be stressed that, whatever method is used, the nest and trap must be kept under continual observation during the trapping attempt.

