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A GLOSSARY OF CANNON NETTING TERMS

by C.D.T. Minton

(The following glossary reminds the editors of their youth (especially GHG) and the heady, early days of wader catching near The Wash, England. In those days (late 1950s) Clive Minton first cajoled the Wildfowl Trust into using their goose-catching rocket nets to catch waders and many of the terms listed below were born. Later development of cannon nets in the 1960s (now MWP is feeling aged too), again by Clive Minton and the Wash Wader Ringing Group, hatched many of the others and they are now receiving an Australian twist! Fascinatingly Clive has now exported himself (temporarily), the methods, terms and his enthusiasm for waders to Australia and he is obviously emeshing (or mesmerising!) Australian wader ringers (banders) in much the same way as he fixed us years ago! Beware, our southern friends, beware - God knows where it will lead you! The uninitiated may find what follows boring but please bear with those of us who appreciate the irony. Ringing totals show that we do catch waders now and then - who counts the failures, the lost sleep, the biting cold, the discomfort and the slave-driving leader so expert in applying psychological pressures to attain his own ends? Cannon-netting has taught us much about waders and is responsible for the world-wide coterie now using apparatus similar to that designed at the Wash years ago - not surprising as the Wash Wader Ringing Group now sell the stuff to the unwary! - Eds.)

1. Air shot or near miss - net fired but zero catch. Not counted in statistics in order not to spoil average.
2. Buttercup - a bird dyed yellow with picric acid (gradually turning orange brown with age). May flower in all seasons. The majority are sedentary and seen regularly; those which migrate do so to areas uninhabited by man or populated only by colour blind birdwatchers.
3. Cannon - steel tube from which projectile is propelled forward when electrically ignited cartridge is fired. In soft ground the reverse may happen.
4. Catching area - the 30m x 15m area in front of a net avoided by birds at all times. An area occupied only by decoys. Birds often prefer to roost in similar area immediately behind the net.
5. Chocolate blocks - the electrical connectors used for joining dropper cable to electric fuses in cartridges. Inedible. Original version brown, but now usually grey or white.
6. Circuit tester - the sensitive instrument which tells you when someone has tripped over a wire and broken the electrical circuit. Hasn't been developed yet to the stage where it can detect short circuits. Has been known to discharge cannon accidentally when enthusiast turns up the "zero adjustment" knob too far.
7. Covering material - an assortment of old rags gleaned from jumble. Used to cover birds in net after firing, so that they lie quietly until extracted and transported to join the rowdy mob in the keeping cages. Subsequently used to make team members comfortable/warm during banding/processing/sleeping.
8. Dropper - the electric wire connecting the cannons together (except when tripped over by unwary team members) and leading, via the main cable, back to the firing position. Sometimes left in position when all other equipment has been put away.
9. Firing box - the magical instrument which can sometimes be used to fire the nets. Has also been known to discharge through firer instead. Scorned by every electrical expert who thinks he can design an even better (more complicated of course) circuit, which however usually turns out to contain even more inbuilt faults.
10. Grot - material (usually decomposing tide wrack) used for covering net. Cannonflaging operation is "grotting". Grot is usually unavailable where required, and plentiful when not required.
11. Hide - an erection of flexible dimensions constructed to accommodate the whole team in maximum discomfort at the firing position. No team member, except the leader, should be able to see anything of the catching area.
12. Jiggler - cord, with attachments, laid out about ½ metre in front of the net. This can be pulled from observation hide/firing position in order to cause birds in 2 metre "danger zone" to move away. Regarded as interesting/erotic toy by Oystercatchers. Always breaks at critical moment. Alternatively, scares all birds out of catching area.
13. Jump ropes - two metre ropes (and elastic) used to secure rear of net to ground. Allows even back of net to move forward, thus increasing range (sometimes greatly so - when they break and the net leaps over the birds). Not suitable for skipping.
14. Keeping cages - instantly erected hessian compartments providing comfortable temporary accommodation for captured waders whilst awaiting banding/processing. Opportunities for escape under sides and through slit in roof ensure that the most ingenious members of the wader population escape unbanded.
15. Leader - slave driver. The person responsible for all successes, but not for failures. Qualifications - organisational ability (especially the delegation of manual work), endless enthusiasm and optimism (especially in the face of adversity and usually unwarranted), and a sense of responsibility and sound judgement (even when short of sleep). Never gets agitated or speaks a cross word.
16. Meal breaks - something the team is not allowed except before 0500 hrs or after midnight. Like sleep, not normally part of the fieldwork programme.
17. Oojahcapiyying - as for twinkling but from further afield and with even less chance of success.

18. Processing - a production line operation which measures every conceivable useless statistic on each bird (weight, wing length, bill length, moult). Takes place after banding and makes birds even more thankful to be released.
19. Projectile - 4 kg weight designed to pull the net over the birds. Range 15 metres if remains secured to net - otherwise further. Score so far 1 car, several trees, no boats/cows.
20. Recce - the search for waders roosting in a catchable location. Usually forlorn. Alternatively produces atypical result, with waders roosting in completely different places on subsequent high tides after nets have been set.
21. Retrap - a bird caught napping for the second (or more) time.
22. Runners - the younger/less experienced members of the team who walk between net and keeping cage transporting birds extracted from the net by the more experienced/older/lazier participants.
23. Scribe - person who writes down most of the information mumbled by the processing team. Main qualifications required are four ears and an ability to close them to superfluous distracting conversation going on all round.
24. Twinkling - trying to move birds (usually unsuccessfully) into the catching area. No connection with similar term meaning 'watering the bushes'.
25. VWSG - Victorian Wader Study Group. An amorphous assemblage of more or less dedicated wader birds - counters and catchers. Originally confined to Werribee Sewage Farm but more recently has spread its wings and now lives up to its name. Has also been known to migrate to other States.

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