

STARTING A BANDING STATION

BANDERS just beginning operations sometimes report that they cannot get the birds to come to their traps. Inquiry usually shows that they had put out a trap with some bird-food in it, in the belief that they had done everything necessary to attract the birds.

There is nothing about a trap in itself calculated to attract birds, but suitable food, properly placed, has a great attraction for them, so that the prospective bander's first move should be to *bait* the birds by placing food on the ground or elsewhere in a locality frequented by them and as near the spot where the trap is to be placed as possible. The practice of baiting birds varies with the time of year, the species of birds, numerous local conditions, and particularly where the trap or traps are to be placed. The kind of traps also plays a part in the problem. If it is planned to use automatic traps, these may be put out at once at any spot frequented by birds, such as old, weedy gardens, etc., but when pull-string (drop-door) traps are to be used, they must be placed conveniently near the house in order that they may be under easy and frequent observation.

When baiting birds, use a food known to be of a sort to which they are accustomed, and for seed-eating birds, use seeds, preferably canary-seeds. Consider the following average case: It is planned to use a pull-string, or other non-automatic, trap on the ground, say twenty-five feet from a house, where shrubbery is scarce and the birds are likewise infrequent. The nearest cover, shrubbery or woods, frequented or likely to be frequented by birds, is say two hundred feet away. The season is the fall or spring, when seed-eating birds have appeared or are to be expected, such as Sparrows and Juncos. Going now to the nearest cover, scatter a thin line of seeds on the ground, or on large, low-lying rocks, for a distance of say two hundred feet, first clearing the leaves away so that the food may be readily visible, and at one or two places put down a considerable quantity. This line preferably should course directly away from the banding station. In due season the birds will discover the seeds and follow the line to the places of concentrated supply. After a day or two, discontinue putting out food except at the place nearest the station where the birds have become baited and from here extend the baited line to the spot where the trap is to be operated, where a concentrated supply should again be scattered. If the line crosses open, grassy ground the

seeds may be placed on pieces of old carpet. When the birds become baited at the objective point, place the trap in position. The rest is easy: a few birds coming and going to the trap serve to attract others, and if the station is regularly supplied with food, a satisfactory number of bird visitors may be confidently expected.

At this stage cheaper substitutes for canary-seed may be gradually introduced, — bread and cracker crumbs, fine-ground flint corn ("second feed" for chickens), hemp seed, etc. Chickadees, Purple Finches, Goldfinches, and Blue Jays may be similarly led to the station by using sunflower seeds, but in this case it is best to place the seeds in trays, such as butter-tub covers used bottom side up and nailed to sticks, say five feet long, stuck in the ground or in the snow, and arranged in a line as before and placed about fifty feet apart.

Shrubbery extending from stations to birdy places may be used successfully for baiting-lines. It is perfectly feasible by this method to entice to a station a wintering flock of birds, such as Tree Sparrows and Juncos, occurring even two thousand feet away, provided suitable cover exists along the route.

When conditions are such that the non-automatic trap can be placed in shrubbery or other places frequented by birds, the problem of baiting is of course practically solved in advance. When convenient, a dirt floor for traps should be provided.

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MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS AT BANDING STATIONS

At the present time this country is probably witnessing at our banding stations the most widespread and sustained study of birds at short range (often not over five feet away) that has ever taken place, a study that promises to be more and more intensive and widespread in the years to come. On account of this close contact with banded birds, we may study many things — for example, the species, the individual, and the meaning of the little groups of birds we see about us — in a way not possible prior to the introduction of bird-banding. Not all the opportunity to obtain ornithological information, however, is due to the actual banding of the birds, but results from the increased chance to observe them which in turn arises from the attraction banding stations possess owing to an ample and varied food-supply, comparative freedom from enemies, bathing facilities, and the wind and snow shelters with which many stations are equipped.