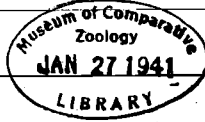


BIRD-BANDING

A JOURNAL OF ORNITHOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

VOL. XII 73,603

JANUARY 1941



No. 1

FWOLING IN HOLLAND

BY JOOST TER PELKWYK

HOLLAND is singularly rich in birds. The country, built up by the Scandinavian glaciers, by the French and German rivers, and, to be sure by the Dutch themselves, is rich in shelter such as dunes, wet pastures and marshes. Even in the coldest month, January, the average temperature does not drop below freezing. This means that birds find safe winter lodging here. The country is also favorably situated for the autumn migration of land birds.

In the life of the Hollanders, birds take a considerable place. Their capital has a stork for its emblem and the gift of the first egg of the lapwing to the Queen used to be a national event every spring. The catching of birds and the gathering of eggs once were important means of existence for the inhabitants of the Low Countries. Catching ducks in duck-ponds, falconry and fowling reached a greater perfection in Holland than elsewhere.

The present century brought to Holland, as to America, increased regard for nature and bird protection. The well observed bird-laws of 1912, 1933 and 1936 make these old professions practically impossible. Until 1912 catching small birds for food was allowed. Skylarks, finches and starlings used to be caught on fowling-yards in considerable numbers and brought a good price. The birds were killed by crushing the heads and the necks pinched between two halves of a cleft willow twig. After every ten finches a ring was pushed around the twig. Fifty finches made a "rits", used as a trophy by the fowler or sold to the poulterer for 80 cents apiece.

It will not be long before the art of fowling, so extremely popular in Holland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, will belong to the past. Then a treasury of knowledge, centuries old and orally delivered, will be lost. Fortunately in recent years some bird-yards have found a new occupation by catching birds for banding. In the bird-yards near Wassenaar, Monster, Harderwijk and De Koog, thousands of birds have been banded and released. I have spent marvelous mornings on these bird-yards enjoying the ancient thrill of the fowler while banding. I cannot refrain from telling some of the technical knowledge I learned from "Uncle Dirk" (Mr. D. Hoos),

who has his yards near Monster. I hope it will give the American birdbanders some suggestions.

Most of the fowling-yards in Holland are more or less permanent institutions which for generations have levied an annual toll on the stream of migrating birds. Establishing a new fowling-yard requires thorough preparation. To fix the right spot for the yard one must be well acquainted with the behavior of the birds in the environment. The behavior of migrating flights of birds usually follows a fixed pattern. The topography causes concentrations of migrants over and over again on the same spots. For successful fowling rather treeless surroundings are most suitable.

As soon as we have found the proper place for the new yards, we begin with building the fowler's-shed. This cabin must not be too small, for we want room to store nets and cages overnight. And don't forget a little stove to boil coffee and to warm yourselves and the birds on chilly mornings. Eight feet square is an average size for a shed. In the walls we make horizontal peepholes that can be closed from within.

In a northwesterly direction (the prevailing direction of the wind being southwest), not more than thirty feet from the cabin, we lay out our main-yard, the "Druip" (Fig. 1). Along the south side of the druipe we make a dike, covered with green turf and about three feet high. On top of this dike we plant a row of dead branches. The highest branches must be planted at the farthest end of the dike, just where it curves around the yard. This part of the yard has the peculiar name of "Helletje" (little hell). At the east side we make another dike, not quite as high as the first one and without branches on top. This dike is bordered on the outside by a wooden shelter carrying a series of caged decoys. Surrounded by little dikes our yard is now an oblong lawn sheltered from the wind. On this lawn we lay out our nets. I never have fowled with a druipe of more than thirty-five feet. In the old days these yards used to be as much as twice that length.

In addition to the druipe-net we spread two "Open Netten" (open nets). These are about ninety feet from the cabin on flat parts in the meadow. The open nets are designed to catch field-birds such as starlings, larks and buntings. We place these nets as far as possible from the wood of the druipe. The reason for this is that a number of birds have the habit of staying in a flock as long as they are in the field. We can then catch the whole flock at once in an open net. In the druipe however, this might take considerably more time, for in the branches flocking is less pronounced and we have to catch the birds one by one.

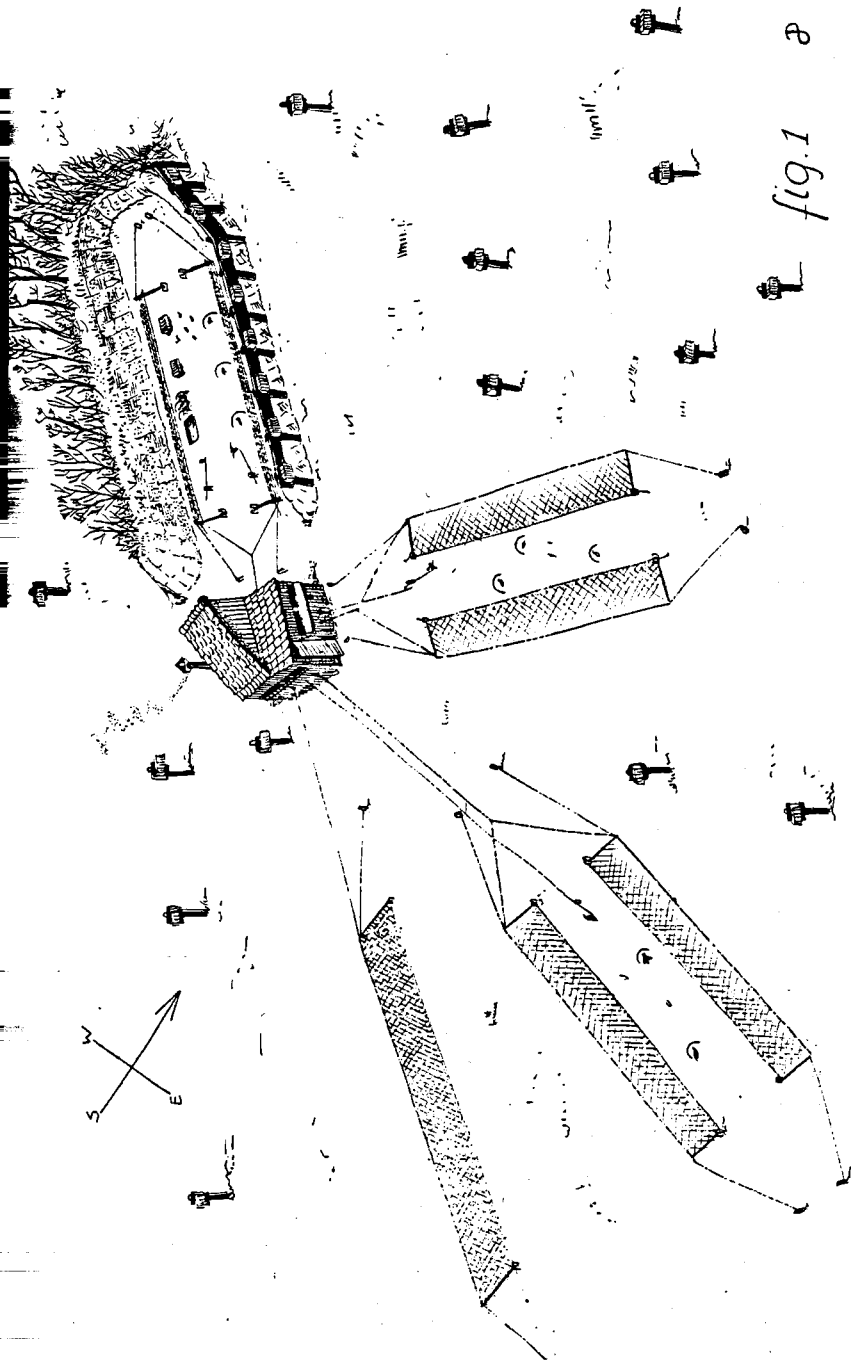


Fig. 1. Airview of a Dutch fowling-yard. In the middle the shed, at the right the druijp, at the left the flight-door, in the foreground the open nets. Scattered in the field cages with decoy-birds.

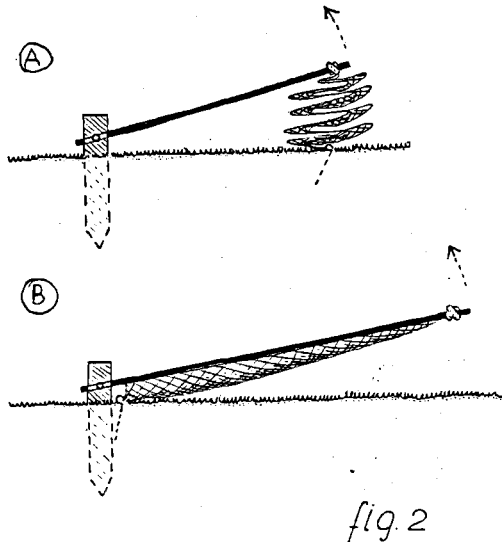


FIG. 2. Schematic cross-section of one of the doors of the druijp (A) and of the open net (B).

All these nets consist of two "doors". Each door is an oblong net especially made for the purpose. The net is extended on two wooden bars at each end hinging in notched stakes, which have been driven into the ground. An elastic rope, stretching over the ends of the wooden bars acts as a spring. We have only to pull slightly on the rope leading to the cabin to make both doors close. The druijp has to be made out of rather heavy material, for it is subjected to much wear and tear. The other nets are less heavy and the meshes are larger to make them close quicker. Besides, these nets are broader than the druijp; generally they are about five feet wide. The druijp differs moreover from the open nets by the doors being folded in rest. As in the case of other nets one longitudinal side of the door is attached directly to the ground by curved iron pins (Fig. 2).

A fourth type of net can only be used with strong west or south-west winds, which cause the flocks of birds to migrate very close to the ground. The net is extended crosswise to the direction of the wind. If the rope is pulled, the wind catches the net so that it is suddenly closed, trapping the birds, that skim the ground. This is the only net, that can be used without decoy-birds, for if the birds migrate so close to the ground they do not react to other birds.

Possibly still more important than the right nets are good decoy-birds. In the choice of our decoy-birds we act on the principle of "like loves like." The greater the variety of our decoy-birds, the greater the chance for some variation in our catch. The decoy-birds are placed in cages all around the yard. It is important to shelter the birds against cold wind, so that they are as cheerful and noisy as possible, for it is their notes that attract the wild birds to the nets. All cages are sheltered by a little board at one side (Fig. 3). If they are placed on the ground near the nets, they are protected by a sod. Only a few birds are displayed in cages near the nets. Fowlers believe that for wild birds the sight of a bird in a cage is disagreeable. "Lopertjes" (runners) are better for this purpose. These birds are under the feathers they wear a "Broekje" (shorts). These shorts are made out of old kid gloves and do not harm the birds (Fig. 4). Decoy-birds walk around in shorts for a whole season. By means of a string the shorts can be fastened to the ground. One or two decoys are fastened to the "seesaw", a twig, that can be drawn up by the man in the shed. The birds in "shorts" have to be trained to behave themselves as the fowler wishes and to hover nicely if the swing is moved (Fig. 5).

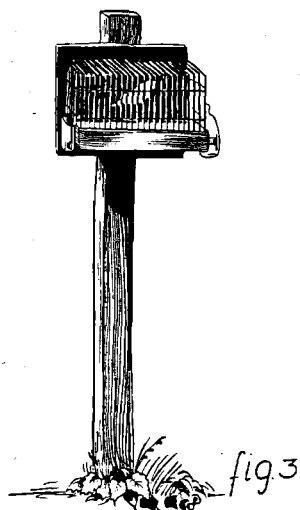


FIG. 3. Cage with decoy-bird in the field.

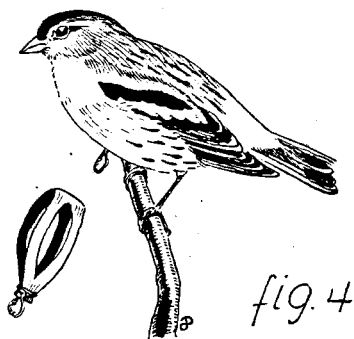


FIG. 4. Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*) in "shorts". The harness is slipped around the body, the wings and legs protruding through the slits.

For a good catch in autumn it is desirable to "Muit" part of the decoy-birds. This is an artificial process by which we cause the birds to sing in full voice in the autumn. Song seems to be much more attractive for migrants than the call note alone. Most Fringillidae can be used for the muit. Only a few species are decidedly unfit as is the redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*) which loses the clearness of its voice in summer.

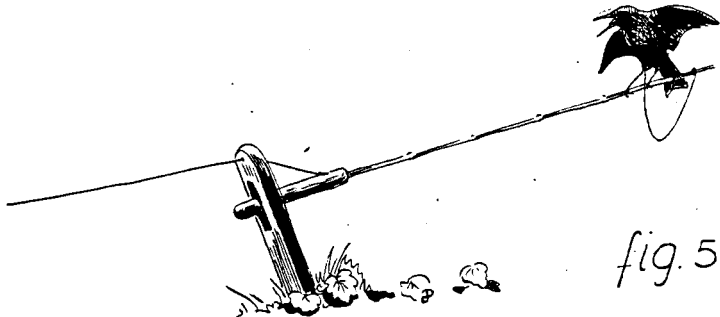


fig. 5

FIG. 5. Starling on the seesaw.

The molt begins early in May when the birds sing freely. We choose only males, which have been accustomed to captivity for some time and which are in first-class condition. We bring these birds within their cages into a special closet. In this closet the birds must have plenty of air, but we must be able to change the quantity of light. In the course of about two weeks we decrease the amount of light gradually until the birds live all day long in twilight. It is necessary to watch all birds carefully so that the process does not hurt their health. Birds in the molt require much more care than birds under normal light-conditions. We keep the birds in twilight all summer long. All their activities are slowed down, even the molt. At the end of August we gradually give them more light and finally bring them out in the open. Then they will resume their song. We have to be very careful in using these decoys outdoors. In dry weather they sing well, but rain can stimulate the molt and if the molt begins, the song is gone. Sometimes we may succeed in stimulating the molt in June by moistening the birds carefully. Then we may have in September decoy-birds molted and singing, an ideal combination.

In the early days many birds, especially chaffinches (*Fringilla coelebs*) and linnets (*Carduelis cannabina*) were blinded to obtain a more prolonged song by removing external distractions. The eyelids of the birds in the molt were carefully seared together with a hot needle. Behind the lids the eyes remained undamaged but the birds were unable to distinguish form. It was possible to loosen the eyelids afterwards by treating them for some days with unsalted butter. Of course some people bungled in blinding and the abhorrence for this method is justified. But, for fowling this blinding was very useful. Both chaffinch and linnets will stop singing and give the call note as soon as they see birds of their kind. Covering the cage has, however, the same effect as blinding.

Most of the decoy-birds are caught some time before use. The best decoy-birds, however, especially among shy species, are those we have raised from the nest. We must bring the young birds home at the right moment. If we are too late, the birds will become shy after a while and they will stay just as shy as wild birds. The Dutch fowlers consider it the right moment if the baby-birds have just strength to rise for a while on their own legs. The birds are brought home in the nest and are left in the nest, which may be placed in an old flowerpot. The best way to feed them is with a flat wooden spoon. The fowlers use as food for all kinds of baby-birds a doughy mixture of bread and egg or some soaked egg-cake. After the birds are accustomed to this diet we begin with tid-bits such as fresh ant-pupae, small pieces of worms and flies. Some fine-cut stinging nettle or chickweed is considered to be very good. When the young are old enough so that they can go to roost in their cage we may begin to give them seeds. To distinguish male Chaffinches from females we pull out as early as possible a few breast-feathers. The males replace these with cinnamon colored feathers. The females are released. It is important to teach the males a good song. "Rebabbelaars", males with a song of inferior quality, have to be kept away from the young, for they spoil the song of the young birds long before these begin to sing. As adults the hand-raised birds are treated exactly as the other decoys. Sometimes they cannot be used so well for the munit.

About the peculiarities of each individual species and even subspecies a trained fowler can give a wealth of interesting data. He can use his fowling-yard almost every morning between September 1 and May 1, if weather is favorable. Still and hazy weather are the worst. Most species have their special season and their favorite weather. Only the crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*) and the shore-lark (*Eremophila alpestris*) appear and disappear most unexpectedly.

The drup can be used most of all the nets. The bird most frequently caught here is the siskin (*Carduelis spinus*), once a very popular cage-bird. Siskins are attracted by a number of decoys around the yards and by few "runners" on the nets and mostly one decoy on the seesaw. In addition, the net offers water and some food, especially some fruiting branches of the alder. Insect eating birds cannot be attracted so well with decoys. A mealworm fastened on a pin is a fine bait. We may use the peculiar habit of the snowbunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) which loves a shelter behind a sod by bringing some sod in the open nets.

For banding, starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) are especially in favor. We catch them with an open net. Ordinarily two runners are used and one starling is sitting on the seesaw. It is very important here that our decoy-birds behave themselves in the right way. It is

unfortunate if cows come near the yard for then the flocks of starlings break up after they come down.

Catching skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) is very similar. Here we employ only one runner and one bird on the seesaw. With a home-made flute we try to imitate the skylark's callnote. If our imitation is not too poor, the migrating larks will ordinarily stop and come down. Early in spring we may have trouble with a skylark that happens to establish his territory on our yards. Other birds, however, have the same bad habit. They drive away all of their own kind and we would not catch a single bird if we left him alone. It is best to catch him as soon as he begins to fight with one of the decoy-birds.

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THE INVASION AND WING MEASUREMENTS OF THE EASTERN PURPLE FINCH AT ARDMORE, PA., DURING THE SPRING OF 1939

BY HORACE GROSKIN

THE Ardmore banding station is located in southeastern Pennsylvania, about 11 miles from the center of the City of Philadelphia. The banding record of the Ardmore station for the year 1939 is as follows: species banded 29; number of birds banded 2,189; repeats 1,670; returns 56; foreign bands 14; making total captures, or birds handled, for the year 3,929.

The largest number of any species banded during the year was the Eastern Purple Finch (*Carpodacus p. purpureus*). Of this race, 1,372 were banded during the year, and of this number 1,146 were banded between February 10th and May 15th, while more than 1,000 of these birds were banded in a six-week period between March 15th and April 30th, which was the peak of the Purple Finch invasion in this region.

The Ardmore station is adjacent to about 35 acres of deciduous woodland with a brook at its westerly edge. The banding equipment at the station consists of 12 traps as follows: a large pull-string flat trap, two modified Government sparrow traps, two Chardonneret, three false bottom types, three Potter types and one automatic tree trap. All traps are located within 100 feet of the residence, and during the winter and early spring months, the traps are moved to within a few feet of the house.

In order to attract as large a volume of birds as possible, bait is not only used freely in the traps, but food is also placed in eleven feeding devices where birds may secure food without being trapped.