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GENERAL NOTES

Capturing Blackbirds and Starlings in Marsh Roosts with Dip Nets.— The capture of starlings, grackles, and cowbirds in substantial numbers for banding has been accomplished by means of a wide variety of traps, and banding literature covering the past four decades carries many references to effective traps and their use. Capturing large numbers of red-winged blackbirds by these procedures, however, has proved to be a much more difficult task, and the best results have been obtained with lights. In 1957, Neff and Meanley (*Bird-Banding* **23**(4): 154-157) described the use of powerful headlamps in capturing several thousand blackbirds in tree-brush roosts in Arkansas. More recently, personnel of the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland, have developed and successfully used a large light trap in capturing thousands of birds in such roosts.

Methods employing light, however, have not worked well in roosts in densely vegetated marshes in Colorado, and birds using these roosts have not been trapped successfully at feeding areas. Needing substantial numbers of blackbirds and starlings for laboratory research and for banding, the authors developed a technique employing long-handled dip nets for capturing birds in marsh roosts. Favorable conditions, as follows, are necessary for optimum use of the method: 1) a dark night, 2) vegetation low enough so that the net can be wielded freely, 3) footing firm enough to permit the netter to move swiftly for some distance, and 4) a dense concentration of roosting birds. These conditions frequently prevail in Colorado cattail marsh roosts in winter, particularly when freezing weather encrusts the mud and shallow water, and birds roost densely for warmth. Under such conditions, birds merely "roll away" in a dense wave when disturbed and seldom fly more than a few yards. A rush of 10 to 30 yards will generally place the netter in the midst of a wave of birds, and a quick sweep of the net may ensnare as many as 40 birds. On the initial trial of this method, the authors captured 550 redwings and starlings in 3 hours.

On moonlit nights, birds flushed at greater distances and flew farther than on dark nights. They were, however, reluctant to leave the marsh and could be herded from one spot to another. The birds then were taken most successfully by stationing several netters near a concentration of birds, and having one member of the party slowly drive the birds until they settled within range. No more than 25 birds were netted in any single sweep under such conditions, but the driving technique permitted the capture of birds in mild weather, in marshes with water a foot or more deep, and in vegetation so tall and dense that a netter could not move rapidly.

In three trips on dark nights to marshes in the Denver area, the catch totaled approximately 1,200 birds. On a fourth trip, during the new moon, 6 men with 2 nets easily captured 600 birds in 3 hours. The ratio of redwings to starlings in these catches was approximately 2:1. The nets used had a hoop 2½ to 3 feet in diameter, with a bag of ½-inch mesh 4 to 6 feet long. The handles of the nets telescoped and when extended were 10 to 20 feet long. The hoops were constructed of ½-inch aluminum tubing (.049-inch wall thickness), with the handles being made of heavier tubing, 1¼ inches in diameter. The materials for each net cost approximately $15.

The birds will become badly entangled if the netting is too light, so it is desirable to use heavy cord material. Also, the bag must be long enough so that it can be closed by a flip of the netter's wrist, and thus prevent loss of birds.

In the operations, carrying cages capable of holding 100 birds were constructed. The doors of the cages were covered with overlapping pieces of rubber inner tube so that the operator could thrust his hand into the cage to release the bird without danger of its escaping. Birds were either banded and released, or taken to the aviary within six hours. Mortality was less than one percent.

Further experience may indicate that modifications of the technique are desirable, but the procedure is described at this time in the belief that, even in its present stage of development, it may be useful to individuals in similar ecological areas who wish to capture large numbers of blackbirds and starlings for banding or for experimental purposes.—Albert W. Spencer and John W. De Grazio, Wildlife Research Center, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, U. S. Department of Interior, Denver 25, Colo.

Winglength of Yellow-breasted Chat.—It is now well established that *Icteria virens* has a complete postjuvenal molt. The wing lengths measured at Hillsboro, N. C. give an interesting confirmation of this. Below are the extreme lengths with means in parentheses measured as wing chords.

7 Juveniles	66-(68.1)-70
29 Males	72-(75.9)-81
22 Females	71-(74.7)-78

The adults were measured between the beginning of May and mid July when Dennis' criterion of black mouths in males and partly pink mouths in females was used for sexing.—Charles H. Blake, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass.

Land Birds at Sea following a SE Storm.—*Location:* On board U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Ship "Explorer"; Lat. 40°45'N, Long. 70°52.7'W, or about 36 miles South of Gay Head, Martha's Vineyard. See C. & G.S. Charts 71 and 1108.

During the period 15-17 April, 1961, strong S.E. winds, up to 60 knots, lashed the Northeast seaboard. I was fortunate to be at the above location following this storm from 18-24 April, 1961, and observed the following land birds on board ship:

18 April. 1 Brown Creeper; very tired. just dropped on deck.
19 April. 2 Song Sparrows, 1 Slate-colored Junco.
20 April. 1 Song Sparrow; observed picking up hailstones. Source of water?
21 April. 2 Song Sparrows; 1 Starling.
22 April. 2 Palm Warblers, 4 White-throated Sparrows, 2 Juncos, 1 Red-shafted Flicker, 1 Song Sparrow, 1 Brown Thrasher, 1 Rufous-sided Towhee.
23 April. 1 Chipping Sparrow, 1 Song Sparrow, 7 White-throated Sparrows, 2 Juncos, 1 Towhee, 1 Flicker, 1 Brown Thrasher, 2 Common Grackles.

Most of these stayed aboard until we anchored one mile off Menemsha Bight, 24 April. Even then, most of the White-throated Sparrows refused to fly to shore and were still on board when I left 25 April.

During this period, strong winds, up to 40 knots, from the NW and SW, snow, hail and rain, were experienced.