

A Trapping Technique for Trap-Wary American Kestrels

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Numerous trapping techniques have been used to capture American kestrels (*Falco sparverius*). Stationary traps have been used successfully at raptor banding stations where concentrations of migrating kestrels were predictable. Of these, the dho-gaza (Phillips 1978, Clark 1981), bow-net (Tordoff 1954), and Swedish goshawk trap (Meng 1971) have been the most successful for the capture of kestrels and other raptors.

Mobile techniques, usually in association with a vehicle, are most efficient when trapping resident territorial kestrels in the field. The bal-chatri is the trapping technique used most frequently and successfully for the capture of kestrels (Berger and Mueller 1959, Berger and Hamerstrom 1962, Ward and Martin 1968).

I used bal-chatri traps to capture kestrels in central Missouri from 1980 through 1983 with a success rate of 58%, similar to the 2-year success rate of 52% reported by Berger and Mueller (1959). However, I found that kestrels became wary and suspicious of bal-chattris during mild weather, when they were not hungry or "sharp set," or when they escaped after an initial contact with the trap. These shy individuals were captured by using a method derived from the fundamental tool of the modern-day falconer, the noose-harness pigeon (Beebe and Webster 1964). I used the harness design illustrated by Beebe and Webster (1964:155-158) and reduced it in size to fit a house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). This design entails placing 15 monofilament slip nooses on a leather harness (Fig. 1). Two small holes and 2 larger flaps are cut in the harness through which the legs and wings of the sparrow are inserted. One end of a monofilament line is attached to a wooden dowel or stick and the other end to the trailing edge of the harness. This functions as a drag when a kestrel attempts to fly away with the captured noose-harness sparrow. With this I captured 7 kestrels that had become trap-wary of the bal-chatri during field studies in 1981-83.

Dave Scarbrough assisted me in the field and helped in designing the sparrow noose-harness. This was accomplished during an American kestrel study funded by the Natural History Section of the Missouri Department of Conservation and guided by William H. Elder.

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Fig. 1. House Sparrow fitted with noose harness and drag line.

