

BIRD BANDING NEWS

Conducted by W. I. Lyon

TRAPS FOR BIRD BANDING

BY W. I. LYON

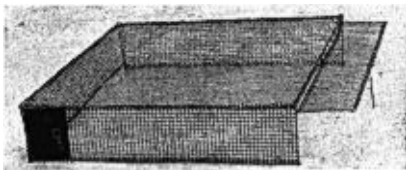
The trapping of birds and animals, without injuring them, has been a hobby of the writer since early boyhood. In 1912, when I received some vague information about bird banding, I trapped about twenty-five Bronzed Grackles and placed pigeon bands on their legs.

The next year I joined the American Bird Banding Association, but there were no available bands so we trapped another twenty-five Bronzed Grackles and banded them with colored celluloid rings.

When the first bands arrived in 1915, the instructions were to band only the nestlings, but the temptation was too great to wait until the nesting season and a few adults were trapped and banded. A suggestion was made to the Association that many adults could be trapped and banded; although a favorable answer was not received, we continued to trap and band adult birds. So it can be imagined how we felt when Mr. S. Prentiss Baldwin's message on systematic trapping arrived. It was like being released from bondage, and the making of traps was started at once.

When Prof. W. B. Barrows came to Waukegan, after the meeting of the American Ornithologists Union in 1922, to inspect the traps, he wished to buy some for the Michigan State College and in that way we were forced to make traps for sale. They still are for sale to those who have not the convenience to make them, but all bird banders are at full liberty to copy any of our traps for bird banding at any time. We hope to give enough measurements in the following article so that anyone can make his own traps; and we hope some one will be ingenious enough to show us how to make a better trap.

There is a way to trap any bird if one will study its foods and habits, but the degree of success may be limited.

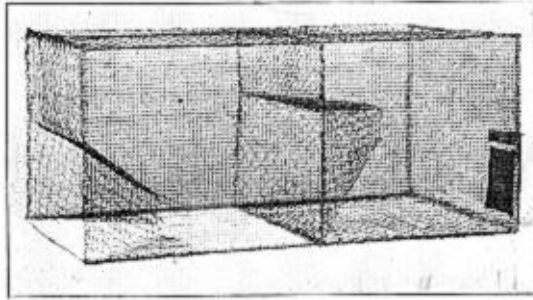


Begin the easiest way, trap only at convenient times. Most anyone can make a flat box-like trap similar to the illustration and raise one side with a stick as a prop and run the string to your window. Keep the ground underneath the trap always baited so when you are not around it becomes a permanent feeding station and the birds become accustomed to it, and eventually you will catch them. You will be surprised just what one small trap will catch with a little persistence, even if only worked at odd times. You can make the size or the shape to fit your window ledge, up in the tree, or on the ground, but the following size for on the ground is found very convenient.

Your material should be what is known as hardware cloth, No. 2 mesh, that is two and one-half meshes to the inch. No. 3 mesh may be used if desired.

Get the cloth three feet wide and six feet long, be sure they cut it square. Take one square, three feet each way, and fold over a double turn like a hem, make this hem one-half inch, this will stiffen the outside edge and do away with the sharp points. If you can find a No. 8 or No. 10 wire it should be placed in the edge where you expect to make the door. Cut the other three-foot piece into four nine-inch strips and fold double one-half inch hem all the way around the edges. In one of these make a door which should slide up and down. The opening should not be very large. In most of our traps we make it 5x5 inches. Then if you have to reach in it is just a convenient size for your arm, not leaving any extra space for the bird to escape. When your trap is made it is always best to paint it with some very thin paint. Any neutral color will do.

The next step is to make a carrying cage about 6x6x16 inches with a door 5x5 inches that slides up and down, so this door may be put against the door of the trap and the birds driven into the carrying cage for convenience in handling.

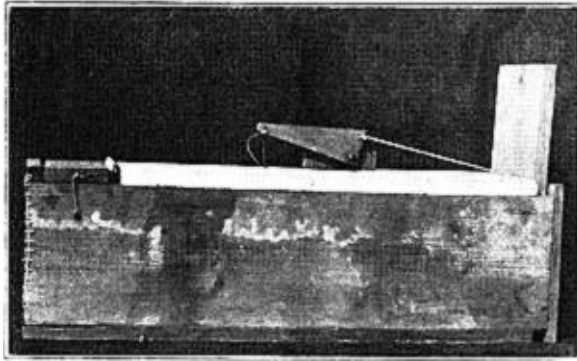


Our first traps were made on the pattern of the old government sparrow trap. We immediately found that the front funnels had such a slope that the birds were uncomfortable in resting on them and by making the funnel only half as high it seemed better. By observing the birds when they were trapped it was noted that they immediately would fly to the top and gradually settle down to the most convenient perch. With the front funnel much lower this would put hem right in line to see the hole into the rear compartment, and by making the rear funnel perfectly flat on top it gave them a very convenient resting place up off the ground and they were more contented. The funnels and the top and bottom of this trap are made out of three-quarter-inch poultry netting, which is more or less hexagonal in shape and is less visible than the square mesh. The sides and back of the trap are made of No.3 hardware cloth and then there is the door in the rear compartment with the opening of 5x5 inches, with a door that slides up and down so the arm can be inserted to catch the birds.

We place a sheet-metal cover over the rear compartment, which protects the birds from rain, snow, or sun and also from cats, rats, hawks, dogs, etc. On many of the traps we bend the edge of the metal roof down over each side a few inches to act as a wind-break. Especially during the winter, we place a little perch up in this protected corner.

The most convenient size we have found to be 20 inches wide, 16 inches high and 36 inches long. It should be painted a dark neutral color to preserve the

wire and make it inconspicuous. This has been the most successful trap of any trap we have ever used in trapping over 15,000 birds.



The cat trap illustrated shows the most successful of a number that have been tried out. It is made of 1-inch lumber about 30 inches long, using two boards 8 inches wide and two 10 inches wide. When nailed together this will give you a hollow box 8x8 inches inside.

The guide strips are nailed to the front so an 8-inch rising and falling door will just fill the opening. If the guides are extended a little above the box it is found to be an advantage but in shipping they cause an extra rate and are often broken so they are left off.

The tripping device is made with a thin piece of board a little less than 8x8 inches with a half inch strip tacked under the center, so it acts like a teeter board. The triangle on top of the trap is made of wood or a good stiff piece of galvanized iron. The string is attached to the outer hole and a slight weight on the teeter board gives four times the pressure on the trigger.

The back of the trap is divided into an extra compartment by a partition of wire cloth, one-third or one-half inch mesh. This forms a bait chamber which can be entered only by a door on top of the trap; and is securely hooked shut. By putting the fish head in this compartment the cat can see and smell it very readily but there is no access to it. Anything caught in this trap is out of sight and can be easily carried to a convenient point of disposal.

Two or three of these traps count for twenty-five cats annually at our station.

There is a bird bander, a carpenter by trade, who makes these traps so they can be shipped from Waukegan at \$4.00. That is only in case you are unable to make your own.

Many banding stations fail to attract birds on account of lack of shrubbery or other cover in which the birds can hide or make their escape. You can increase the number of birds by planting sunflower and hemp.

Hemp produces one of the best covers for birds, and also provides an enormous lot of food that stays up off the ground during the entire winter. One of our hemp plants reached the height of fourteen feet and was at least ten feet in diameter. The extra size of this plant may be attributed to the fertilizer that was in the ground underneath it, because this particular seed was planted upon

the grave of two cats. Try planting some hemp and sunflower around your trapping sites and along the fence lines.

CARDINALS IN MINNESOTA.—On November 11 last, Mrs. Commons saw a male Cardinal in our shrubbery and on the following day, November 12, captured a female in one of our traps and banded it (band No. 482843). Some fifty years ago the Cardinal was a rare bird in Minnesota but of recent years it has been gradually extending its range farther north, and having banded this one at our Tanager Hill station we were somewhat elated about it and were anxious to learn to what extent it had become a Minnesota bird. We requested Dr. Thomas S. Roberts, Director of the Zoological Museum, University of Minnesota, who is the best authority on the subject, to give us information about its occurrence in Minnesota, which he has kindly done and of which the following is an abstract:

Dr. Roberts states substantially that the first positive record in this state was a male bird shot by himself near Lake Harriet (Minneapolis) in October, 1875. A few were reported seen before and after this date, up to October, 1878. After this time the records became more frequent and from about 1911 they became permanent residents in the southeasterly part of the State, spreading gradually northward until now they are established and nesting as far north as Minneapolis. From Red Wing south they are now fairly common, remaining through the year and nesting in considerable numbers. The farthest north nesting record is at upper Lake Minnetonka (our locality). For a number of years the only records were in the fall, winter or early spring, and it was not until about 1911 that they became established as nesting birds.

Although there have been several reports of them in our Lake Minnetonka locality we, ourselves, had never seen one here before through many years of observation.

After banding the one referred to we became interested in learning the banding record of them in our state. In reply to a letter sent to the Bureau of Biological Survey we are in receipt of one from Mr. Lincoln in which he says that after examining their files they were unable to find records of any of these birds having been banded heretofore in this state, and that accordingly he feels satisfied that Mrs. Commons has the honor of banding the first Cardinal banded in Minnesota.—FRANK W. COMMONS, *Minneapolis, Minn.*

CONTINUOUS MATING OF TOWHEES.—As there is a question as to the time some birds retain their mates, the following experience with a pair of Towhees may be of interest.

On April 19, 1923, I banded a male Towhee with No. 46786. March 27, 1924, I caught him again and also his mate No. 46793. I was not as active in 1925, so I did not catch either of them that year. November 19, 1926 I again caught 46786 and his mate 46793. I found the band 46786 had worn very thin and I replaced it with a new one, so that this new number is 46817.

This year, April 27, I trapped 46817 again, and while I am sure she (46793) was with him, (you know I band on the "off side") I was not able to capture her. The record is sure, however, for at least three years, and probably it is safe to assume that their partnership is a life-time mating.—DR. H. H. HAYES, *Hubbard Woods, Ill.*

BEHAVIOR OF CHICKADEES.—On May 27, 1925, I caught and banded a Chickadee in my canary-cage trap. He did not seem frightened and I watched the trap closely for his return. The next day he came back, and every day for at least a week. One day I was surprised to see him come, and this time accompanied by his family of three little ones (I never saw the mother). He directed the little ones and had them in a row on the ledge outside of the cage; then he hopped in and proceeded to feed the babies through the bars of the cage. One little fellow slipped around the cage and jumped up in the door, but the father saw him and flew to the door and pecked the baby and made them all stay out of the trap. He returned for four days, and each day the same performance took place; but never once could I catch one of the little ones and of course I did not try to trap the father again.

Each year he comes back for I can see the band through my binoculars, but I have been unable to catch him again.—MRS. M. L. COUTANT, *Danville, Illinois*.

AN ALBINO PURPLE MARTIN.—A white Purple Martin was born, raised, and went on his migration from one of our martin houses. I tried my best to trap him but, on the two occasions when he entered the house, he "gave me the slip." I hope he will return next year. This bird was also seen among the martins at DeTour. Of the forty Purple Finches banded in 1926, nineteen returned in 1927.—GEO. W. LUTHER, *DeTour, Michigan*.

CATBIRDS REMAIN MATED.—Cathbirds, Nos. 146857 and 146858, which were banded as a mated pair on June 6, 1926, and July 11, 1926, were retrapped, still mated, at their nest within five feet of both 1926 nests on June 24, 1927, at Riverside Park.—S. E. PERKINS III, *Indianapolis, Indiana*.

NOTES

In the Massachusetts Items of Interest, February 1, 1928, Mr. Forbush writes: "We hope that bird banders will take pains to record the colors of the bill, eyes, legs, and feet of the birds that they band. There is so much confusion in various publications regarding the colors of these parts of small birds, as well as large birds, that a systematic effort should be made to record the colors from *the living birds in the hand*. Many notes on the colors of the bills and feet of birds have been taken from dried skins in which the colors are often quite different from those of the living bird.

"These colors change more or less according to age and season. In recording them it is well to state whether the bird is an adult or young, and to give the *date of the record*."

The Inland Bird Banding Association will appreciate any efforts to carry out Mr. Forbush's suggestions.

COMMUNICATIONS

Editor, WILSON BULLETIN: Mrs. Taylor's paper on Alexander Wilson, appearing in the June (1928) issue of the BULLETIN, contains what I believe to be an erroneous statement which, though of minor consequence, should, to guard against repetition, be spoken of. Mrs. Taylor says of the American Ornithology that "Volume I contains two plates colored by Wilson's own hand."