

BANDING WITH THE AID OF MIST NETS  
by Malcolm J. Lerch

Last Summer my wife and I tried our hand at netting with Japanese mist nets. We find that they work very well after one has a little experience taking birds out of them.

Nearby our home is a marsh area consisting of an extensive shallow body of open water ringed by a band of cattails. During July and August, a multitude of red-wings, grackles, cowbirds, starlings, and barn swallows roost every night in the cattail area. By using a boat, we were able to put up our posts in the soft mud bottom of the open area and string up the nets. The flocks of birds would start to come in a couple of hours before dark, and we would be very busy. The only trouble was that when 15 or 20 red-wings or grackles hit the nets at the same time, some of them always escaped before we could get them out. The larger birds (red-wings, grackles, and starlings) seem to be strong enough to claw their way up the fold in the net and get away, while the smaller ones (swallows and sparrows) usually lie quietly in the fold until they are released.

Just before dark, groups of barn swallows course back and forth over the open water, but they usually see the nets in time to avoid them until it is almost dark. However, several times a young swallow would hit the net and scream for help. Then the air would be full of swallows who paid little attention to the nets and so were captured too.

The month of July is usually one of our poorer months for banding, but this year it was the best month of the whole year. We caught 370 birds of 25 species, and all but 26 in the nets.

During the month of September, the nets worked very well, and we caught several species that we had never banded before, including blue-headed, red-eyed, warbling, and philadelphia vireos, kingbirds, alder flycatchers, wood pewees, and 15 species of warblers.

The total number of birds banded so far during 1955 is about the same as in 1954 (1550), but the number of species is larger (70 against 56). While the use of nets helps immensely, they have to be watched more closely than traps. --Route 5, Penn Yan, New York

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