

NETS: "MORE HARMFUL THAN BENEFICIAL"

Statement signed by 12 Northern New Jersey banders: Harvey W. Brewer, Alice F. Brewer, Patrick K. Garland, John J. McDermott, Arthur F. Barber, Helen E. Barber, Beecher S. Bowdish, Christabel Bowdish, Marie Dumont, Ruth K. Shand, Doris J. Worden, Gustave Dumont, Jr.

The past five years have seen the increased use of the Japanese mist net in capturing birds for banding. This has been encouraged by the Banding Office, and has received acclaim by many banders who use nets today.

The 1947 "Manual for Bird Banders" contains many representations of the various traps that have been developed by banders. This same manual stresses the responsibility of the bander.

Page 13: "In the construction of traps it should be borne in mind constantly that the safety of captured birds is of paramount importance. A banded bird should always be released in as sound and healthy condition as it was when trapped."

Page 86: "The utmost care must be exercised in handling small birds, for they must be in perfect condition when liberated."

Page 86. "If the information to be obtained from the banding of birds is to be of value, the carriers must be strong and healthy and not handicapped in any way, as under no other conditions can their movements be considered as normal."

Let us bear in mind that the Japanese mist net was not developed by banders, but by the bird catcher who simply sold some of his birds into cages and the remainder into the stew pot. When we accept the net with the large catch, we accept its faults. We accept birds in varying conditions of shock, birds minus tail feathers, minus primaries or with other injuries. We accept the fact that the bird which leaves our net is not "a strong and healthy carrier." No single piece of equipment such as the net can harmlessly capture over 150 species varying in size from the Hummingbird to the Grackle without damaging some birds.

Even those birds which seem to be removed from a net more easily are adversely affected by prolonged entanglement. Once the net is set, five or fifty birds may be enmeshed. The fiftieth bird removed will hardly be in the same condition as the first. This lack of control is one of the main reasons why the net is not suitable for bird banding.

Most of the passerine bird banding in this country has been done by volunteers in their spare time at small stations. These stations have

been a source of information to the public whose relationship with the bander has been one of mutual benefit. Not only has the bander told the public about his share of the banding program, but he has stressed the importance of the public's co-operation by reporting banded birds. The public has acted as his agent. Only in this way could the thousands of fine records have been built up.

In "Bird-Banding" Vol. XXVII No. 3, "Requirements for the use of Nets" prescribes that our neighbors and delivery men be not allowed to see or visit the netting site. There are good reasons why our neighbors should be allowed to visit any banding activities we are carrying on, for these are the people who will give us our records. If they are excluded from part of the banding program, we cannot expect them to look favorably on banding, or to trouble to report a band. All wild life belongs to the public. We are morally responsible for the safety of the birds we capture. For every bander there are thousands of bird watchers. These people have a right to know how we are operating our stations, and to know that the birds which we capture are given the best possible care. If we are using equipment which they believe is not suitable, they have the right to express their dissatisfaction.

Banders should find new ways in which to improve their catch, but this should be done in a safe way, as has been done in the past, by a method which will be acceptable to the ever increasing group of people who today are becoming interested in the bird life of their country.

The purpose of this article is to provoke discussions on the use of the Japanese mist net. In this way its use can be evaluated. We do not believe it will be accepted by the public. We believe that it is more harmful than beneficial to banders and to birds. ★ ★ ★

(Since the stated purpose of the foregoing article is to provoke discussion on the use of nets, the Editor invited an experienced user of nets to contribute his thoughts. Mr. Bergstrom graciously accepted the task. His article follows.)

THE SAFETY OF BIRDS IN NETS

By E. Alexander Bergstrom, Editor of "Bird-Banding"

I welcome the opportunity to comment on the question of safety of birds in Japanese mist nets. The advantages and disadvantages of these nets should be thoroughly understood if they are to be used to best effect.