METHODS OF MIST NET ERECTION

(Our request for contributions - at the start of John Given's article "Erection of Mist Nets" in the previous issue - has resulted in three pieces which, with a reprint from Inland Bird Banding News, follow:)

By Raymond Bubb
917 Madison Ave.
York, Pa.

Starting with the poles, I found that a two-piece pole was much easier to transport than one long section. Poles for a number of nets can be carried very easily in a narrow cloth bag (my wife made such a bag of denim at very low cost.) The poles were cut from stock aluminum tubing, at around 22¢ a foot.

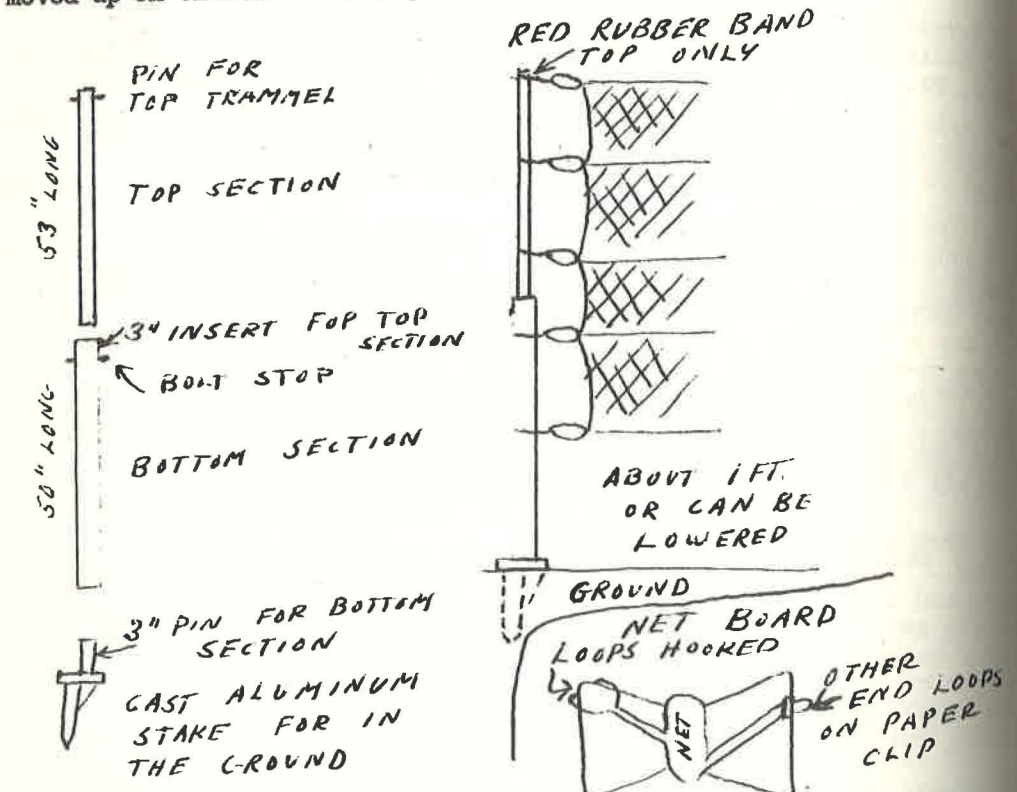
The bottom section I made of 5/8" (inside diameter) aluminum tubing 50" long. The top section is made of ½" (inside diameter) aluminum tubing 53" long. Now the outside diameter of the ½" tubing is a little more than 5/8", so a friend of mine who works in a machine shop reamed out the 5/8" tubing so that the top section would slide neatly into the bottom section. Next, 3 inches from one end of the bottom section I put a 3/18" bolt through the tubing to act as a stop for the top section. Through one end of the top section I put a 3/16" pin to act as a top catch for the top trammel of my net. This top pin isn't necessarily used all the time, if the net is needed close to the ground.

Each net loop contains a rubber band, with a red one on the top trammel. The rubber bands hold the net in place without hooks on the poles and can be adjusted very quickly. If I plan an early Saturday morning set, I can easily set up my nets Friday night and hook all the rubber bands on the hook at the top. This keeps the net compressed high and out of the way of night travelers such as deer, etc. (I have noticed deer tracks under my net area on one such occasion.) Early Saturday morning the net can be dropped open in short order.

This next step in my method is one of the biggest time savers in the field, but required some work at home to perfect. I realized that a major problem was to find a way to stake out the poles to hold my net, so I planned a stake of aluminum that I can put in the ground and insert my bottom section on a pin. This was accomplished by making a wood pattern of the stake and having it cast of aluminum (for lightness) at a nearby foundry. This cost will vary per foundry, but will be in the neighborhood of $1.00 a piece.

Now I have a light weight stake that I can press into the ground with my foot, set my bottom section on the pin, hook the rubber bands on and unroll the net to the proper distance, then repeat with the second pole. These stakes have thin ribs which help hold once placed in sandy soil or muddy spots. Once in a while a guide rope will be needed. Also with this section arrangement, some extra sections can be made so the net can be raised some to suit the terrain.

My nets are wrapped on a 1/8" masonite board shaped like a bow-tie. The starting loops of the net are hooked over a corner and wrapped by flipping the board over and over so the net wraps in the narrow center part. The other end loops are hooked over a paper clamp that can be moved up on the board so they are kept tight.



With this arrangement I can put up a net in less than 10 minutes. The more time saved on net erection, the more time the nets will work for you.

* * *

Albert Schnitzer
155 Wild Hedge Lane
Mountainside, N.J.

I make each pole of four pieces:

2 pcs. - 3/4" OD x .049 wall x 4' minimum long tubing
1 pc. - 5/8" OD x any gauge x 1' ditto
1 pc. - 1/8" x 1" cotter pin

The piece of 5/8" tubing is drilled at its midpoint and fitted with the cotter pin. A piece of tape can be wrapped around it as a suitable substitute.

The 5/8" tube will slip fit into the 3/4" tubing like a sword in its sheath. One of the 3/4" tubes is hammered into the ground at the proper spot, the 5/8" tube slipped into this as far as the cotter pin will allow, and the second 3/4" tube fitted on top.

Any combination of diameters that will allow a slip fit (not too loose) should be acceptable. I use the sizes enumerated above only because they are frequently left over from various jobs. Further I find these sizes give about as rigid a pole as can be obtained from much larger aluminum and is almost as light as aluminum but is much less clumsy since it is slenderer. It is also much less laborious to lug and pack than long TV antenna poles.

When hammering the lower end into the ground, it is advisable to cushion the blows with a piece of wood in order to prevent distortion of the tube end. I use a ½" steel pin to start a pilot hole in rocky soil.

* * *

Trudy Smith
P.O.Box 191
Ridgway, Pa.

For my purpose, the 10' steel TV antenna masts are excellent. They are somewhat heavier than the 10' conduit pipes which I use for permanent location. The 1-1/4" diameter mast costs approximately $2,00 from most TV wholesale supply houses. By sawing the 10' mast in half, it may be made into 5' lengths and then, by reversing, the smaller end telescopes easily into the larger end for about 4 inches. After sawing the 10' mast in half, I drilled a small hole through each section about 4" down from the end which telescopes. The reason for this is explained later.

These 5' lengths fit easily inside a station wagon or in the trunk of a sedan. 5' masts are also available at TV supply stores. Consequently, a pole 10, 15 or 20' can be conveniently erected. I manage a 15' pole alone and find it comparatively easy to manipulate after once getting used to it. However, when operating at this height, generally I have someone to assist. Not so much for necessity of erecting the poles and nets, as to assist in lowering them for easy access in extricating enmeshed birds.

After selecting a lane, I use a 3' iron pipe which has a sharp point welded on one end and a 3/4" bolt welded on the other. Then with a sledge hammer and a little elbow grease I drive this pipe a foot or more into the ground, depth depending on the terrain, and then pull it out again. Into this hole is placed the sawed-off end of the 5' mast. I walk the netting lane a distance of approximately 40' and here I leave the sledge hammer, the 3' pipe and the 5' mast to be used later.

While I usually have available a small sickle to cut weeds, vines, brambles and other such obstructions which so often menace a netting lane, it is not always possible to hew these entanglements low enough to avoid snagging the net as it is being suspended from one pole to the other. Therefore special caution must be exercised in erecting the net. With an assistant, this is not at all difficult, but when a bander tackles the exploit by himself, necessity again proves to be the mother of invention in many ways and the following is an example of one of them.

The reason for the ¼" hole drilled through each section of the sawed-off mast, mentioned in paragraph 3, is to accomodate an 18" piece of stiff wire or dowell which is thrust through this hole. The lower trammel is placed on the pole first, followed by trammels 2, 3 & 4 & 5 in that order. The purpose of this wire is to prevent the trammel ends from slipping down the mast to the ground and becoming entangled in the weeds or brambles, etc. while the net is being strung to the other pole.

With the trammels already fastened on one pole, I proceed to unfold the net to its maximum length. While holding the net high with one hand, keeping it away from brush and weeds, the other hand is free to pick up the 3' iron pipe; then by carefully stretching the net to the exact spot where the pole is to be anchored, the iron pipe is jabbed into that spot, leaving both hands free to tie the trammel ends to a small narrow strap which is fastened around my shoulders. With the trammels elevated and by standing at an angle to keep the net taut, both hands are free to drive the 3' pipe into the ground with the sledge hammer. Into this hole goes the other half of the sawed-off mast. The trammels are then secured in place on this mast in the same order as aforementioned.

In order to elevate the poles to 15', two 5' masts are telescoped together and this is then telescoped into the 5' mast already in the ground. In order to raise the nets, a 10' lightweight wooden stick or bamboo pole works nicely. (To the end of this is attached a small clothesline hook which is used to lower the net after it has been raised to the top of the poles). By placing the wooden pole under the upper trammel, it can be pushed up the mast for 15" or so. The second trammel is then pushed up 15" and so on for the rest of the trammels, working up each mast alternately.

To extricate birds from a 10' height offers little difficulty to an experienced bander. From the 15' height, unless one bands in cherry orchards or such, where 15' ladders are already available, it is a great help, while extricating birds enmeshed in the lower pockets first, to have someone carefully and slowly lowering trammel by trammel until the last bird has been released from the uppermost part of the net.

* * *

Liven A. Peterson
Grand Island, Nebraska
(from Inland B.B.A.News)

My year-round netting area is a shelterbelt associated with several nearby brush clumps and grain fields. It is located on the Grand Island, Nebraska, municipal airport property. I also operate baited traps in this area.

I have found that placement of nets must vary with the seasons to get best results. During the fall, winter and spring seasons birds are frequently present in small, restless flocks. These birds can often be driven into the nets by carefully walking through the cover and herding them like a band of sheep. One soon learns the more favored routes followed by birds, and the proper pattern of net placement is determined by trial and error.

Driving birds is an art in itself. If done too rapidly they may fly far over the net. If too slowly, they may disperse and drift around or away from the net. The best method is to keep them hopping along from bush to bush in low, short flights. At the critical moment one should step more rapidly so that the birds will flush forward directly into the net. Sometimes a car can be parked in a location that will help to direct the birds in a certain direction. An assistant or a scarecrow made of an old coat can accomplish the same thing.

At my shelterbelt, small flocks of birds occasionally break out and fly across a field to a nearby patch of red cedars. By placing a net across the side of the patch facing the shelterbelt many birds are caught just at the end of their flight. Tree, Lincoln, Song and Clay-colored Sparrows are the species most frequently netted by driving small flocks in this area.

I usually set up 3 or 4 nets and move continuously from one net to the next until I am through banding for the day. If the usual number of birds are present in the area, 4 nets are all I can take care of alone.

* * *

SHOREBIRD BANDING IN VERMONT

By Bruce Adams

When I went to Vermont to attend college, I anticipated plenty of interesting banding. But I never expected that a major part of that banding would be with shorebirds.

Since 1957, Normand St. Jaques has been trapping shorebirds at a mud flat area on the shore of Lake Champlain. Although we have since tried nets, they have not been very successful as the birds seem adept at dodging the nets. The banding has been accomplished almost entirely with a modified version of the all-purpose trap, shown in the diagram below.