

MIST NETTING SAW-WHET OWLS

By Peter Petersen, Jr.

Reprinted from Inland Bird Banding News, Vol. 35, No. 1

I have always captured Saw-whet Owls during the course of my netting in the fall months at Pine Hill Cemetery, Davenport, Iowa. The first two years of operation, 1959 and 1960, only five were netted, two the first year and three the second. These were all caught in standard small bird nets (1½" mesh) during the night in the creek-bottom ragweed and willow habitat of which my net site consists. In 1961 I placed a larger (2 3/8" mesh) net over the creek which had been a stopping point for my net line previously. During that fall I netted ten Saw-whet Owls, seven of them over the creek in the larger net. Obviously the birds follow this water-course while hunting, and the larger mesh should be more efficient in holding them. This fall eight have been captured to date (Nov. 10, 1962), five in large nets over the creek.

I have never had a casualty among these twenty-three owls by virtue of their being enmeshed overnight, or for at least part of the night, despite the fact that one capture was in early December. Many people do not leave their nets up overnight for fear of leaving the birds in for such a long period of time. I have no trouble and agree with Low (Bird Banding Vol. 28, p. 124-125) regarding leaving nets up overnight. My worst experience was a Screech Owl captured during the night which was drenched by an unexpected dawn shower. I dried the bird using the car heater and it seemed none the worse for its experience when released. It was recaptured six days later, normal and healthy.

The dates of banding show an apparent migration pattern for Saw-whet Owls. In 1961 three were captured October 14, and two November 6, and one November 8 showing two movements. This fall two were caught Oct. 26, one Oct. 27, two Nov. 1, and one Nov. 2, also indicating two movements. Of course these are small samples to use for assuming a movement of magnitude but tend to indicate same. The earliest capture has been October 5, 1959. One recovery has been reported, an individual which flew into a window about one mile away six days after being banded. There have been no repeats.

The 2 3/8" mesh net over the creek has produced some other captures which would have doubtless been impossible in other locations. These include Green Heron, American Woodcock, Solitary Sandpiper, and Belted Kingfisher. The poles for this net are placed on the top of the creek bank so the bottom of the net is seven or eight feet above water level and even an unexpected heavy rain could not cause the creek to rise enough to reach the net. On some occasions the net must be lowered to remove birds, usually this can be done by sticking the upper five foot section of pole in the ground.

The writer would be interested in any further trapping techniques.

2736 E. High St., Davenport, Iowa