

A NEST TRAP FOR RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS

By Don P. Fankhauser

Poultry wire, fish netting, and a discarded "Hula Hoop," were used to make a nest trap for capturing female red-winged blackbirds (Agelaius phoeniceus). The trap, $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet high and 2 feet in diameter, worked well in clover fields, but a larger trap might be needed for taking birds in taller vegetation.

The trap is set by placing it over a nest and the supporting vegetation, with the top propped open by a length of stiff wire. For manual operation a line of perhaps 50 yards is attached to the loose end of this wire support. When the line is pulled, the support is removed and the top closes. For automatic operation, a mousetrap is mounted as shown in the photograph. A string, tied to the trigger of the mousetrap, is run across the nest and fastened to the opposite side of the trap. A bird entering the nest touches the string and sets off the mousetrap, which removes the support and causes the top of the trap to close. An opening cut in the netting of the top enables a person to reach the bird within the trap. During the operation the hole is kept closed by a clothespin. Thick vegetation may keep the trap from resting firmly on the ground. This is not critical since the captured redwings usually fly up and try to escape out of the top of the trap instead of the bottom.

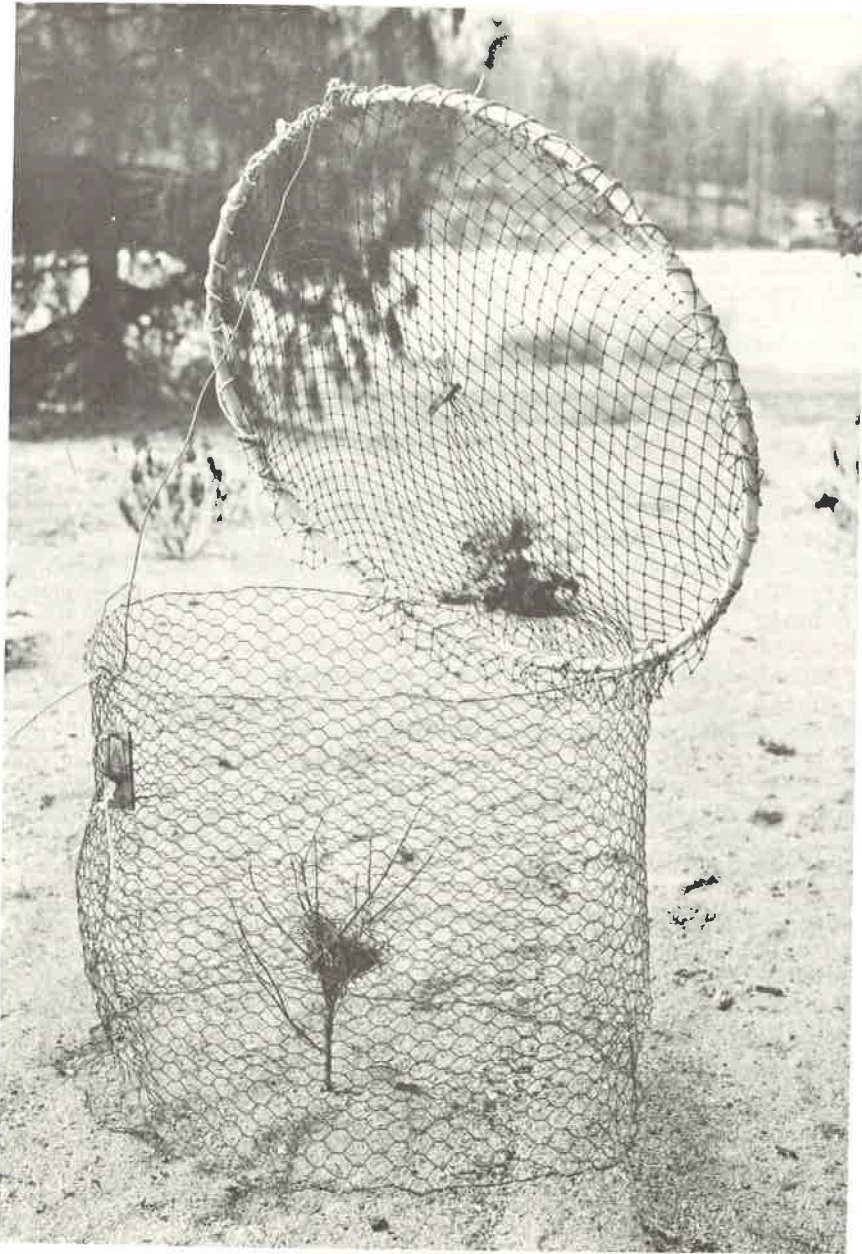
Manual operation of traps was most efficient when several traps were placed in the open position over nests some time during one day and then sprung near dawn the next morning. All the females were on their nests at this time and were not easily flushed when the observer approached the end of the line. Some birds were taken during daylight hours by springing the trap with the assumption that the bird was inside. At other times, traps were watched until the bird was seen to enter, and then were sprung.

Traps adapted to automatic triggering by the nesting birds also worked well. However, after being set they had to be checked periodically to avoid holding birds in traps too long. Also, the triggering device had to be made so sensitive that it sometimes was set off at inappropriate times by wind, rain, or other disturbances.

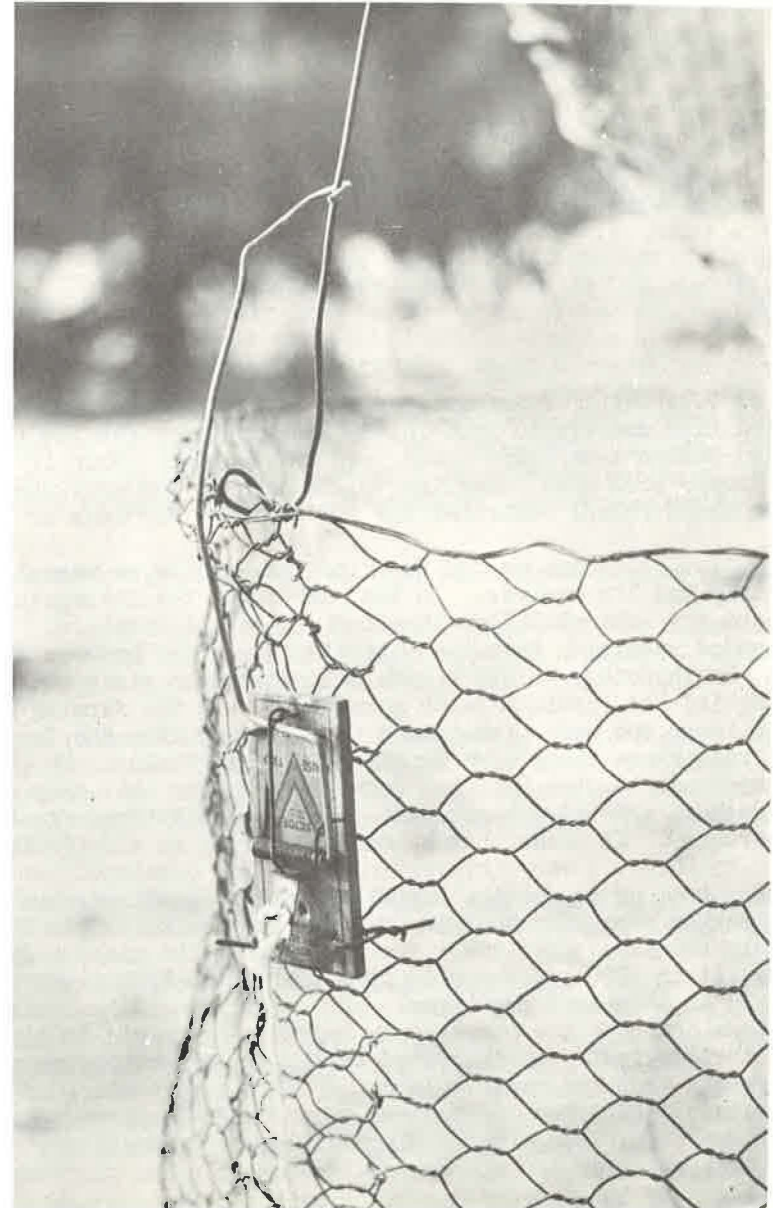
These traps have been used to capture only nesting red-winged blackbirds, but they probably could be used equally well for certain other species that build low nests.

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(See pictures of trap on next 2 pages)



Simulated set showing both manual and automatic triggering mechanisms.
(Photo by Fred C. Schmid)



Closeup of automatic triggering mechanism
(Photo by Fred C. Schmid)