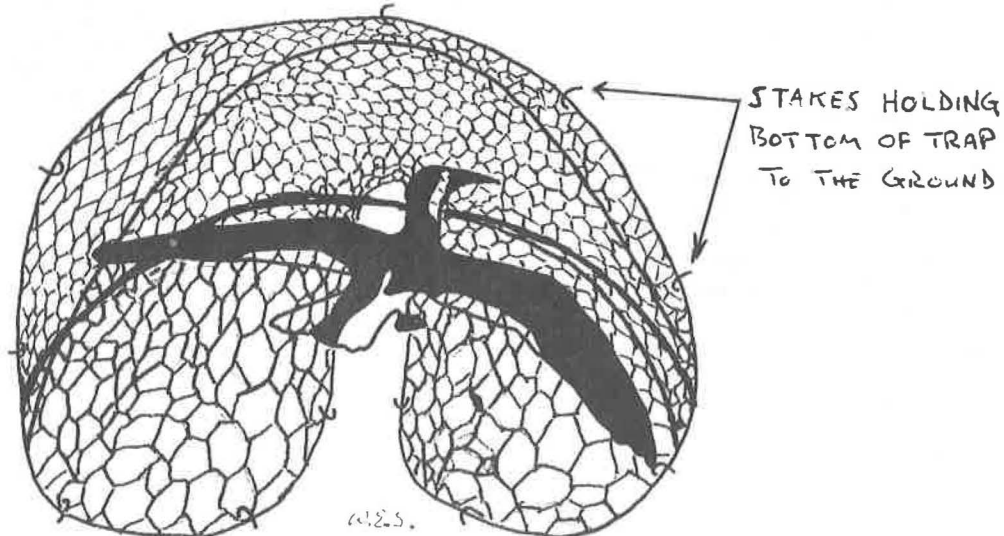


A NEST TRAP FOR TAKING ADULT SKIMMERS, TERNS AND GULLS
By William E. Savell

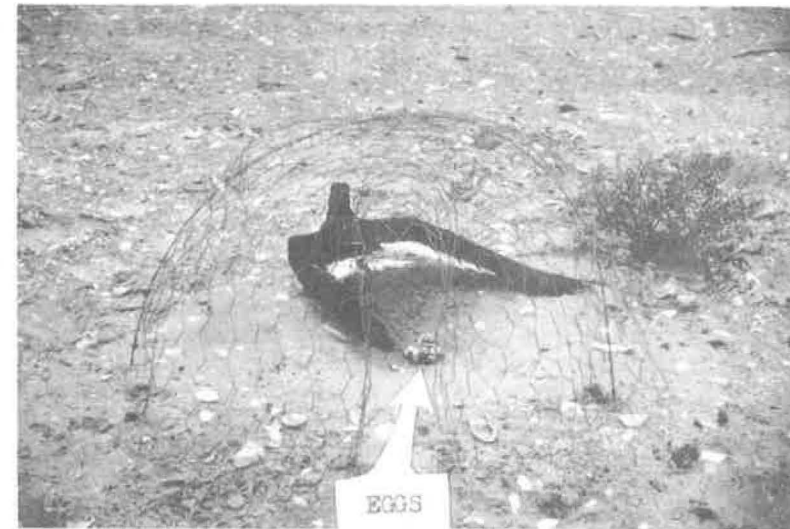
The purpose of this article is to call attention to, and briefly describe, a simple, efficient, portable trap for use in taking adult ground nesting birds, especially those colonial species such as gulls, terns and skimmers. There is nothing original on the part of the writer in the design and operation of this trap, as it was observed in use while assisting Dr. Colin Beer and Dr. Jack Hailman, in 1966, at the Brigantine Wildlife Refuge (N.J.) where they were using it for capturing adult Laughing Gulls. Dr. Hailman informed me it is a version of the "Lobster-Pot Nest Trap" described in Bird-Ringing by R.M. Lockley and R. Russell, on pp. 42-43 (plus Figure 13 showing a gull approaching the nest) published in 1953 by Crosby Lockwood & Son Ltd.

Ground-nesting birds may be caught by placing the trap over the nest. Basically, the trap consists of two six-foot lengths of chicken wire, three feet in width. These are fastened together with wire rings to form one piece six feet square. The purpose of using two pieces is compactness allowing the material to be folded in two for ease of transportation in the trunk of a car, or on the deck of a boat. The only other parts necessary are approximately twelve wire stakes about ten inches long. These may be made of old coat hangers or slightly heavier wire. The actual fabrication takes place at the banding site and is accomplished in a matter of a few minutes. The same procedure is necessary at each new location, however.

The entrance is of the funnel type, and is formed from the side of the wire mesh which is smooth (rather than either of the two ends which have been cut from the roll). This will be the front of the trap. Proceed



by placing the six foot square over the nest with the front facing downwind. Secure one side to the ground using three metal stakes. Move to the other side and raise the material so as to form a half cylinder. Secure this side with three stakes. Now move to the rear and fold the excess wire mesh so as to present no openings through which the birds may escape, and secure with a couple of stakes. At the front, fold the mesh into the trap in such a manner as to form a funnel of about two inches width and five or six inches deep and secure each side with two stakes. This completes the job, no reinforcements being necessary as the wire is stiff enough to allow the trap to be self-supporting and quite rigid.



As these traps are very difficult to locate in sandy areas after you have left, they should be marked in a conspicuous manner. Likewise, each nest should also be marked upon completion of banding operations, if any future activities are anticipated at the same site, in order to avoid needless duplication. Where nests are in close proximity to each other we have found it better to keep the traps close together rather than to cover too wide an area, resulting in a more efficient coverage. In setting the traps bear in mind that birds enter more readily when the entrance is placed so that they enter facing into the wind. As a precaution against damage to eggs, the trap should be placed so the nest is situated about 15 inches from the rear. This allows the bird sufficient room in which to struggle without egg damage when the bander approaches. Where possible approach from the front of the trap. Removal of the bird is accomplished by removing one or two of the stakes and reaching under the wire.

No large scale operations utilizing this trap have been undertaken due to lack of time during the nesting season, but the results have been

quite interesting in the few hours we have devoted to its use. Generally speaking, it is necessary to leave the area for a minimum of 20 minutes before the birds will enter the traps. We usually move two or three hundred yards distant, or where possible return to the car. A blind or tent would be adequate also, as none of these species are shy about returning when no activity is taking place.

In 1966, approximately eight hours were spent in the field, using six of these traps. 31 adult Black Skimmers were trapped, of which one (#524-99123) was a foreign retrap, banded near Cape May, N.J. in 1961, as a nestling, by S.T. Harty. Two were returns of birds banded by the writer as nestlings in 1963, at a different site approximately five miles distant. The remaining 28 adult birds were banded and released to continue incubating. In three instances both birds were captured at the same time in the same trap.

In 1967, approximately six hours and six traps were utilized and 15 adult birds were captured. Considerable time was spent banding nestlings in the same general area, which accounted for the smaller number of adults banded. Thirteen of the birds were adult skimmers and one was an adult Gull-billed Tern. One foreign retrap, a Black Skimmer (#534-97129) was captured on July 27, 1967, but no report has been received from the Banding Office at this writing. In one instance both birds were taken at the same time in the same trap.

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