THE SQUIRREL-PROOF TRAP PLATFORM

By Robert P. Yunick

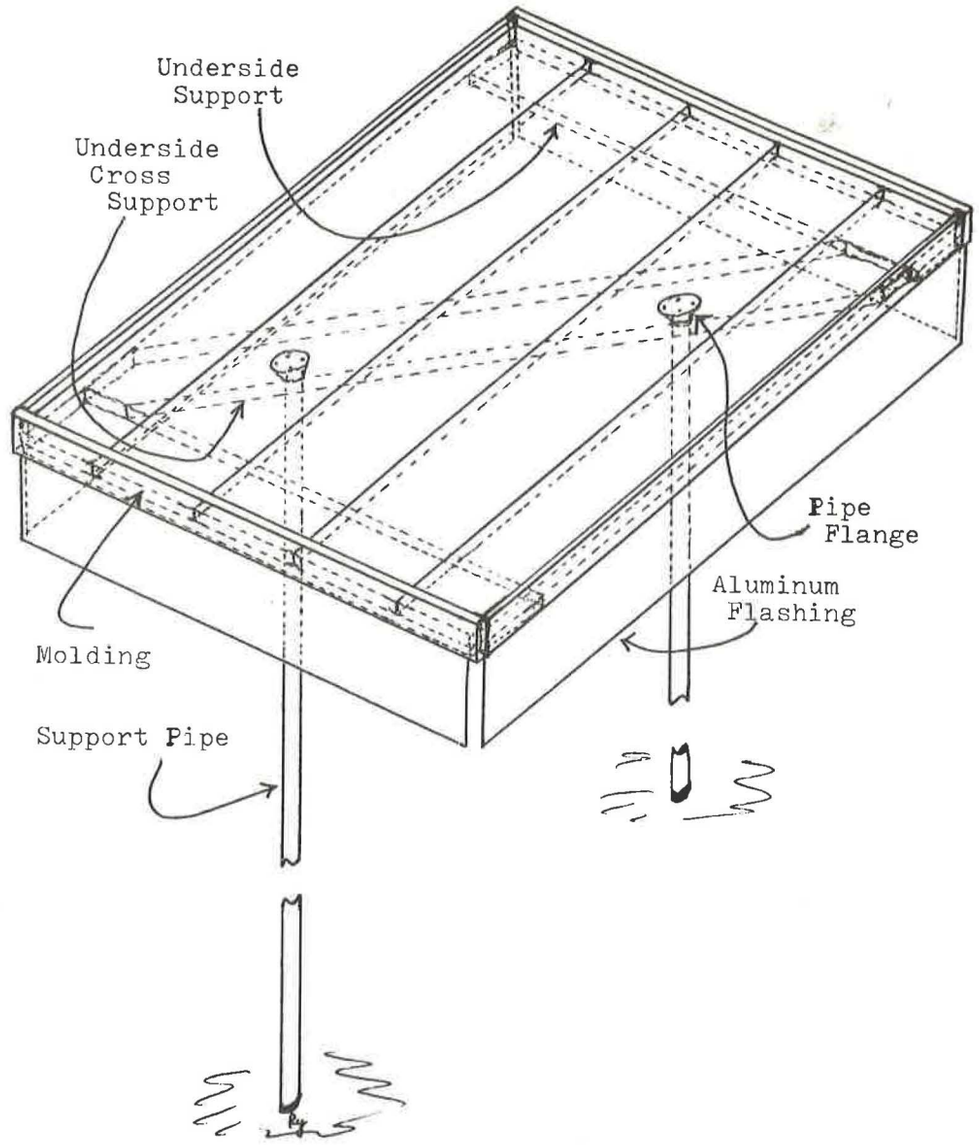
Frequently it has been my experience while engaged in backyard winter banding to be plagued by squirrels and other quadrupeds which have quite thoroughly upset the orderly operation of my ground traps. Since shooting or trapping of the culprits was not possible for several reasons, it became necessary to outwit these critters. To accomplish this, I have resorted to the use of elevated platforms which in the past eight seasons have proven effective and versatile. The following describes their construction and tips on their effective use. It is hoped that this information will help others who are experiencing difficulty with ground trapping due to squirrels to enjoy better trapping.

These platforms operate on the basis of three basic principles: 1) They are elevated above ground level, 2) They are out of jumping reach, and 3) They are protected by a sheet metal skirt. The skirt is the chief reason for their success.

Most of my platforms are made of 3/4-inch pine and are various sizes depending on the type of trap they support. To date, Potter traps (both single and multi-cell), Mason traps and a platform trap of my own design have been used on these platforms. Most commonly a platform measures about 30 x 40 inches. The planks making up the platform are secured by cross pieces on the underside of both ends. A 30 x 40 inch platform requires two one inch support pipes threaded on one end, and these are connected by flanges connected to a third support piece running on the underside per the accompanying drawing. A 20 x 30 inch platform is adequately supported by one pipe.

The protective skirt is usually aluminum flashing, and is attached by nailing on molding strips measuring about 3/8 x 1 1/2 in. The strips are elevated about 1/2 inch above the platform to provide a lip on the periphery to diminish the loss of seed by wind. The flashing width depends on the platform size. The smaller the platform, the smaller the reach from the support pipe to the edge and the longer the skirt must be. A 30 x 40-in. platform requires a skirt about six in. wide. With this, a squirrel simply cannot negotiate the jump from the pipe to the platform edge. Numerous squirrels will climb the pipe in an attempt to gain access to the top of the platform, only to be thwarted by the skirt. Smaller platforms measuring 14 x 14 in. require a 10-12 inch skirt for safety.

Most of my platforms are five to six feet off the ground. Snow must be removed from the ground about their base, for when two feet or more lies on the ground, the hunger-driven squirrels can make the leap. Thus the snow must be removed or tramped down to prevent access from jumping from below.



Squirrel-proof Trap Platform

The vertical jumping capability of the grey squirrel appears to be about three feet at the most. The platforms must also be situated so that no tree limbs, poles, lines or other squirrel supports overhang them. Squirrels readily climb a tree and jump down on a feeding area when the opportunity presents itself. Ten to 15 feet appears to be a safe horizontal distance to place these platforms from overhead or horizontal access. The support pipes should be anchored about 16-20 inches in the ground to effectively support the weight of the platform. The ground is very soft when the frost leaves in the spring and a pipe buried only about one foot may lean and topple.

When not in use as trap supports, these platforms make excellent feeders. Thirty evening grosbeaks on a 30 x 40 inch platform is a pretty sight. Mostly they are used for dispensing sunflower seed, though cracked corn sprinkled on these platforms attracts mourning doves, juncos and other ground feeders. These platforms work their best on the winter finches, and the blue jay - chickadee - nuthatch tribes.

When snow is anticipated, the platforms are covered with polyethylene sheet which is held in place by snap clothespins at the corners of the flashing. This covering not only facilitates snow removal, it preserves for use in a dry state the food contained thereon. Without the cover, one has to sweep off the snow and usually sacrifices the food in so doing. An inexpensive automotive windshield brush with a scraper on the handle is an effective cleaning tool. Due to the extreme weathering these platforms must withstand, it is adviseable to provide them with the best of exterior coating. I use at least two coats of a soaking oil finish that saturates the wood well and then a finish paint coat for effect. Green is a quite pleasing color. Platforms which are ravaged all year by the weather last about three years. Those which I put out in November and remove in May are still in use after six to eight years' use.

A PLATFORM TRAP
By Robert P. Yunick

A trap design that has worked for me very effectively for the past six years is one I call a platform trap. It is especially effective for Evening Grosbeaks and the similarly gregarious species like Purple Finches and American Goldfinches. After building the first model on a trial basis, I built a second one two years later, and have used both ever since in my yard. I have passed the design on to one or two other banders who have contructed them and found them successful also.

The trap rests atop a wooden platform to eliminate interence from squirrels. The platform has been described serpately, so this description will center on the trap design and use. The trap consists of an open-ended cage having two drop doors triggered by a pull string as pictured in the accompanying drawing. The trap may be made of either $\frac{1}{2}$ inch hardware cloth or $\frac{1}{2}$ x 1-in. welded wire, the latter being preferred.