

**BANDERS' SHOPTALK****PREVENTING NET CASUALTIES**

By Anne Shreve

(Reprinted from EBBA Workshop Manual, Vol. 4, 1965)

All of this has been written and said before, but perhaps that was before our beginners' time, so if its repetition can prevent even one casualty, it will have been worth the writing.

Here, in West Virginia, bird-banders are almost as scarce as Sutton's warblers. With few experienced people available, we learn some things by trial and error, and through manuals such as this. We have learned a few techniques of our own which we found were helpful to others, especially to beginners, so we pass them on.

TECHNIQUES OF REMOVING A BIRD FROM THE NET:

Your first solo with a badly tangled chickadee may be a trying experience (for both bander and bandee). Always remind yourself of one thing: if the bird went in, it can be backed out easily and unharmed. The bander must first take the time necessary to figure out exactly how the bird went into the net. Observe carefully from which side the bird entered the net, and between which trammels it went, in order to find the mouth of the pocket in which the bird lies. Start on the side of the net which the bird entered; part the trammels and netting loosely, and look into the pocket caused by the weight of the bird. Back the bird out the way it went in, step by step. A light touch is a most important prerequisite for all methods. There are several standard procedures for removing birds, but you will find that different species and different problems will require your own improvisation.

- A. The original, and perhaps still the most widely used, requires the following steps:
 1. Find out from which side of the net the bird entered. Find the mouth of the pocket caused by the weight of the bird.
 2. (The tibia is the feathered part of the leg above the bare tarsus.) Using the left hand, grasp both tibias from behind in the following manner:

- a. Put the index finger between the tibias.
 - b. Hold securely by pressing the thumb against the bird's right tibia,
 - c. and pressing the middle finger against the left tibia. This leaves the right hand free to remove net strands from the entangled legs and feet.
 - d. The first and most important step in removing net strands from legs and feet is to make certain that all threads are pulled down and off tibias and thighs. (These threads are sometimes high up on the thigh at the flank. Make sure all threads are kept down below the heel joint (which is the prominent joint between the tibia and tarsus).
 - e. Untangle the toes by pulling strands gently - a pencil or orange stick is helpful. (It will be noticed that if heel joint is straightened out, the bird's toes have a tendency to relax and netting is then easily removed.)
3. Pull the bird up and away from the net, still holding the legs by the feathered tibia, above the bare tarsus. Flick net threads from the bend of the wings, working from the underside.
 4. When both wings are free, pull remaining loops from around the neck, working from the back of the head forward.
- B. Another popular method is very useful when the bird is positioned feet downward in the net, and not too badly tangled:
1. Work from the side of the net entered by the bird.
 2. Reach into the pocket and grasp the bird with the head between the index and second finger. The thumb should slide in behind the wing, under the leg and touch the breast. See sketch p.29
 3. With the other hand, remove the threads from the bend of the wings, one at a time, working from the front of the wing, this time.
 4. With the bird still held in the original position, remove the net strands from around the neck, pulling them off in the manner of removing a T-shirt.
 5. Pull the bird up and away from the net, and it will free its own feet in an effort to fly.

This method, when administered with a nimble hand and a light touch, is very easy on the bird as the only firm contact is on the sides of the neck. It is also a timesaver since feet untangle themselves.

- C. A third method requires a little practice but is applicable to almost every situation:

1. As always - determine the side of the net entered.
2. Grasp the left (or right) leg above the tarsus and release the foot.
3. Release the left (or right) wing.
4. Release the head.
5. The other wing is next.
6. The right foot.

This procedure requires an experienced "feel" - the bird is sort of rolled over and released in order of foot, wing, head, wing and foot.

H A Z A R D S -

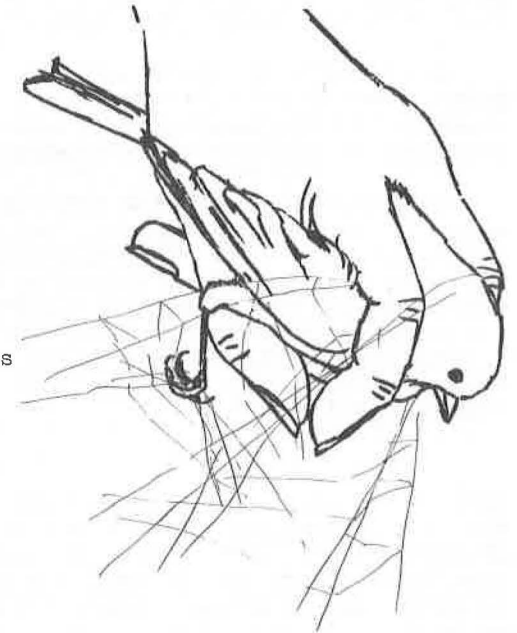
A hazard which is not quite as serious as it appears to be:
- tongue caught in the net.

The mouth structure of birds, especially thrushes, brown thrashers and catbirds, allows net threads to catch behind the tongue. While the bird's head is held between the index and second finger, the third and fourth fingers and the thumb can hold the net near the side of the mouth, and relieve pressure on the tongue. A pencil, an orange stick, or a sharp twig can be manipulated with the free hand to lift the thread from behind the cleft of the tongue. Until one becomes deft at releasing the tongue in this manner, a small pair of scissors is invaluable. Usually, clipping a single strand of mesh will do the trick, and it is certainly worth the wear and tear on a beginner's nerves, not to mention the bird's.

Netting in less than perfect weather is only for the experienced bander, and he should have help. No novice should attempt it.

Wind can blow the net to one end of the lines and strangle a caught bird.

Direct, hot sun can kill a bird within minutes, especially if its unprotected underparts are exposed.



Do not band in the rain. A rain-soaked bird might not survive; wet hands cause body feathers to stick to the fingers and are pulled out.

Fingers may also become stiff and slow in very cold weather, allowing a bird to freeze before it is extricated from the net.

Of course, an improperly attended net leaves birds to hawks, house cats, foxes and other predators that are quick to notice a struggling bird. A beginner should check his nets every fifteen or twenty minutes.

When nets are furled, be sure they are secured in at least three places. One may use cord, strips of cloth, clothes pins, or pipe cleaners. A bird, perching on an unsecured, furled net, may become entangled and slip between the trammels.

Gathering cages may become infested with parasites, and fungi may thrive in the droppings therein. Foot pox can be fatal to birds which become infested. Cages should have removable papers on the bottom and should be cleaned often and exposed to the sun. An ordinary plastic mesh onion bag, or a bag made of mosquito netting is ideal for carrying one or two birds per bag. A nylon laundry bag, with three divisions stitched vertically, can accommodate several birds; droppings fall through the mesh, bags are washed daily, and birds can cling to the inside without danger.

* * *

We cannot be too careful! For one who loves living things, it is a distressing experience to see a warbler, who has weathered the perils of migration, become a casualty in the hands of a careless bander. An experienced bander finds himself with practically no casualties. This is partly due to his expert touch, but most certainly it is also because of his conscientious netting, trapping and handling. Knowing the hazards in advance, and taking no chances, are key factors in preventing casualties.

* * *

