

WITH THE BIRD BANDERS

Under the direction of J. Eugene Law, Altadena, California

What is a Bird Bander?—When a person captures a bird alive, places a numbered aluminum band or ring around its leg, and then liberates it, he becomes a bird bander. When he keeps a careful record of the birds he bands, and makes reports of the same to the Biological Survey at the proper times, he is cooperating in a great movement for the advancement of accurate knowledge of the birds. If, in addition to the foregoing, he writes up the interesting experiences that banding brings to him and, from time to time, sends them to the director of this column for publication, he will help to make this column one of live interest, and will stimulate others to join in the banding work. This column belongs to the banders and they are urged to use it.

The aforesaid bands are thin circlets just large enough to have stamped on them a number and the abbreviations "Biol. Surv." No two bands bear the same number. They are made in various sizes to accommodate the different birds and the largest size is adjustable. With a bird in hand, one selects a band which, when closed, will easily slip up and down on the tarsal segment of the leg without much room to spare.

The Biological Survey supplies these bands without charge to such persons as have first secured from it a permit to band birds. To receive a permit, one must, of course, have sufficient knowledge of the birds to identify those that he bands. Western students who want to become banders can obtain application blanks from the bird department of any of the western museums, or from the secretary of any of the local bird societies, or from the director of this department. When signed the application should be sent to the latter, and will be forwarded by him to Washington.

No one who enjoys the birds should fail to equip himself with permit and bands. Occasion is sure to arise when birds can be banded, and it is very easy to make the opportunity. Any simple trap will catch the birds. With the banding permit, the Biological Survey sends full directions for making traps and for banding the birds.

A bander easily recognizes the new arrivals in his yard because they are not wearing his bands. In no other way does one get any conception of the procession of birds that visits him. In a city backyard in one winter season the writer banded 65 Gambel Sparrows, 22 House Finches, 6 Song Sparrows, and 1 Mockingbird. There were rarely more than 6 or 8 sparrows in evidence at one time. Some stayed throughout the winter, repeatedly returning to the trap. Others merely registered as they passed through. If one has any time at all for bird study, no use of this time will yield more enjoyment and more profit than operating one or several traps and banding the birds he catches.

Do not let rut inertia deprive you of the opportunities for added pleasure and service that this new activity offers. Most of us can make our own trap. The rest of us can easily get some mechanic to make it. One's equipment is complete with permit, bands, trap, and a pair of pointed pliers, all easy to get. Once over, past the first experiences when the bander is more frightened than is the bird that he is holding in his hand, inoculation becomes complete. He will thereafter lose no opportunity to band birds.

Whether you are a bander or not, be on the lookout for banded birds. The band is white, rests just above the foot as the bird hops about, and is conspicuous against the ground or against any dark object. If you detect one, trap the bird and ascertain its number. Any bander in your community will be eager to help you and thus learn whence the bird has traveled.

Simple Bird Traps.—Any bird cage¹ can be made into an automatic bird trap. If the cage has a door that slides up and down (a drop door) use a false floor designed in accordance with the sketch shown in figure 50, c. This floor consists of 'hardware cloth' 2½ x 5 inches in size, into one end of which is threaded a piece of stiff wire bent

¹The writer is indebted to Mrs. Elizabeth A. Herrick for the idea of making a trap from a bird cage. In substituting the false floor for the adaptation proposed by her (see Bird Banding Notes, no. 4, 1923, p. 6) one has a simpler trap of equal efficiency.

as indicated in the sketch. A bird entering the cage to reach the food, naturally hops first onto the raised edge of this false floor (fig. 50, a). Under the bird's weight this floor collapses, and this automatically releases the door, and the latter drops and closes the cage (fig. 50 b).

If a person chooses, he can add a partition and another drop door and thus have two compartments, and at a nominal cost of money and energy he can acquire a 'fleet' of the traps. Perhaps the best cage for the purpose is the one commonly used by bird dealers. Its dimensions are 6 x 10 inches, and it is 8 inches high.

This false-floor cage trap can be operated on the ground, on a window ledge or in a tree. In every case a quick catch is stimulated by placing a 3 inch 'stoop' at each door and nowhere else. For ground trapping, set the trap up 3 or 4 inches on bricks or stones so that the latter will form stoops at the doors. When the trap is suspended, a stoop of shake or shingle may be attached.

An automatic 'drop trap' can be made from any screened box or cage which has an open bottom. As outlined in figure 50, d, a piece of hardware cloth, two-thirds the

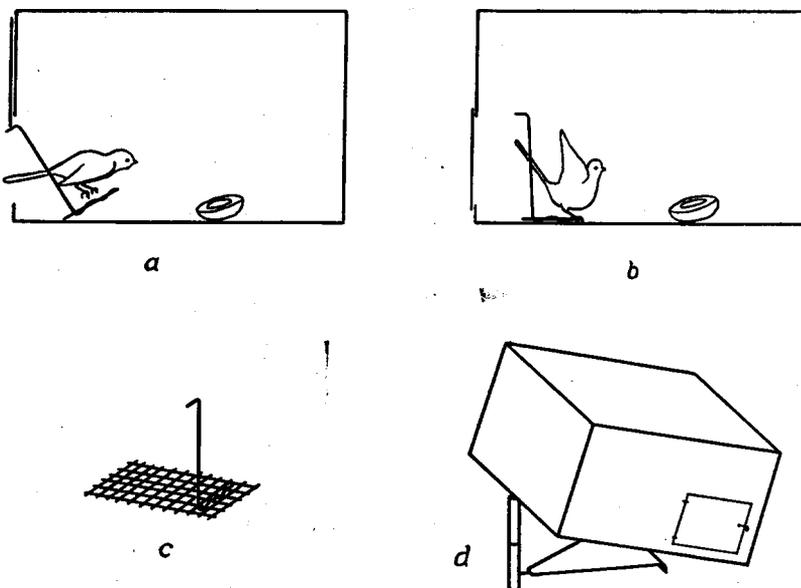


Fig. 50. SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE DEVICES FOR BIRD TRAPS.

- a, b, c. For a false floor cage trap.
 d. For a false floor drop trap.
 a. A diagrammatic cross-section of the open trap at the instant that the bird is hopping in.
 b. The same, one instant later, with the trap sprung.
 c. The false floor with the trigger wire 'threaded' into it.

length of the bottom of the box and slightly narrower, is cut to a triangular shape. An inch of the broad end is turned down to a right angle. The opposite, tapering end, in setting the trap, rests on a small nail which has been driven into the lower part (1 inch up) of one of two sticks, each about 2 inches long. These two sticks, ended one above the other, support one end of the cage. A moment's adjustment will fix the set so that the tiniest bird, hopping onto this false floor, will cause the sticks to collapse, and the cage to drop over the bird. Place the bait (food) well back on the false floor and behind it. Some operate a drop trap by using a single supporting stick to which is tied a long string, which the operator pulls at the proper time. The false floor, of course, is not needed when the trap is operated by pulling the string.

Gulls.—Few common bird groups have kept their family secrets better than have the gulls. Specific divisions and plumage sequences are still debatable. Apparent wide individual variation coupled with a several-year period of immaturity prevents positive allocation of many specimens. But since gulls breed in great colonies, many of them accessible, a splendid opportunity to solve some of these problems awaits banders.

This work has been actively begun by Mr. Theed Pearse, of Courtenay, B. C., who writes under date of July 20, 1923: "Last year I banded just over 100 Glaucous-winged Gull nestlings on Mittenach Island in the Gulf of Georgia, about 100 miles north of Vancouver, B. C. These young birds were all banded on the left leg. I hope to get over there this month, when all young birds will be banded on the right leg, my idea being that, in this way, identification on the wing might be assisted and that, taking into account the plumage, it should be possible to tell at a glance during the next two or three years the age of any banded bird. Next year I shall hope to band on the left leg.

"We have at Mittenach a colony of Gulls that, this year, was estimated at over 1500 pairs and the breeding rocks are easily accessible, so that it is a colony where extensive banding operations could be carried out. Unfortunately the birds suffer very much from egg stealing, Indians and others (and crows). Last year, the number of estimated pairs there was 500 and there were no birds of the year flying, so that the birds banded, with perhaps as many more eggs, represented the total output from this number of pairs."

Shall We Have Snakes or Birds.—On July 2, 1923, I killed on suspicion a Gopher Snake (*Pituophis c. catenifer*) four feet long. The birds were making a big fuss over it. Dissection disclosed a House Finch in its gullet and an egg of a Road-runner in its stomach. The House Finch wore band no. 52057 and had been banded as a half-grown nestling on June 23. The snake was killed almost directly under the nest where the bird was raised, but as the nest was under the eaves of a plastered garage, the snake must have caught the bird after it left the nest.

On July 4, a similar fuss led me to a Black Racer (*Coluber lateralis*) which was about seven feet above the ground among the branches of the same tangle that had sheltered the gopher snake. The racer was mouthing a bird, which it had already killed, and which was found to wear band no. 52058. This bird was another baby House Finch from the same nest as no. 52057. The snake had eaten a small lizard prior to catching the bird.

While it seems remarkable that two nestlings from the same nest should be caught by different snakes, and most extraordinary that these two culprits should have been caught red-handed, the incident compels a realization of the menace that the larger snakes are to our bird life.—J. EUGENE LAW, *Altadena, California, July 31, 1923.*

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Further Indictment of the Brewer Blackbird.—Referring to the notes on Predatory Brewer Blackbirds by Mr. A. W. Anthony in the May-June, 1923, issue of the Condor, will say that several years ago we had similar experiences with this bird at the State Game Farm near Corvallis, Oregon.

When the pheasant eggs were hatched, it was the custom to put the hen mother in a coop out in the field and the baby pheasants were allowed to go in and out and feed in the open. The Brewer Blackbirds (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) developed a taste for young pheasants. They were caught red-handed killing the little game birds. They pecked the eyes out and ate the brains. The rest of the body was untouched. I was very much surprised at the time and couldn't account for this blackbird developing such a taste. At the time the young pheasants were fed on maggots. The blackbirds were also attracted by this food and I took for granted that a blackbird had inten-