Other criteria for ageing such as the length of crest and buff fringing to the coverts, were examined and although many birds correlated with these factors there were examples of birds not conforming.

REFERENCE

Witherby H.F., Jourdain, F.C.R., Ticehurst, N.F., and Tucker , B.W. 1940. Handbook of British Birds, Vol. IV; H.F. & G. Witherby Ltd. London.

NOTE: I should be grateful if anyone catching known age lapwings would examine the tail feathers and inform me of their findings at MAFF, Pest Infestation Control Laboratory, Tangley Place, Worplesdon, Guildford, Surrey GU3 3LQ.

MIST NETTING FOR LAPWINGS AT AN INLAND GRAVEL PIT

by C. M. Hemmings

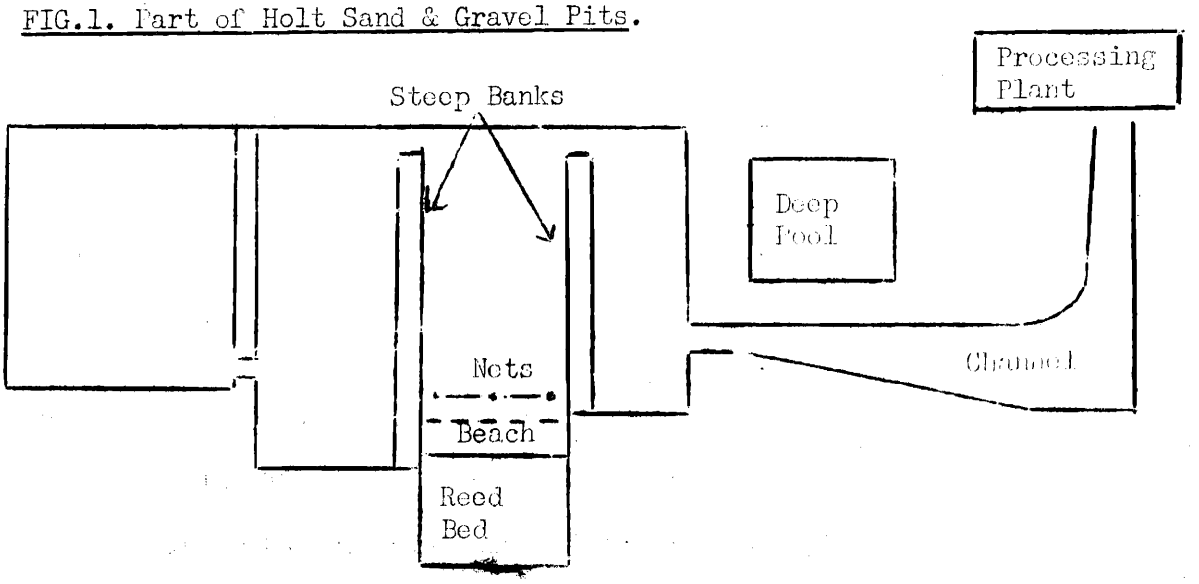
Between 9th October 1975 and 7th January 1976 sixteen attempts were made to mist net Lapwings Vanellus vanellus using three shelf, 14 metre, wader nets, at Holtsand and gravel pits, Ombersley, Droitwich, Worcestershire, 52° 15' N - 20° 15' W. 63 birds were caught and the purpose of this note is to show that persistant inland netting can give good results, given a suitable site.

The land for 2 km to the south shows the effect of gravel extraction over many years. Although some parts are now cultivated, and crops such as sugar beet are grown, many parts are too low lying and damp for grazing cattle or sheep in winter. During autumn and early winter flocks of up to 2,000 Lapwings gather in this area.

The habit of Curlews, and later Lapwings, of visiting one of the gravel pit pools during the evening towards dusk was observed whilst netting a hirundine/wagtail roost during August. The birds landed in shallow water close to a 30 metre wide sandy beach which divided a 500 x 35 metre channel. Steep banks 5 metres high bordered the long sides. Two nets, 14 metres wide were set across the channel, 10 metres into the water from the beach see Fig 1.

As the Curlews before them, Lapwings visited the area during the evening and after dark. Whether to roost, bathe or drink I am not sure but there was probably little food there. They flighted in low across the water between the 5 metre high banks on either side towards the sandy beach, encountering the nets on the way.

FIG.1. Part of Holt Sand & Gravel Pits.



After the first few mid week outings because the days were becoming shorter it was impossible for me to go to the area before dark. There was no alternative but to set the nets in the dark. Although this created a disturbance, birds always returned to the area within half an hour. During the daytime they usually dissappeared completely if disturbed. No attempts were made to catch birds after mid-night although I am confident that successful catching could have continued until dawn.

The maximum number of birds seen over the gravel pit area at any one time was 15, although flocks totalling up to 2,000 were present within half a kilometre. It seems as if small numbers from the flocks continually visit the gravel pits, perhaps to drink.

The number of Lapwings trapped per visit changed little with weather conditions. Increased movement on light nights compensated for the less obvious apppearance of the nets on dull, wet nights when birds preferred to stay on the nearby fields. Peak catches were between the 22nd and 29th October with a maximum of 13 on the 26th October, and between 25th November and 10th December with 6 on 4th December. Outside these dates no more than three were trapped on each occasion. However, over the whole period 63 Lapwings were caught (none re-trapped). Other birds included 10 Snipe, 1 Jack Snipe, 1 Curlew and Teal.

In all 16 visits were made which averaged 4 Lapwings a visit, or to put it another way, one every 1¼ hours. But leaving my job after dark and wanting to go netting (convincing my wife of my good intentions was one problem!) I could be confident the birds would be there, and it proved to be possible to catch Lapwings a few at a time over a long period. Apart from becoming more familiar with the species (all the caught birds were aged, sexed, weighed and measured), slowly increasing the ringing total may turn up an unexpected bonus. Like DR 19207, ringed at Holt Gravel Pits on 14th October 1975 and found dead in northern Hungary on 9th March 1976.

When I visited the gravel pits again in mid June 1976 I found a dramatic change in the appearance of the area, with new channels dug, some places completely filled in and other areas exposed. Flocks of Lapwings were again present in a similar but recently formed area and Curlews and moulting Lapwings (one a re-trap from 26th October 1975) have been caught in less obvious, recently acquired, Scottish made nets.

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CATCHING LAPWINGS WITH CANNON NETS

by C D T Minton

Introduction

For some years it has been the intention of Wader Study Group members to devote more attention to the study of inland waders, especially Lapwing and Golden Plover, and in particular to see whether the cannon netting technique, now employed so successfully on coastal waders, can be used effectively at inland sites. In the past a few small cannon net catches had been made (including one of 12 Snipe!) on an ad hoc basis, but in December 1974 the opportunity arose to make some more significant catches of Lapwing. This has triggered off a concerted study programme and 700 Lapwing have now been caught. A number of interesting aspects of Lapwing feeding and roosting behaviour have already become apparent and since these are highly relevant to catching techniques they are documented here so that others contemplating Lapwing studies may benefit.

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