The relatively high densities of Godwit and Oystercatcher enabled us to keep an eye on three to four traps at a time. If a trap clapps the bird mostly continues to incubate. We therefore waited till all traps and dropped. Oystercatchers are easy to catch. Catching times of five minutes or less frequently occurred. For 79 birds the mean catching time was 24 minutes. In many cases the second bird of a pair was caught shortly after the first. In 30 cases this was on the mean 41 minutes after resetting the trap for the second time. Sometimes the first bird was caught again. In these cases it proved better to try again on another day, at another time. In our experience the two birds of a pair of Oystercatchers keep to a fairly constant time pattern in incubation day after day (this probably applies to other species too). If the bird had not returned to the nest after an hour we removed the trap. The permissable length of this period depends on the weather. We had the impression (no figures) that it was more difficult to catch Oystercatchers in the same area during the second year than during the first.

About 2-4% of the Oystercatcher-pairs from which one or two birds were caught abandoned the nest. In three cases one of the eggs was broken. Therefore, it is advisable to use dummy eggs when possible.

Godwits can be caught easily too. The shortest catching time was two minutes, but there were great differences between individuals. Relatively more birds than with the Oystercatcher did not return to the trap at all. Two birds of a pair can be caught with a delay of two days or more. A few individuals caught in 1975 were also caught in 1976.

Lapwings are difficult to catch. The minimum catching time was 10 minutes. Many birds did not return to the trap at all.

The sole Redshank that was caught abandoned the nest although it had already been incubating for a long time. Also one Reeve was caught, brooding small pulli, she returned to the trap within a minute.

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A METHOD OF MAKING WADER DECOYS

by I.P. Bainbridge

Over the past few years the use of stuffed or preserved decoy waders for wader catching, particularly cannon netting, has become commonplace with certain groups. I have received several enquiries on the methods of making wader decoys. The simplest method is to use concentrated formalin solution to preserve the birds intact. This then is another use for the odd wader casualty or birds found freshly dead.

Before the method though, a warning about the 40% formalin solution used; it is a strong irritant and will sting in cuts and cause severe distress if it gets into an eye. It will also harden fingertips. It is thus necessary to have a supply of fresh running water at hand, in case of any accidents. I also wear safety goggles. Formalin also has a noxious vapour and will choke, so take care!

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Requirements

Cotton wool, stout needle, button thread, sharp pointed scissors, strong forceps, galvanised wire (1-2 mm gauge), hypodermic syringe, hypodermic needle, 40% formalin solution, glass eyes or map pins, enamel paint, hardboard, awl, drawing pins, long pins, wire cutters, toothbrush or similar, safety goggles.

And of course a fresh or deep frozen bird!

1. Fresh birds from any source can be used, provided they are undamaged. If they are stored frozen, wrap them in soft tissue so the plumage is undisturbed, and frozen flat. If frozen birds must be thawed before treatment.

2. Birds up to the size of Redshank and Knot can be treated whole. With bigger birds the gut should first be removed (if this is not done the bird will be rather heavy and somewhat unstable). With this the bird can also be sexed before injection. (Measurements of such birds are very useful and can be submitted on standard WSG forms.) Part the feathers of the stomach centrally, and slit the body wall from the end of the sternum to the cloaca. Remove the guts, pad the resulting cavity with cotton wool, sew up the body wall and replace the feathers over the stitching.

3. Slit the pad of the foot, and remove the tendons of the legs by pulling the intact tendons with a strong pair of forceps (Fig 1). Insert a suitable gauge of galvanised wire up the tarsi, the inside of the knee and thigh and vertically up through the body to the dorsal skin (Fig 2). This may or may not hold the legs firmly upright. 20 cm of wire should be left projecting from the leg when it is fully inserted.

4. If the bird is to be in a sleeping position, no wire is necessary in the throat. If it is to alert, insert galvanised wire down the throat into the thorax. Stretch the neck tight - the wire should then all be in the throat, it's tip at the back of the skull, at the foramen magnum. Push the head back onto the wire, inserting the wire into the skull through the foramen. This wire can later be bent into a realistic position.

5. Using the hypodermic inject the bird with 40% formalin. For a small bird inject 5 - 10 cm^3 into the abdomen, thorax, and through the foramen magnum into the brain. If the latter causes the eyeball to swell firm but gentle pressure should revert this. For bigger birds increase the amount of formalin proportionately. The thighs and wings may also need injecting in bigger birds (inject 1-2 cm^3 into the fleshy part of the limbs). The abdomen must still be injected despite the removal of the gut. A curlew may need up to 30 cm^3 of formalin.

6. Put in glass eye (for smaller birds small map pins will do - if need be they can be painted later with 'Humbrol' kit enamel!). Using forceps, bring the eyelids over the eyes to hold them in place. It is best to insert the eyes at an angle away from the bill.

7. Take a piece of hardboard 1½ times as long and twice as wide as the bird. Make two holes in the centre, as wide apart as the birds legs need to be. Push a large drawing pin into each corner. Insert the decoys leg wires through the holes in the hardboard. Hold one leg and bend the projecting wire flat, and forwards under the board, and bend it flat over the front of the board. Bend the other leg wire backwards under the board similarly (Fig 3). Put the board flat on a table and the decoy should stand fairly upright.

8. Double loop a length of button thread around one leg above the knee (Fig 4). (The leg will not slip along this knot, as it can with a single loop.) Tie the loose ends to the two nearest drawing pins, so the leg is held upright (see Fig 5). A clove hitch around the drawing pin is best - by pulling on the loose end of the knot any slack can be taken up in the cotton. Tie the other leg similarly and the decoy should stand upright.

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9. Using long pins, pin the wings to the body at the carpal and metacarpal joints.

10. The head: a) if asleep: using a needle, insert a thread through the nares, and tie it over the bill. Put a pin through the soft part of the lower mandible, under the tongue, and pin this into the back. Tie the nares threads to the back drawing pins and adjust the tension so the head lies correctly.
b) if alert: adjust the wire in the neck to a lifelike position. If need be, support the head with a wire under the chin and threads through the nares.

11. Make sure all the feathers are in place. A small stiff brush (toothbursh) will help.

12. The decoy should not be set in its finished position. Put it in a warm, dry, fly-free place for two to three weeks. The threads can then be cut off and if need be the eyes, bill and legs painted. Leave all the pins in place. Take the decoy off the large piece of hardboard, and put in onto a smaller piece, roughly the width of the bird square. If the bird is left on this, the legs are strengthened. In the field the hardboard can be covered with sand or soil; this is often easier, both for ringer and decoy, than sticking galvanised wire into hard ground. Decoys like this should last for years if looked after, though canon netting tends to be rather hard on them. However they still seem to last longer than conventionally stuffed decoys.

On the Wash, decoys are used mostly for field cannon net catches, placed in a group in front of the nets. They should be put facing the wind, and generally the incoming birds will land slightly upwind of the decoys. They can be very effective; it is most rewarding to watch your decoys disappear in a flock of several thousand waders! Generally, the slightly bigger birds make better decoys - Dunlin may be just to small to attract the attention of a circling wader flock. Knot and Oystercatcher tend to be excellent for mixed wader flocks, and Curlew work quite well on their own species. Turnstone have recently been used on beach catches, and seem quite effective at luring passing flocks of birds onto the appropriate bit of beach.

One last word though; there is no substitute for putting the cannon nets in the right field at the outset. Decoys will bring the birds to the right spot in the field, but get the field right first!

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