

These colour-ringed inland breeding Oystercatchers have been observed in the post-breeding season in Morecambe Bay. The individuals have all been feeding in mud, probing for polychaete worms and Cockles Cerastoderma edule from July to February. In all cases these birds were in the minority, 87-96% of birds visible feeding on the Mussel Mytilus edulis beds. The birds were not observed feeding in coastal fields during the 1978/79 winter.

References

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A SIMPLE RAPID METHOD OF MOVING A SET CANNON NET WITH MINIMAL DISRUPTION

by Nigel A. Clark

In response to the cannon-netter's nightmare of unpredictable tides a new method of setting or re-setting a cannon net was sought. This has now been developed to the point at which a two-cannon net can be set or re-set by five experienced people in less than five minutes.

The method involves the use of a "stretcher" made of hessian or polyester sacks, 13 metres long and ½ metre wide. Three 5½ metre-long bamboo mist-net poles are threaded through channels on each side, and these poles must overlap to make the entire structure rigid.

The net, which is 13 metres long, is set in the usual way, on top of the stretcher. If it becomes necessary to move the net, the cannons and projectiles are lifted and placed on top of the net on the stretcher with the electrics still connected. (N.B. see 1, below). The pegs connected to the jump ropes are also placed on the net, as are spade, mallet, decoys, etc. The five people are spaced out at regular intervals along the stretcher to move the net.

There are several very important points to be remembered:-

1. As loaded cannon are being moved with cables attached, THE FIRING BOX MUST BE DISCONNECTED before the team starts the move. It is NOT sufficient only to switch off.
2. Each person must be allotted a particular job before starting the operation, so that it can be carried out as quickly and quietly as possible.
3. When cannons and pegs are lifted off the net, care should be taken to ensure that the net is not twisted.
4. New cannon holes must be dug and the cannon weighted down properly so they are not displaced when fired.
5. All normal safety precautions must be taken when positioning cannon, and all members of the team must be behind the net when circuit-testing.
6. The stretcher poles in front of the net must be below the trajectory of the net, otherwise the net will not extend properly.

We have found this method extremely successful. It has proved very useful for catching on sites which are exposed on the falling tide; birds seem to have no hesitation in landing with the decoys, in front of the very obvious stretcher, perhaps as they have learned that cannon nets cannot be set below high tide!

This method may also prove useful for catching species such as Sanderling Calidris alba and Turnstone Arenaria interpres on sites where it is possible to make several catches over the high-tide period.

If any further information is required, I shall be happy to provide it.

Nigel A. Clark, Department of Zoology, University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

Safety note

Some groups may contemplate using the "stretcher" principle to enable them to catch on a rising tide, with the idea of gathering both net and birds onto the stretcher, and carrying the catch to dry ground in this way. There could be many possible dangers in using this technique (see Cannon Netting Code - page 8, Beach catches para.b.), and any experiments should be conducted with the very greatest care. In particular, it is suggested that experiments should start with small numbers of medium or larger sized species; that care be taken to avoid too great a weight of net and birds on any part of the stretcher; and that a team of at least ten experienced people should be involved to gather the net onto the stretcher, to control it while being moved, and to spread the net and extract the birds after moving to higher ground. - Eds.

Rocky shores

When a cannon net is set on a rocky shore there is considerable risk that it will become entangled on rock projections and torn when fired. We therefore set nets on rocks on hessian strips about 1m wide using the procedure developed for catching gulls on rubbish tips (Cannon-netting Code of Practice p.13-16). This method is entirely satisfactory. The hessian may also be folded forward over the furlled net to prevent birds standing on it if the cannons are set under the furlled net (see Code of Practice). Obviously the stretcher principle described above could also be used. - G.H.Green

Reference

Lessells, C.M., McMeeking, J.M. and Minton, C.D.T. Cannon-netting Code of Practice. British Trust for Ornithology, Tring, Herts.