

THE NIGHT DRIVING OF COOTS FOR BANDING ON THE WINTERING GROUND IN LOUISIANA

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During the past few years there has been an increasing interest in the American coot (*Fulica americana*) as a game bird while at the same time there has apparently been a decrease in the number of birds wintering in the Mississippi Valley. Because of the decline of this species and its importance as a game bird, it seems advisable to report the successful capture of coots by driving them at night on City Park Lake, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, during the winter of 1951-52.

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF CITY PARK LAKE

City Park Lake is located within the city limits of Baton Rouge near the Louisiana State University Campus. This lake, which contains approximately 49 acres, was flanked on two sides by residential areas, on one end by a golf course and park and on the other end by University Lake.

Only a small part of the lake was over six feet deep. The perimeter of the lake was bordered with a band of Alligator weed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*) and water primrose (*Jussiaea diffusa*); sheltered bays contained floats of water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) and duckweeds (*Lemna minor* and *Spirodela polyrrhiza*) while shallow water areas were covered by extensive beds of coontail (*Ceratophyllum demersum*) and southern naiad (*Najas guadalupensis*). The submerged plants were covered with a dense growth of algae. Fifteen cypress trees (*Taxodium distichum*) were scattered about the lake.

The shallow muddy bottom and the submerged vegetation provided a growth media for myriads of Amnicola, Planorbis, Lymnaea, Physa and Vivipari mollusks.

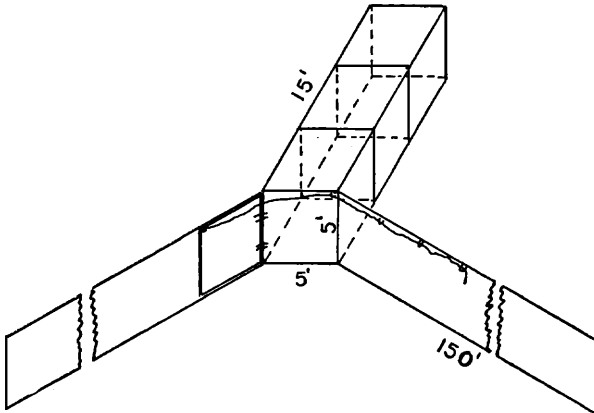
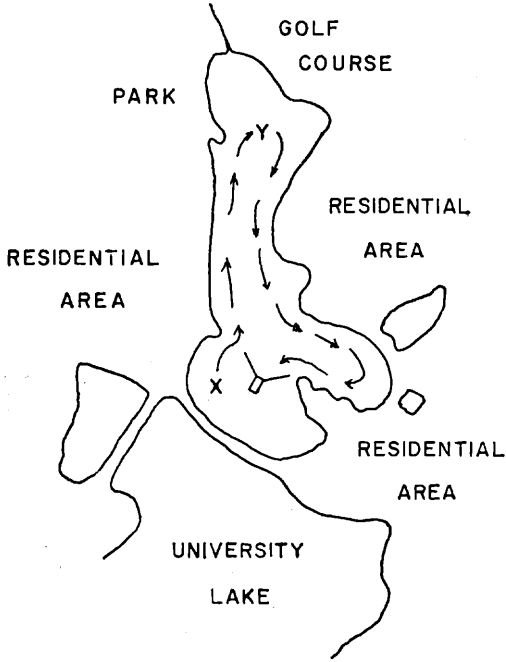
The following water birds were present on the lake about a week before the drive: 600 coots, 125 ringnecked ducks (*Aythya collaris*), 70 lesser scaup (*Aythya affinis*), one juvenile blue goose (*Chen caerulescens*) and 35 pied-billed grebes (*Podilymbus podiceps*) and a few other water birds.

MATERIALS, CONSTRUCTION AND PERSONNEL

Materials required for the drive were (1) three rolls of five foot poultry netting with a one inch mesh, (2) 20 pine slats 1" x 2" x 5'4", (3) 28-10 foot bamboo stakes, (4) 16-2½" x ¼" bolts, (5) one 100 x 6 foot fish seine, (6) six boats, (7) 100 feet of small rope, (8) 10 burlap bags and (9) six night-hunter's head lights.

Four pine slats were nailed at regular intervals to each of four 15 foot sections of wire. These sections were bolted together to form a rectangular box with the slats on the outside. The corners of the wire were then lashed together. The wings were extended in a "V" fashion from the trap to form 150 foot leads which funneled the coots into the trap.

CITY PARK LAKE



DETAILS OF TRAP CONSTRUCTION

FIGURE 1

About 12 Game Management Students and five visitors assisted with the drive.

DRIVE PROCEDURE

The trap was placed in the lake during the day on bamboo supports as shown in Figure 1. Lead stakes were driven during the day but the lead wires were not erected until about one-half hour before the drive. Since the water at the trap site was about five feet deep, a 100 x 6 foot fish seine was extended from the bottom of the lake to the lower edge of the wire in front of the trap to prevent coots from escaping by diving.

The coots normally rafted up at night at location "X" shown in Figure 1. They were driven from this position to location "Y" while the lead wires were being placed on the stakes. Following erection of the wings, the coots were driven on the route indicated by the arrows in Figure 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The moon was down, a slight south wind was blowing and the temperature was mild at the time of the drive. The coots were easy to drive and were kept under observation by occasional checking with the head lamps. As they approached the trap, they became excited; some flew over the lead nets and many stampeded between the boats; however, 89 coots, 2 pied-bellied grebes and one blue goose entered the trap. The birds were removed, placed in the burlap bags and taken to the shore for banding.

A second attempt to drive the coots was made the following night when an equal number of coots were on the lake. Evidently they remembered their previous experience for most of them flew over the trap or stampeded between the boats with only 12 birds entering the trap.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following suggestions, some of which were recommended by Cowan and Hatter in 1952 for the driving of diving ducks, are given for future coot drives: (1) avoid driving coots in vegetation-choked water, (2) place trap in area where coots normally wish to stay, (3) drive down wind during dark of moon, (4) place trap so that coots cannot see it until quite close and (5) keep drivers quiet. It is probable that it would be easier to drive coots during a rain.

Since thousands of coots winter in the Southeastern Coastal States, it is believed that many could be banded by adoption and modification of the night-drive method.

REFERENCES

- COWAN, I. AND J. HATTER. 1952. A trap and technique for the capture of diving waterfowl. *Jr. Wildl. Mgt.*, 16(4): 438-441.

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