

A QUICK-CATCH CORRAL TRAP FOR WINTERING CANVASBACKS

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Abstract.—We designed a bait trap for wintering Canvasbacks (*Aythya valisineria*) that has proven more effective than conventional funnel or slot entrance traps for diving ducks. The unique feature of this trap is the corral entrance that presents unimpaired access to the bait and thus ease of entrance to the trap. Catches of 50–75 ducks have been made in a matter of minutes at prebaited sites.

TRAMPA PARA CAPTURAR RAPIDAMENTE ESPECIMENES DEL PATO AYTHYA VALISINERIA

Sinopsis.—Se diseñó una trampa con cebo, para capturar especímenes del pato *Aythya valisineria*, que probó ser mas efectiva que las trampas en forma de embudo convencionalmente utilizadas para atrapar a estas ves. La peculiaridad de esta trampa es una entrada circular en forma de corral, queda claro acceso al cebo y facilita la entrada del pato a esta. Una gran cantidad de aves (50 a 75) pueden ser capturadas en pocos minutos con estas trampas.

An effective bait trap for diving ducks (Aythyini) was developed during a 6-year banding program for wintering Canvasbacks in upper Chesapeake Bay. Conventional funnel or barrier trap designs (see Haramis et al., J. Field Ornithol. 53:342–351, 1982) worked well during extended periods of cold winter weather when ducks respond well to bait. However, during mild weather, ducks remained attracted to the bait, but were reluctant to enter traps with funnel or slot entrances. The need for a more effective trap under mild weather conditions prompted development of the corral trap.

The corral trap consists of two parts: (1) a box trap fitted with a vertical entrance funnel, and (2) a circular corral, the entrance and special feature of this trap (Fig. 1). The corral is made of 1.8 m (6 ft) fencing supported on stakes so that only about 15 cm (6 in) of wire is submersed under water. Because the trap is operated in water about 60 cm (2 ft) deep, a space of about 45 cm (18 in) is left along the full extent of the corral's 9 m (30 ft) underwater perimeter. This large space is the entrance through which ducks may dive and gain easy access to the bait inside the corral. The corral is placed near shore and the box trap toward open water to exploit a diving duck's natural tendency to seek safety by swimming toward open water. Once surfacing inside the corral, a duck seeks the open-water side for escape and swims through the funnel into the box trap. Large numbers of ducks often enter the corral quickly and the cautious approach of a person along the shore causes the ducks to cease diving and swim into the box trap. Care is required, for too abrupt an approach causes the ducks to dive in the corral and escape.

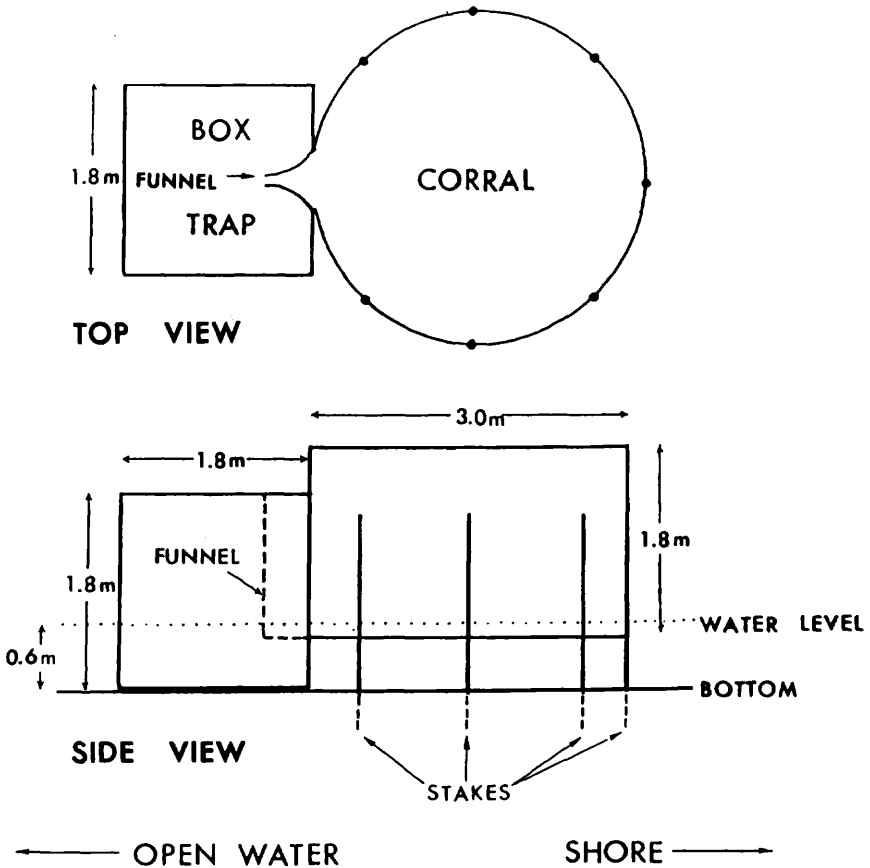


FIGURE 1. Top and side views of the corral trap.

The trap is fabricated from 5×10 cm (2×4 in) mesh, 1.8 m (6 ft) welded wire: the box trap is made from 12-gauge wire, the corral from lighter 14-gauge wire. Hog rings are used as fasteners. The corral is supported on 1.8 m (6 ft) fiberglass fence posts that are T-shaped in cross section and notched on the flat side. When a post is placed through the mesh, the wire can be supported along these notches and adjusted to the proper height. Sharpened at one end, the posts are easily driven into sandy substrates. The corral requires no top netting to contain Canvasbacks, although on windy days some birds may gain enough lift to escape.

To maximize trapping efficiency, sites were prebaited with whole corn to attract ducks and corrals were staked in place to condition birds to the presence of the trap. Corrals were baited and left open on the open-water side for ducks to escape. The box trap needed only be set in place for operation.

The ease with which ducks entered the corral separates the performance of this trap from earlier designs (Haramis et al. 1982). If ducks dived for the bait, some were usually captured. In midwinter, when subfreezing temperatures and extensive ice cover created the best trapping conditions, first trapping at prebaited sites often produced a full trap of ducks (50–75 birds) in a matter of minutes. Because ducks often entered the trap quickly, it became standard procedure to observe the corral and approach the trap at the appropriate moment to catch and move a maximum number of ducks into the box trap. This procedure permitted catches to be made quickly and efficiently. Ducks were removed from the trap with a dip net; access was provided through a drop door on the side of the box trap. All other general trapping and banding procedures followed Haramis et al. (1982).

This trap has been successful in Chesapeake Bay where 2000 diving ducks, primarily Canvasbacks, but also Scaup (*A. affinis* and *A. marila*), and Buffleheads (*Bucephala albeola*), have been captured during the past two winters. Use of the corral trap, in conjunction with a daily trapping rotation at different banding sites, has proven a highly productive and efficient method of trapping Canvasbacks in the upper Chesapeake Bay region.

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