

## THINK WITH A GOOD NOSE NEAR A NEST<sup>1</sup>

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**Banding Nestlings—Reduction of Nest Predation.** It is well known that the “scent trail” left by a human visiting a nest probably attracts predators to the nest. Most raptor nest predation is by mammals. It behooves banders of nestlings to “think with a good nose”. Be careful not to leave a scent trail for cats, dogs, raccoons or other predators to follow.

After you have finished your work at the nest of a ground nesting bird walk on past the nest. If you walk back the way you came in, your scent trail will lead predatory mammals directly to the nest. Disturb the cover near the nest as little as possible.

**Nests in Trees.** Start up the tree with a ladder (it leaves no scent up the trunk) or throw a rope over a branch and climb the rope, keeping clear of the trunk. Another solution, recommended by Bob Dandrea, is to place naphthalene crystals at the base of the tree. Tom Ray writes that an animal inhaling a nose-full of the fumes usually retreats to re-evaluate the consequences of raiding a nest protected by such noxious odors. Dandrea’s idea of using the crystals is especially ingenious as naphthalene fumes are heavy and several handfuls of crystals, spread about the base of the tree, will settle among the ground cover and stay there for a long time—certainly until the human scent has disappeared. Scattering crystals on the ground comprises the first barrier. A second barrier, for example a burlap collar containing naphthalene crystals, should be installed about six or seven feet below the nest.

*Warning—Naphthalene fumes are highly toxic. Store in an airtight container.*

Some banders spray the trunks of nest trees with commercial repellants designed to keep pet dogs off the furniture. It is possible that such products, particularly those with an oil base, might be worth a try.

<sup>1</sup>This paper originally appeared in a slightly different form as “Some hints to reduce nest predation” in a Memorandum to all Banders from the Bird Banding Laboratory (MTAB-14, pp. 10-11, April 22, 1970).

William Robinson suggests nailing wide metal collars around the trunk of the tree, camouflaged with spray paint to make them less conspicuous. Naphthalene crystals, however, may well be as effective and are less conspicuous.

Some cliff nests have trails leading to them and naphthalene on the trail should increase their security.

**Nests on the Ground.** If you are aware of the actual nest location, it is best to approach it on a path which would lead **past** the nest. When you are adjacent to the nest, you should turn at right angles to your path of travel, walk directly to the nest and band the nestlings. Once you have banded the nestlings, retrace your steps to your original line of travel.

On the return trip from the nest, sprinkle your trail with liberal quantities of naphthalene crystals. When you reach your original trail, you should again turn at right angles and continue in your **original** direction of travel (see the sketch below). Thus any predator who picks up and follows your original trail would be discouraged from turning off and following your side trail to the nest. He would be more likely to continue following your trail in your original direction of travel.

