
Another mist net pole variation

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There have been several articles over the years concerning mist net pole construction and a recent article (Castrale, J.S.; Karr, D.V. 1981. A versatile set of inexpensive mist net poles. NABB 6:48-49.) prompted us to add yet another variation to a familiar theme.

Banding at Connecticut Audubon Society's Birdcraft Station in Fairfield, CT is basically a year-round operation. Mist nets are normally set in permanent positions around the sanctuary with slight variations to take advantage of a particular habitat. However, on occasion it is necessary to perform banding demonstrations at various sites across the state or we elect to do some banding in specialized habitats such as salt marshes for shorebirds. It soon became apparent that a pole set was needed that was lightweight, capable of being set up in a few minutes yet economical. The set described in this article is a slight variation of a set we have used since 1979 with excellent results. The original design utilized larger diameter poles and were somewhat heavy; carrying 3 or 4 sets of these poles over ones shoulder for any distance, especially through a phragmites stand in a marsh, was work fit for a mule.

Aluminum tubing was considered but was found to be too flexible and resulted in sagging of the nets. We chose steel conduit (similar to the design of Castrale and Karr), known as "E.M.T.", which can be purchased in varying lengths and diameters from an electrical supply store. The materials needed for 1 set of poles consists of 1 10' (3m) length of 1/2" (1.27 cm) diameter and 1 10' length of 3/4" (1.91 cm) conduit. 2 hose clamps large enough to fit over the end of the 1/2" conduit are the only other items needed to complete the set. Prices will vary from area to area but this particular set cost about \$6.00. Conduit costs for us ran from \$1.85 to \$2.75 for 10' lengths, and the hose clamps were purchased for about \$0.60 each.

To assemble the set, each length of conduit is cut in half with a hacksaw. The 3/4" conduit forms the lower sections and the 1/2" conduit forms the upper sections. A hose clamp is placed about 4" to 6" (10 to 15 cm) from the end of each piece of 1/2" conduit and firmly tightened. This stub end is then set inside the 3/4" section. (Figure 1). The clamp serves only to act as a stop for the upper section.

To set up the mist net (Figure 2), an 18" (45.7 cm) piece of 1/2" diameter steel reinforcing rod (common to the construction trade for reinforcing concrete), or 1/2" steel threaded rod, will form a stable base for the poles. In

New England, stones and rocks seem to mysteriously appear just below the surface of the ground at the exact spot chosen to drive in a rod. The use of reinforcing rod (re-rod) is ideally suited to rocky, sandy or wet soils. The re-rod tends to wedge itself between the rocks and has good holding ability in wet or sandy soil. (This type of rod can be foraged for in a variety of places; the local dump or a new construction site are good places to start.) It is a good idea to drive the 2 rods into the ground at slightly opposing angles using a 5 lb (2.3 kg) maul. Set 1 pole, string out the net stretching it taut, and then set the other pole. When the pole slips over the angled rod, it has a tendency to straighten slightly and keep tension on the net. Guy lines may be used if desired, but we use them only on hilly terrain. All that is needed now is to push the loops of the net into the desired positions.

Because the nets at our banding station are usually left in permanent positions, we simply furl them for the night. If sagging occurs (as from rain), 1 pole can be reset without much work. This pole set can be used for most net sizes and has been capable of handling birds the size of small hawks, flickers, doves, and large shorebirds.

The problem of portability was solved with this pole set, as it takes only a few minutes to take down 3 or 4 nets and pack them into a car trunk. The net is closed and furled and the loops moved down onto the lower section. A cloth net bag with a draw string not only holds the net but is used to tie the poles together. This eliminates taking the net off the poles and wasting time later reinstalling it. One person can set up or take down this rig in a few minutes.

For the past 3 years, this pole set has served our purposes extremely well. It can be left in a permanent location for long periods, is compact enough to be stowed in most car trunks or in small cars, and light enough to be carried to a banding site without undue strain. Above all, its cost is low enough to suit most banding equipment budgets. This variation is by no means the last word in pole sets; we have read the literature on the subject and still decided to experiment with our own design to suit our particular needs.

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Figure 1. Pole detail

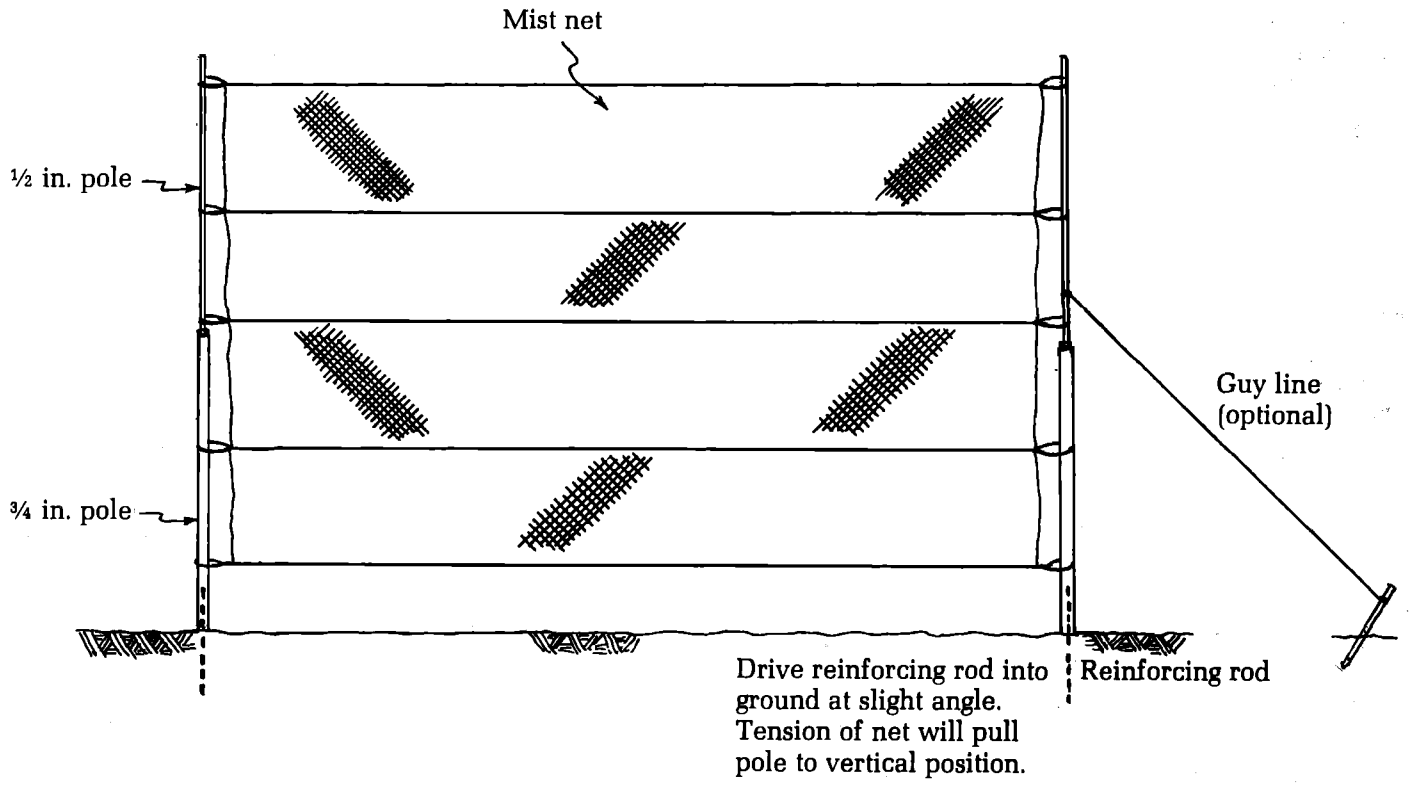
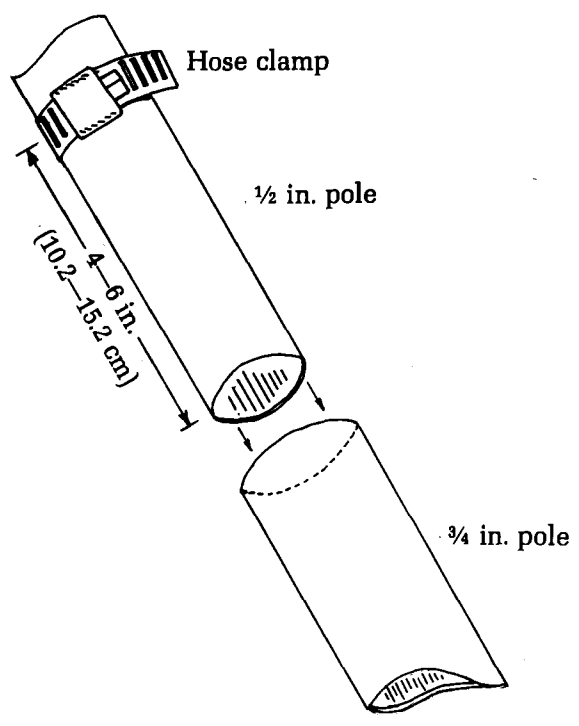


Figure 2. Mist net set-up