Improved trapping methods for Loggerhead Shrikes

Alan Kridelbaugh

The Loggerhead Shrike *(Lanius ludovicianus)* characteristically feeds on large insects and small mammals (Bent 1950), and bal-chatri traps have occasionally been used to trap them (Berger and Mueller 1959, Clark 1968, Ward and Martin 1968). I found bal-chatri traps relatively ineffective for capturing shrikes and used a modification of the trap described by Lohrer (1974).

I used a single-cell wire box trap (20x20x20 cm) with 1.2 cm mesh, a drop door on one side, a treadle rather than a single trip bar, a removable bait compartment, and no floor (Fig. 1). Single-cell square traps were more effective than 2-cell rectangular traps because shrikes spent less time seeking entrance along sides without doors. The tendency of shrikes to land beside their prey and peck at it, rather than land on top of it, accounts for greater success of traps with side doors. Traps with treadles worked best because some birds hopped over trip bars; I never had a shrike negotiate a treadle without getting caught. I prefer traps without floors because bait is more easily placed in them and no cleaning is required. The separate bait compartment prevented shrikes from killing the mouse.

Kaufman (1973) has shown that shrikes, when given a choice, prefer mice *(Mus musculus)* of natural color. Lohrer (1974) reported trapping success with white mice. I successfully attracted shrikes into traps using various colored mice, but the best year-around bait was a 5-8 g agouti-colored mouse. In summer, when shrikes fed primarily on insects, some individuals did not respond well to mice as bait. These birds were caught with a large beetle tethered inside the trap with a small-gauge wire pushed through its abdomen. Tethered insects may also be useful for trapping other birds, such as Mockingbirds, that may be difficult to trap in a net (Lohrer, pers. comm.).

Using the trap described, I trapped 60 Loggerhead Shrikes in central Missouri during 1980 and 1981 (Kridelbaugh 1982). I calculated trapping success by dividing number of birds caught by number of times the trap was set. As I made no attempt to exclude times when I believed the bird failed to see the bait or when some other disturbance (e.g., a passing car) interfered with trapping, I may have under-estimated, but my trapping success for the 2-year period was 73% — a high success rate for any trap. For example, Berger and Mueller (1959) during a 2-year period had a success rate of 58.7% while trapping American Kestrels *(Falco sparverius)* with bal-chatri traps.

The sex ratio of trapped shrikes was skewed slightly toward males (54%). This skewedness does not seem to reflect a difference in response of the sexes to the trap, but rather a seasonal bias in trapping effort. Most of my trapping was done when females were incubating (males do not help with incubation or brooding). At this time males increased their foraging in order to meet food demands of females and nestlings and thus were more exposed to trapping.

The improvements to Lohrer's method are: (1) no floor (2) treadle vs. trip bar, (3) separate bait compartment, and (4) impaled insects as bait.

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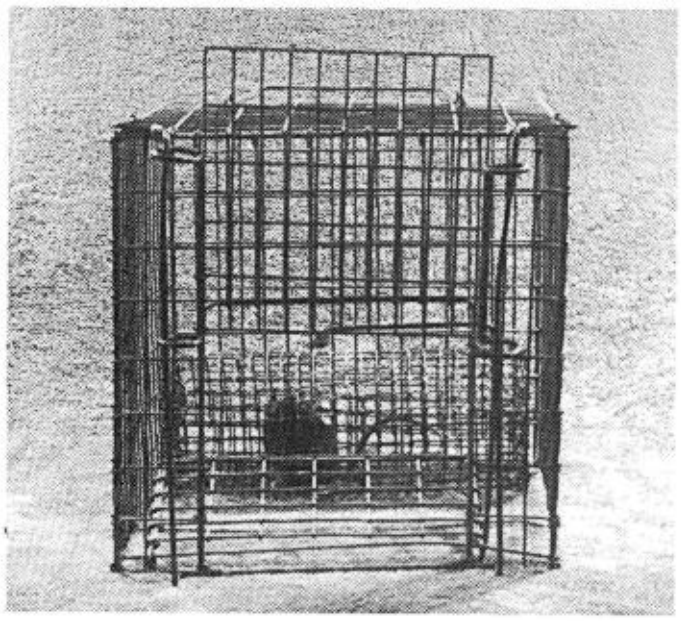

Figure 1

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To catch a woodpecker

Tom Mutchler

Take 1 one-celled Potter trap

Attach it — I used ½" staples — to a ½-1" thick board twice the length of the bottom of the Potter trap.

Straighten the release bar and attach to the board. Fasten a suet bag of brightly colored mesh, i.e. onion or turkey bag, to what is normally the back of the trap (now, the top), suspended from the center of the trap so the suet cannot be reached from the outside. (A)

Attach, to the bottom of the gate, a pull string long enough to reach the point of operation, passing it through staple or eyelet guides. (B)

Attach board, with the gate side down, to a window side, tree, or wherever the woodpeckers frequent.

This is a selective trap. If the bird is banded, one can let it dine. If it is not banded, simply pull the string quickly. It is excellent for trapping suet-eating birds.

Our traps are mounted beside a window. We can see the traps from another window. The trap string is pulled through a partially opened window. The traps can be emptied through the window and reset by hand.

Banding results, first 4 days of operation: 9 Downy Woodpeckers, 5 Red-breasted Nuthatches, and 3 Hairy Woodpeckers — even though we had other suet bags in the open.

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