

Use of a noosing pole to capture Common Nighthawks

Martin K. McNicholl

During the summers of 1971 through 1974, I studied social organization and behavior of Blue Grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*) on Vancouver Island, British Columbia as part of a longer-term study of factors affecting populations of this species. Populations were monitored annually, in part, by systematic search by a team of observers with trained pointing dogs (Zwickel 1972). The frequent discovery of nests of Common Nighthawks (*Chordeiles minor*) by these dogs presented me with an opportunity to collect data on large numbers of nests of this species.

As my nighthawk studies were incidental to other work, time constraints did not permit intensive efforts to trap adults at their widely scattered nests. However, a telescoping "noosing pole" used by grouse research teams (Zwickel and Bendell 1967) proved to be a useful device for capturing incubating adults. Zwickel and Bendell (1967) listed Common Nighthawk among species they had captured with this pole, but did not evaluate its potential for use on this species. In this paper, I consider the usefulness of such a pole in capturing nighthawks and the effect it may have on nesting success.

Study area and methods

This study took place on Zwickel's (1972) control and experimental study areas, known as Comox Burn (485 ha) and Tsolum Main (625 ha), respectively, on east-facing slopes of Vancouver Island about 19 km northwest of Courtenay, B.C. in all years and in some additional surrounding areas in 1973 and 1974. Zwickel (1972 and papers cited therein) and others have described these areas in considerable detail, and habitat details at nighthawks' nests will be documented elsewhere. Basically, nighthawks nested in relatively open sites of coniferous and mixed forest, much of which had been logged and/or burned in the recent past.

The noosing pole, described in detail by Zwickel and Bendell (1967), consists of a telescoping pole reaching 20 ft (6.1 m) when extended maximally and 10 ft (3 m) when collapsed. A flexible nylon noose is attached to the tip; for nighthawks we usually used the smaller (2.5 in/63.5 mm diam.) nooses designed for grouse chicks.

I captured nighthawks on or near nests by slowly approaching them from the rear, pulling the noose slowly over the head until it reached the shoulder level, and then suddenly tightening the noose and rushing in to

grab the bird. Nesting birds were pulled off the nests, an operation that could usually be performed without moving the eggs. If the eggs were disturbed, they were replaced in their original position as soon as the adult nighthawk was secured. When dogs were present, they were told to sit still and did not move during the noosing. Nests were subsequently visited on a regular basis to monitor subsequent fate, including possible desertion.

In addition to capturing incubating or brooding adults, the noosing pole was occasionally useful in capturing young old enough to fly short distances.

Results

Successful captures and subsequent fates of nests are summarized in Table 1. All adults captured were females. Only two of the 16 nests at which adults were captured were subsequently unsuccessful in fledging young. One nest with eggs that failed to hatch may have been deserted. The death of a chick within 2 days of the noosing of its mother in 1973 coincided with a period of heavy rains after which young were found dead at several nests, possibly as a result of exposure and/or inadequate supply of insect food (unpubl. data). Thus, this death was probably not attributable to the parent's noosing. Several nighthawks were not approachable to a distance within which the noosing pole could be extended. One female that was "noose-shy," i.e. allowed a close enough approach for capture, but repeatedly flushed when the noose was nearly over her, could not be caught while still incubating eggs, but was later caught when the young had hatched. Another bird that did not allow a close enough approach initially was captured when it responded with a close approach to calls of a young bird being handled. There was no evidence of desertion after unsuccessful attempts, even if these were repeated.

Table 1. Successful captures of Common Nighthawks by noosing pole.

Nesting stage at capture	Number of females noosed	Number that fledged young
eggs	3	2 (67%)
egg + young	1	1 (100%)
young	12	11 (92%)

Discussion

Nooses on the ends of extendable devices, primarily poles, have been used to capture cormorants (G.G. Hogan, pers. comm.), grouse (Zwickel and Bendell 1967), gulls (Miller 1974), owls (Nero 1969), and woodpeckers (Jackson 1982). The results reported here suggest that this technique can be used with caprimulgids with young, and possibly still incubating, with little or no desertion. As with other birds, some individuals differ in their response to the noose and will require other techniques.

The telescoping nature of the pole described by Zwickel and Bendell (1967) adds to its portability, much as DeHaven (1969) had described for telescoping mist net poles. This portability makes the device easy to use in the field, and banders should consider using it for other species. Since these nooses capture birds by the neck region, they do pose a danger of strangling the bird, but with care this danger can be avoided. As noted by Zwickel and Bendell (1967), birds are most readily caught from or near the ground, and banders should avoid capturing birds at considerable height unless they have a clear space into which to pull the birds without danger of strangling them on a branch or other obstruction. Inexperienced "noosers" should attempt capture of birds only close to ground level.

Acknowledgements

The few nighthawk nests that I discovered were much augmented by those discovered by the grouse crew and their dogs. The cooperation and enthusiasm of these people made the study possible. I am grateful to the

following for reporting nest locations, often guiding me into obscure sites, and occasionally noosing birds: Helen M. Amerongen, Pamela Gibb, Georgia Goth, Ken P. Hansen, John Kristensen, Kathy Martin, Robert J. McFetridge, Gary F. Searing, Judith Smith, Kirby Smith, John D. Vanada, Lynda Watson, Norman A. Williams, Reto Zach, Fred C. Zwickel, and Jeff G. Zwickel. The grouse studies and thereby this study, were supported by the National Research Council of Canada, an Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Fellowship, the British Columbia Fish and Wildlife Branch, and the University of Alberta on lands owned by Crown Zellerbach Canada Ltd., Courtenay Division. Comments by both Martha H. Balph and W.C. Royall, Jr. were helpful in revising this manuscript.

Literature Cited

- Dehaven, R.W. 1969. Telescoping mist-net poles. *Inland Bird Banding News* 41:84-85.
- Jackson, J.A. 1982. Capturing woodpecker nestlings with a noose — a technique and its limitations. *North Amer. Bird Bander* 7:90-92.
- Miller, D.E. 1974. A simple noose method for capturing nesting gulls. *West. Bird Bander* 49:10.
- Nero, R.W. 1969. The status of the Great Gray Owl in Manitoba, with special reference to the 1968-69 influx. *Blue Jay* 27:191-209.
- Zwickel, F.C. 1972. Removal and repopulation of Blue Grouse in an increasing population. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 36:1141-1152.
- Zwickel, F.C., and J.F. Bendell. 1967. A snare for capturing Blue Grouse. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 31:202-204.
- 320 Markham Street, Toronto, Ontario M6G 2K9 Canada

