Noosing Adult Cormorants for Banding

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Noosing is a well known means of capturing birds for banding and marking, although noose designs and capture techniques vary widely (see McNicholl 1983). The noosing technique reported here was used to capture adult Great Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) at a breeding colony on Prince Edward Island, during a study of breeding parameters of this species and Double-crested Cormorants (*P. auritus*) from 1976 to 1979 (Hogan 1979). According to Lewis (1929), Double-crested Cormorants were captured for food by Indians with nooses, and adult Pelagic Cormorants (*P. pelagicus*) have been captured with padded leghold traps (Tenaza 1966).

Great Cormorants in North America breed in colonies on seacliff ledges, on the level ground at the tops of cliffs, or on small, coastal islands. They rarely nest in trees (Godfrey 1966, pers. obs.), a habit common to other races of this widespread species elsewhere (Cramp and Simmons 1977). While they often nest apart from other species, they occasionally share nesting colonies with Double-crests. Between 1976 and 1979 there were 6 Great Cormorant colonies on Prince Edward Island containing a maximum 738 nests (Hogan 1979). By 1983 there were 8 colonies containing 1324 nests (Hogan 1983). All colonies are on sandstone seacliffs ranging in height from 6 to 33 m.

Between 1974 and 1978 I banded 538 Great Cormorant nestlings at the breeding colony on Durell Point, on the east coast of the island. The majority of nests (approx. 95%) were built on the upper sloping shelves of the 12–27 m high cliff and were readily accessible. In addition, 51 adults were captured with a noosing pole modified from a similar technique used by Edgar (1968) for Australian Gannets (*Sula serrator*). A diagram and details of the device are shown in Figure 1. The noosing pole was constructed by a local tinsmith.

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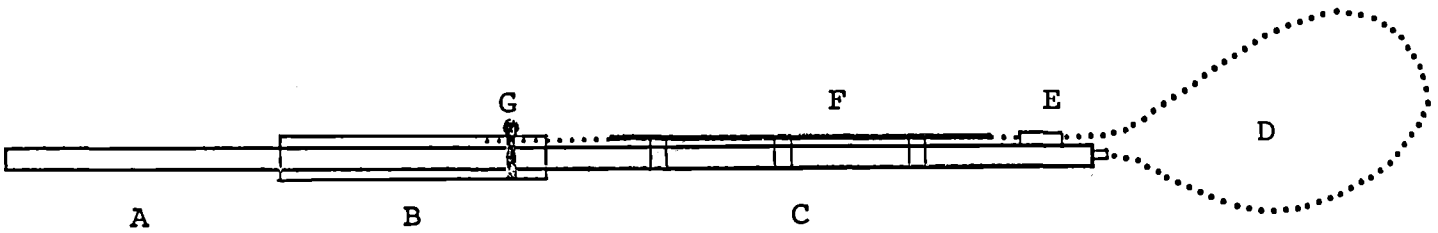
Figure 1. Diagram of noosing pole used to capture adult Great Cormorants.

A. ½-in thinwall steel tubing, 120 in
B. ¾-in thinwall steel tubing, 30 in
C. ½-in tin or steel band
D. 3/16-in steel cable, 96 in
E. ⅜-in nipple
F. ⅜-in copper tubing, 48 in
G. ¾-in clamp



To capture a bird, the steel cable forming the noose was fully extended by sliding the outer steel tube (to which the cable is attached) forward. The noose was then moved slowly towards the bird and carefully slipped over the bird's head and down to cover the upper wings and breast. If lowered further, the bird simply stepped out of it. Once in position, the noose is tightened by sliding the outer steel tube back to pin the wings firmly to the body. The bird was then either lifted away from the nest or held in place. A helper was required to grab the bird. The entire procedure generally took 5 to 15 minutes. Some birds were captured easily, while others would not tolerate the approach of the noose. Once captured and processed, the birds was released, whereupon it invariably flew to the water, bathed, and returned to the nest, usually within 10 to 15 minutes. Neighboring birds exhibited little disturbance. Aerial predators such as gulls (*Larus spp.*) and Northern Ravens (*Corvus corax*) did not frequent this colony while the observers were present. The technique worked best while small to half-grown chicks were in the nest. Adults were less likely to tolerate the close presence of observers when there were only eggs, and larger chicks scramble from their nests if disturbed and may fall off the cliff.

The technique described here is a safe, low-disturbance method for capturing adult Great Cormorants at their nests. Behavioral differences may exist between cliff-nesting and ground-nesting birds regarding their tolerance to disturbance.

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(Eastern)