

News, Notes, Comments

Some Banding Suggestions at Nest Boxes

The following are some techniques I have found helpful while banding birds at nest boxes. Other banders may also find them useful.

Adult Capture- It is not uncommon to attempt to capture incubating or feeding adults in a nest box by simply walking up to the box and plugging the entrance with a cork or rubber stopper. All too often, during those last few steps of approach, the adult will pop its head into the opening, sense the approaching captor, and flee.

I have found that the capture rate of this walk-up technique can be improved by carrying a 5- or 6-ft former broom or rake handle and using it to block the entrance from a distance of 7 to 8 ft (the handle length plus an arm's reach). It is usually in those last few steps that the noise of one's approach alerts the occupant of the box; and by being able to plug a box entrance from 7 ft away vs. 2 ft away, fewer occupants are given the opportunity to escape.

I have seen on some occasions how a bird that becomes alerted and seeks to escape can be intimidated to retreat back into the box by the appearance of the handle coming at it from 2 to 3 ft away.

At the box, the inserted handle can be replaced with a stopper, or can be allowed to hang toward the ground from the hole at an angle, serving to block escape of an occupant without cutting off the air supply to within the box, while removing the occupant(s) from the box.

Adult Trapping- Aron Magnusson (1984, *Var Fagelvarld* 4:318; and commented on in *OBBA Newsletter*, 1988, 33:1-2) described a very simple, effective nest box trap made of semi-rigid plastic film that hangs inside the box entrance. The trap works on the principle of a hinged flap which can be pushed like a swinging door for entry; but, due to a U-shaped opening of smaller diameter than the entrance hole, prevents an entered bird from exiting.

I cut these "flap traps" from 14-mil (0.014 in or 0.35 mm) Mylar film as depicted in Figure 1. I use a one-inch width "U" for Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) and Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) in boxes that have 1½-in diameter entrances. The "U" can be cut entirely with scissors, but much cleaner edges are obtained by using a gasket cutter

to cut a one-inch diameter hole, followed by two parallel cuts with scissors to create the "U."

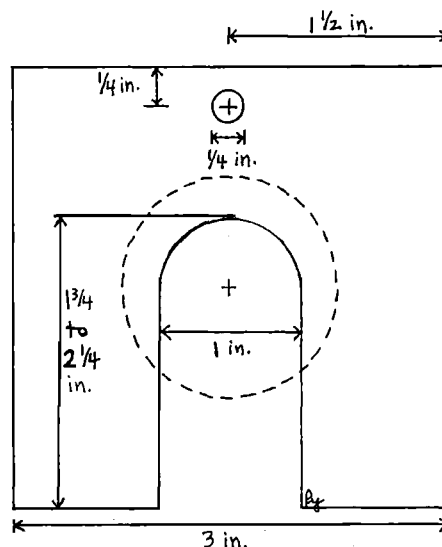


Figure 1. The Magnusson nestbox trap (or "flap trap") showing the dimensions for a trap with a 1-in "U" opening. The dotted circle represents the positioning of the trap in use relative to a 1½-in diameter nestbox opening.

The two improvements I suggest are: 1) spray the flaps with a flat black lacquer or paint to minimize glare, hence reducing their conspicuousness to an entering adult; and 2) punch a ¼-in diameter hole with a paper hole punch centered near the top; and use a pushpin in the hole to mount the flap inside the box. Magnusson suggested using a pressure-sensitive tape to secure the flap inside the box. Given the inconsistent and sometimes rough inside surface of nest boxes, I find that the pushpin is a more secure mounting than tape. Pushpins are thumb tacks with small handles and are used for mounting paper notices on bulletin boards.

Press the pushpin into the wood only far enough to hold the pin in place, allowing the flap to hang free as though hinged and able to be pushed inward easily. If the pushpin is pushed firmly against the flap, the flap then no longer works as though on a hinge and then requires flexing, the greater force of which may discourage some would-be entrants.

Nestling Holder- I commonly lack enough hands or holding power to accommodate all the implements, record log, and the nestlings while at a box. Shirt and pants pockets can help to hold bands, pliers, rule, scale, pen and other like devices. Larger objects, including rain gear, etc., can go into a backpack. However, while banding the

nestlings, I find I need someplace to put them other than in my hands which are busy with banding, measuring and record keeping. Having an assistant helps, but one is not always available.

I have found a very simple, inexpensive way to manage this problem. I use a clean, empty 8-oz plastic container of the sort used to sell oleomargarine or dessert topping (a so-called margarine "tub" measuring typically 6 in top diameter, 4½-in bottom diameter, and 2⁷/₈-in high). I cut two ¼-in holes about 2-in apart, about ½-in below the top rim. Through the holes I string a sufficient length of cord or ribbon to tie around my waist, so that when secured, the container is positioned on my waist at my belt buckle.

I use the container to hold the nestlings before or after processing, thus freeing my hands of that task. I found it advantageous to remove all the nestlings from the nest in order to inspect the nest for unhatched eggs, parasites, measurements, etc. Once that is done and recorded, I can then individually process and return each nestling to the box.

The container works best when lined with a handful or two of fresh or dried grass. The grass serves two functions: Nestlings seem most at ease when they have some medium to grab with their feet, as they do in the nest. The bare plastic container affords them no such opportunity, and they restlessly grab for something and do not settle down in the container. With the grass lining, they settle quietly and are more manageable. Secondly, if any of the young defecate in the container, it is a simpler matter to discard and replace soiled grass than to try to clean the messy plastic container. The birds themselves also stay cleaner in the grass.

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Dr. Carl D. Barrentine explains that he can no longer carry on the duties of Advertising Manager. If you can volunteer your time for this important NABB position, please write to:

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Revised Band Sizes and AOU Numbers for Identification Guide to North American Passerines

by

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The following corrections should be made:

- Page 42: Eastern Phoebe, AOU # should be 456.0.
Page 78: Tufted Titmouse, band size should be 1B.
Page 84: Rock Wren, AOU # should be 715.0.
Page 85: Carolina Wren, band size should be 1B.
Page 87: Marsh Wren, AOU# should be 725.0.
Page 107: Crissal Thrasher band size should be 2.
Page 199: Brown Towhees should continue to be reported as BRTO, AOU# 591.0 until the Banding Lab gives different instructions. Preferred band sizes for the new species are: Canyon Towhee (Arizona), 1A; California Towhee, 2.
Page 199: Abert's Towhee band size should be 1A.
Page 202: Rufous-winged Sparrow band size should be 0.
Page 203: American Tree Sparrow band size should be 0.
Page 209: Five-striped Sparrow band size should be 1B, AOU# should be 574.2.
Page 210: Ipswich Sparrow band size should be 1B.
Page 220: Dark-eyed Junco. The correct band size for all races except Gray-headed Junco should be 0.
Gray-headed Junco band size is 1.
Page 223: Smith's Longspur band size should be 1

I thank Robert C. Tweit for pointing out these discrepancies.

Previous errata appeared in:
North American Bird Bander 13:112-113.

First Documented Banding of a Rufous Hummingbird in South Carolina

The banding of a Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) took place in Greenville on 3 April 1990. This is the first documented banding of a Rufous in South Carolina. The bird was seen in mid-December 1989 trying to drink from a feeder where the liquid was frozen. Several birders were called to identify the bird, but no one was positive, suggesting either a Ruby-throated, Rufous or Allen's.

Finally, on 18 December 1989, after a couple days of moving the feeder closer and closer to the sliding glass door and into the den of Mrs. Freeman's home, which had been decorated with poinsettias and other highly colored plants, the hummer flew into the room and then into a parakeet cage. It was taken next door to a greenhouse and released. It was fed a special formula ordered from Florida to make sure it received proper nutrients along with the regular sugar formula.

On 3 April 1990, we trapped, measured, took pictures, and banded the bird. It was indeed a Rufous Hummingbird, AHY-F, and was in excellent health. Measurements were:

wing: 45 mm; weight: 3.3 grams; maximum width of rectrix #5: 3.2 mm; maximum width of rectrix #1: 8.1 mm; culmen length: 16mm; and tail length: 26 mm. Plumage: back - metallic green with bronze highlights and dull cast on head; wings - dark brown-slate (in strong light they had a slight purplish cast); tail feathers - middle pair metallic bronze-green; both broadly edged with cinnamon-rufous; next pair with more than basal half cinnamon-rufous, then metallic bronze-green; three outer pairs broadly tipped with white; chin, throat, and chest - white, small patch in middle of throat with metallic orange-red tips; rest of under parts - cinnamon-rufous laterally, fading to dull buffy white on breast and abdomen; under tail coverts - light cinnamon-rufous or cinnamon-buff centrally, with broad margins of buffy white; bill - black; iris - dark brown; feet - dusky. Plumage description, pictures, slides and measurements are on file in the Charleston Museum, Charleston, SC.

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Banders' Forum

Kinglet Banding with Modified Size 0 Bands

The recent plea by Wallace (*NABB* 15:66-67) for the manufacture of a size 00 band must have been welcomed by all who have the opportunity to band our smallest songbirds, especially kinglets and gnatcatchers. Indeed, the presently recommended band readily slips over the toes of some individuals and is prone to physically harm these birds unless it falls off.

Wallace is not hopeful that the Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL) can take any action on behalf of a smaller bird size in the near future, and my correspondence with them confirms this. Consequently, we must deal with the obvious problem as best we can and, at the very least, follow Wallace's and the Ontario Bird Banding Association's advice of exercising caution when banding kinglets and gnatcatchers. I wish to suggest a more practical solution and one which I have used with excellent success during many years of banding kinglets on their wintering grounds here in northern Florida.

With a small triangular file, I carefully remove a little from both ends of the partially opened size 0 bands. Care is taken to do this evenly across the whole width of the band. When, in the process, the ends are given a slight slant toward the inside, the inner diameter of the closed band can be reduced from the original 2.15 mm (my measurement) to 1.95 mm without damage to the engravings. The BBL has given my method its blessing with the understanding that the integrity and, hence, legibility of the numbers are maintained. The relatively high return percentage of my banded Ruby-crowned Kinglets indicates to me that the modified bands wear very well.

The filing procedure may appear cumbersome and poorly suited for those who have to handle many birds in a short period of time. However, with a little experience, the preparation of the bands does not take longer than any of the other procedures commonly associated with the proc-