

The Editor
Safring News

Dear Sir,

In your Editorial (Safring News 18: 1) you complain that ringers have not commented on Warwick Tarboton's article (Safring News 17: 77-78). I cannot comment directly on Tarboton's remarks about the "Great White Hunter Syndrome", as my copy of that issue is in storage, but I can say that the intense sense of expectation about six times a day, as I emerge from the house to go round the nets, means that I do not really mind empty nets or nets filled with Red Bishops *Euplectes orix* (or some such trash bird); there is always the hope of finding something nice next time. I am interested in the data obtained from trapped birds, but the excitement of the hunt is at least 50% of my reason for mistnetting, even if some of the trapped stuff is not avian.

You also wish for ringing anecdotes: I cannot compete with the person who caught an automobile as I have never been silly enough to set my nets where such things disport. On the odd occasions when we held Landrover Trials in the garden, the nets were dismantled and placed in a safe place; it was incredible where some of our friends' vehicles ended up. I did catch a biggish tractor (with attached mower) twice (the same one, indicating that these things do not adhere to the adage 'once caught, twice shy') and I did once watch in fascinated horror as a hand-pushed mower, travelling parallel to and 0,5 m from a new net, collected a billowing fold at one end, ripped the net from one end to the other and then attacked the steel peg holding a guy rope. The peg could, after much labour, be straightened and the deep gouges along its length did not impair its usefulness, but the blades of the rotary mower were never the same again; we kept finding bits of them on the lawn for months afterwards.

The capture of mechanical objects is less interesting than that of animate creatures. Cattle are well known to cause alarm and despondency among ringers and I have had my fair (unfair?) share of them galumphing about, draped in various quantities of expensive net, but it is possible that dogs are not commonly caught. Silver, a fairly small bitch, was once found completely entangled. Somehow she had 'fallen' into the bottom pocket and had twisted and turned to such good effect that the central third of the pocket had to be cut out before she could be freed and disentangling an anguished dog can lead to wounds far greater than those produced by barbets. The neighbour's Great Dane was more or less blind, so could be forgiven for crashing through the end of a net, removing a fair chunk of it, but his next effort was disastrous. He very carefully stepped into the bottom pocket, toppled over and wound his legs up in

the shelf string of the next pocket, so that he resembled a dead lion being brought home hanging from a pole. He was too heavy to lift and was in considerable pain from the shelf strings cutting into his flesh, so that, before scissors could be obtained, the entire net had disintegrated. Fortunately this episode did persuade Juno that it was inadvisable for him to do the rounds with me.

The inadvertent capture of bats can cause problems. After a couple of occasions when a net had been left open after dark and insectivorous bats caught, I always closed up before dusk (even if it did mean not catching hunting nightjars), but then I discovered that on cool, damp, overcast days the Epauleted Fruit Bats *Episcopus minor* were likely to fly. To be faced by 7 - 8 of these biggish creatures (males have a wing span of over 0.6 m) with concomitantly large teeth, was daunting. Initially I tried to hold a bat by the scruff of its neck, so as to avoid the teeth, but they can turn round inside their skin and, since the neck hold was presumably painful, they bit twice as hard. One day a mother, with baby clasped to her belly, was caught. I lifted baby off and hung it from a 'spare' finger. Mum swivelled round and licked me, so I hooked her feet to another finger and managed to remove the net one-handed, without any kicking, screaming or biting; it is an odd sensation to be licked while taking things out of mistnets. I found that the method worked equally well with insectivorous bats (which also lick), so this became my method of dealing with all these intelligent creatures, although there were one or two occasions when it was a toss-up as to whether or not one would bite before realising that I was trying to help it.

Rats and mice do not seem to behave well under adverse conditions. Just how they managed to get into a net set a metre off the ground I do not know, but when they did, it was the neck hold or nothing and, naturally, I ended up with well-chewed fingers, as I have no desire to cut the net unless it is absolutely essential. Bumble bees are a different matter; alive they sting and, if left to die, will tangle and chew a net to such good effect that overnight a square metre or more may be damaged, so when one of those pretty little dears gets into a net, it is always 'rush home for the scissors and release chop chop'.

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