

garden to one of the windows in the house. Offered the choice of this method of getting caught or the original electric trap on the bird table they usually prefer the former. On one occasion two birds managed to get caught simultaneously, one by each method!

One bird (female with ring no. 4-48242) recently trapped by this method had been ringed on 23 November 1976, its first retrap being on 14 December 1979. It almost seemed as if it was desperately trying to make up for lost time! We finally got rid of it by having it released on the other side of town and so far it hasn't returned.

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MIST-NETTING AT SUNSET

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When nets are put up early in the morning, and are visited at intervals throughout the day by a group of ringers who remove and process the birds that happen to get caught, the whole process can be most leisurely. By contrast, catching birds that roost in large flocks in a reedbed, which means catching them from just before to just after sunset, can vary between the disappointing and the overwhelming. Catching absolutely nothing when you have asked several friends to come along and help can be so embarrassing that I now usually work alone. On the other hand you may catch a lot of the birds you want and even more of the ones you don't and find yourself disentangling your victims by torch light long after night has set in. This note is meant to offer ideas that have occurred to me to others who may encounter the same problems.

I only use one net at a time. Once when I put up two nets in a reed bed a few of the species I wanted were caught in one net and a lot that I did not want in the other. It was quite dark by the time I got them all disentangled and the nets were in such a muddle that straightening them was a long and exasperating business.

If I were designing a mist net I would make the longitudinal strands on which it is slung of different colours, for example red, orange, green, blue and violet. This would make it obvious at once if the net was twisted and the strands out of order. An easy alternative is to attach small lengths of coloured silk in this order to the end loops by which the net is slung from the supporting poles. This shows at once if you have got the loops in the wrong order.

The net is erected in a prepared clearing in the reeds about a metre wide which has a metal pipe driven into the ground at each end so that the poles can be inserted quickly without using any guy ropes. Bamboo poles are used and after use they are hidden in the vegetation to avoid having to transport less easily replaced metal ones. Ideally everything one is going to use should be transportable between car and reed bed by one person.

When putting up, taking down or removing birds from the net it is important not to get entangled in it oneself. Buttons and watch straps have an uncanny propensity for getting caught. I find that a well zipped up anorak is ideal protection because it keeps one warm and offers a minimum of excrescences that can get mixed up in the net.

I always carry a pair of fine scissors on a string round my neck with its points protected with a short length of the plastic tubing on which bird rings are supplied. Ideally these scissors should not be used because if you free a bird by cutting nylon threads you can easily fail to remove small pieces which are large enough to cripple the bird after you let it go. The scissors are only used as a last resort.

As the birds are removed from the net it isn't practicable in the failing light to process them at once. If you did you would have to let most of them go in the dark with a real risk of their injuring themselves or falling prey to predators. I put them at once into small cloth bags closed with a string in the neck and also with a reinforcing rubber band. Having some of your birds escape in the car on the way home is undesirable and presents something of a motoring hazard. The bags are hung in an empty cupboard overnight

for processing early next morning. The birds apparently spend a peaceful night like this and seem none the worse when you take them out. As my home is less than 2 km from the reed bed I let them go in my garden. If they had to be taken further they should be taken back and released at the reed bed.

I make it a rule to erect the net in my garden as soon as the birds have been dealt with - unless there is a strong wind blowing. It should be checked for foreign bodies of vegetable, or sometimes animal, origin. Fine dissecting forceps are useful for removing fragments of leaves, twigs and so on. The nylon is so strong that these can usually be dragged away without damage to the net. If necessary they can be cut up with scissors. Insects may give trouble and beetles have a penchant for getting badly enmeshed. The best solution is probably to cut them up small and remove the pieces.

Rents in the net may be due to the passage of large birds or animals through it or to the use of the scissors when getting birds out. All rents should be repaired if the net is to remain serviceable. I repair mine such as a surgeon repairs divided tissue. A small reel of nylon thread thicker than the nylon of which the net is made is held in the palm of the left hand. Fine forceps are passed through an opening near the edge of the rent and back again through another opening on the opposite side of the rent. The nylon thread is grasped and pulled through and a simple knot is tied, using the forceps. A reef knot is unnecessary. The thread is cut with the fine scissors leaving one end short and one end long (to mark the place). When the next knot is tied the long end left at the previous knot is left short. In this way you don't get lost. With a long rent it is best to start at the middle and then at the middle of each half. With a triangular rent the first stitch should be at the angle.

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