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New poles for mist-netters

Charles T. Collins

The increased use of mist-nets for capturing birds has in recent years greatly changed the emphasis, equipment and to some extent the species of birds handled in bird banding programs. The previous dependence upon traps greatly impaired a bander's mobility and much work was done at backyard stations. Nets, on the other hand, are easily transported to more distant study sites or focal centers of migration and do not depend upon attracting birds to food or water sources.

Nowadays, much of the modern bander's equipment, in addition to nets, consists of suitable net poles. In parts of the world where bamboo grows wild or where there is an abundance of suitable-sized saplings, poles may simply be cut in the field and abandoned afterwards. However, most temperate zone workers use some sort of manufactured material for net poles.

For a bander working in the backyard or at a permanent study site where equipment can be left in place without disturbance, ease of transport is not a major consideration. Poles can be larger, heavier and equipped with such labor-saving devices as external sail tracking (Nixon, 1972. *Western Bird Bander*, 47:53-55). For others, the choice of pole design is often dictated by portability, with factors such as weight, length, diameter, and ease of assembly being of great importance; what will conveniently fit in or on a car may be crucial. No one design perfectly meets the needs of all banders. With this in mind, I would like to present a few new ideas concerning poles for mist-netters.

Most designs with which I am familiar utilize 8- to 10-foot lengths of pipe or electrical conduit, often cut into 4- or 5-foot lengths with some sort of mechanism for joining sections together. Recently, I have seen some adjustable telescoping aluminum poles which could be useful. These poles are available in most paint supply stores and are designed for use with roller paint brushes. A simple twist locking mechanism allows the pole to be extended and locked at any distance up to approximately twice its initial length. These poles, approximately 1 inch in diameter, are available in 2-, 4-, 6-, and 8-foot lengths which extend to 4, 8, 12,

and 16 feet respectively. The 4- and 6-foot lengths would seem most useful and most easily transported. The 8-foot length poles would enable several nets to be extended nearly 16 feet from ground level but would be more difficult to move around.

These variable length poles would be of particular value when operating in close spaces. They could be adjusted to fit under heavy branches or overhanging rock ledges where the more familiar type of fixed-length pole would be difficult or impossible to use. The telescoping design would also allow the pole to be shortened, with the nets still attached, to reach a bird in an upper shelf — a usually frustrating situation when two nets are stacked above one another. In such situations, birds seem to invariably end up in the uppermost shelf requiring a near dismantling of the whole rig in order to reach them.

The two makes of these poles I found ("Royal" Telescopic Multi-purpose Extension Pole and "Quik-lok" Aluminum Extension Pole) varied appreciably in price from one store to another but were approximately \$5.00 each for the 2-4 foot model, \$8.00 for the 4-8 footer, \$10.50 for the 6-12 footer, and \$13.75 for the 8-16 footer. As was also pointed out by Nixon (op. cit.) in discussing the cost of sail tracking, the initial cost should be considered in light of the appreciable life span of the equipment and increased ease and enjoyment in working with nets and birds.

A much cheaper, non-adjustable, type of pole was recently pointed out to me by D. Bontrager and D. Zembal. They have been using 5-foot lengths of galvanized tubing designed for television antenna mast construction. These sections are 1¼ inches in diameter and crimped in at one end for a distance of 5 inches, allowing sections to be easily fitted together. Their cost per unit (\$1.55) is very attractive and they require no modification or joint construction. They would be very stable even if 3 or 4 units are joined together, and would be particularly valuable where nets were to be raised well above ground level. Their greater bulk and weight may not make them as popular as thinner and

lighter sections of aluminum conduiting. They also tend to stick together, making disassembly difficult at times.

The telescoping pole would be clearly superior to most other designs when used in a situation where the poles, with net attached, are lowered over a bridge or cliff as is sometimes done to capture swallows (Lueshen, 1962. *EBBA News*, 25:107-109). Multiple sectioned poles tend to come apart in this situation unless carefully tied or taped together.

I have successfully used a wide variety of poles including ones manufactured expressly for banders (Bleitz Wildlife Foundation) as well as homemade 15-footers with sail tracking. However each bander has his or her own special requirements and preferences. Hopefully the ideas presented here will help some banders in the search for "the pole" for their use.

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Banded Painted Redstart returns to winter feeding area

In November 1973, it was reported to us by owner Isobel Hicks that a Painted Redstart (*Setophaga picta*) was coming to the bird feeding area of the Cave Creek Ranch Motel in Portal, Arizona. Soon, presumably the same individual began coming to our feeders at Aguila-Rancho, next door. It drank sugar water, ate peanut butter and, occasionally, suet. It was last seen at these feeders on 29 April 1974.

On 5 November 1974, a Painted Redstart appeared at our feeders and, as it was not yet banded, we could only presume it to be the same bird; it used the same perches and fed in the same way from the same feeders. After 24 November, it appeared daily. A Painted Redstart turned up at the same time at the feeders at Cottage #4 at Cave Creek Ranch Motel, rented for the winter by Mrs. Dickie Bogle. This was at a distance of 300-350 yards from our own feeders. On 30 January 1975, Mrs. Bogle caught it in a trap set for House Finches, and I banded it with #27-29141. The wing measured 73 mm, weight was 11.5 grams, and we presumed it to be a male. This banded bird visited feeders, both in our yard and at Mrs. Bogle's, until 1 May 1975. On 26 March it was joined by a second Painted Redstart which we did not succeed in capturing.

On 17 October 1975, a banded Redstart again appeared at our feeders and, after 28 October, was there daily — always announcing its presence with its rather sweet chirping call note. It came "on schedule" for many observers on the Portal Christmas Count, 30 December. When Mrs. Bogle moved back into her rented cottage at Cave Creek Motel in late January of 1976, it found her feeders within two days. It was subsequently trapped and the band number verified.

While many other species in other families are known to return regularly to winter feeding territories, I know of few instances of a warbler so doing — except probably Yellow-rumped — and certainly not a species so rarely banded as a Painted Redstart.

Sally Hoyt Spofford



Worksheets for Western Birds

Ageing/sexing worksheets for western birds will be mailed with NABB only to Western Bird Banding Association members. They are, however, available to anyone interested. For each worksheet desired, send 25 cents (or \$1.00 for 5 worksheets) to Mrs. Donald F. Radke, P.O. Box 446, Cave Creek, AZ 85331.

The following species sheets have been issued: Merlin, California Quail, Gambel's Quail, Common Snipe, key to kingbirds, Eastern Kingbird, Tropical Kingbird, Western Kingbird, Cassin's Kingbird, *Myiarchus* flycatchers, Violet-green Swallow, Tree Swallow, Verdin, Bushtit, gnatcatchers, Orange-crowned Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, *Oporornis* warblers, Tricolored Blackbird, Western Tanager, Summer Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, Cassin's Finch, Common Redpoll, American Goldfinch, Lesser Goldfinch, towhees.