

1978

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Recommended Citation

Gartshore, Mary E. (1978) "A Noose Trap for Catching Nesting Birds," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.

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A noose trap for catching nesting birds

Mary E. Gartshore

A variety of techniques have been described for catching nesting birds (Fankhauser, 1964; Weaver and Kadlec, 1970; Larsen, 1970; Dhondt and van Outryve, 1971; Artmann, 1971). Many traps have been designed for specific nesting situations and some are rather cumbersome to use.

While conducting a short study on Chipping Sparrows (*Spizella passerina*) in Ontario during the summer of 1975, an adaptable and simple way of catching birds on the nest occurred to me. A brooding Chipping Sparrow was flushed from its nest and became entangled in the long human hair incorporated into the nest lining. The bird was uninjured and easily extracted. In northern Nigeria, Hausa children use horse-hair slip-nooses for catching raiding weaver birds on sorghum heads. The bal-chatri, which has been successfully used to catch raptors, consists of a cage covered with nylon slip-nooses and containing a live mouse (Berger and Mueller, 1959). With the above ideas in mind, a trap adapted for catching birds on the nest was constructed and tested.

Several slip-nooses made of fine monofilament nylon or "invisible thread" were attached to a fine wire ring the circumference of which was the same as the nest cup of the species to be caught. For Cinnamon-breasted Rock Buntings (*Emberiza tahapisi*), a common, ground-nesting bird of the Nigerian savannah, the ring was placed on the nest and secured to a nearby grass stem by a short thread (Fig. 1). The birds usually returned in less than 15 minutes and about 60% were caught on the first try. Some individuals proved very difficult to catch but eventually all 12 females in the study area were captured.

This trap was modified to accommodate the retort-shaped, grass nest of the Speckle-fronted Weaver (*Sporopipes frontalis*). The nests were usually placed in dense thorny bushes. A small wire ring about the size of the nest entrance was fitted with up to six slip-nooses. The ring was securely attached to a twig by a wire (Fig. 2). As Speckle-fronted

Weavers are group breeders (personal observation), it was possible to catch any member of the group provisioning the young. The female alone incubates the eggs but may not feed the young, so noose-traps were used at different stages in the nesting cycle to catch more birds. A mist net erected nearby usually caught several additional birds which flew around frantically when a member of the group was noosed.

The advantages of this trap are that it is lightweight, inexpensive, and easy to assemble. Several can be kept between the pages of a field note book for ready use. It is virtually invisible at least to inexperienced birds, and can be modified to catch even the wariest. It is suggested that the trap be adapted for each species and its particular nesting situation. For instance, a single fishing-line slip-noose attached to a nail above the nest hole of an artificial nest box was used successfully to catch entering Purple Martins (*Progne subis*) (G.L. Holroyd, pers. comm.). Heavier test line should be used with larger species. If a noose breaks, however, the escaped bird should be able to preen it out. For nervous species or ground-nesting gulls, terns or waders where there is a danger of nest-desertion or egg-breakage, a long line attaching the trap to some point distant from the nest should be used. Once the bird has settled and has become entangled the observer can flush the bird so that it flies some distance from the nest before being handled. This method has worked with Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) (C.J. Risley, pers. comm.).

The use of the noose-trap resulted in no nest desertions, although in the tropics with a high nest predation rate this was difficult to prove. The incidence of injury should be about the same as that for a mist net; however, in my experience no injuries occurred. The trap should not be left unattended and, to avoid attracting predators or causing shock or injury, the entrapped bird should be removed promptly.

I have attempted to make a few suggestions as to

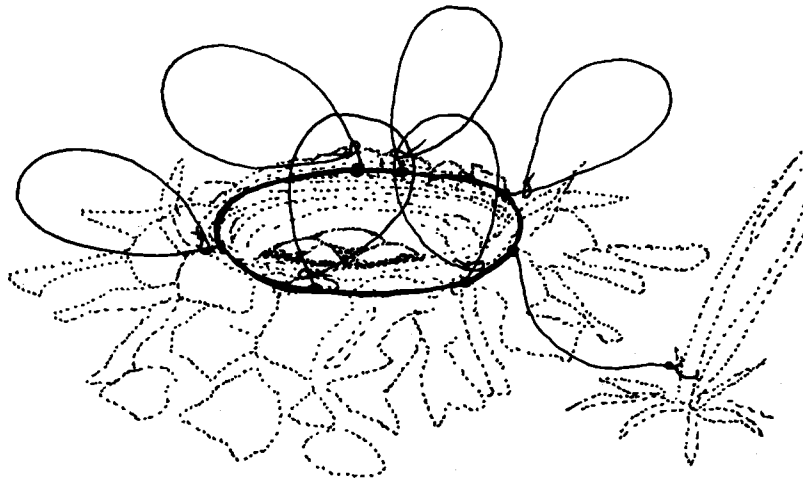


Fig. 1. A slip-noose trap in position for catching the ground nesting Cinnamon-breasted Rock Bunting.

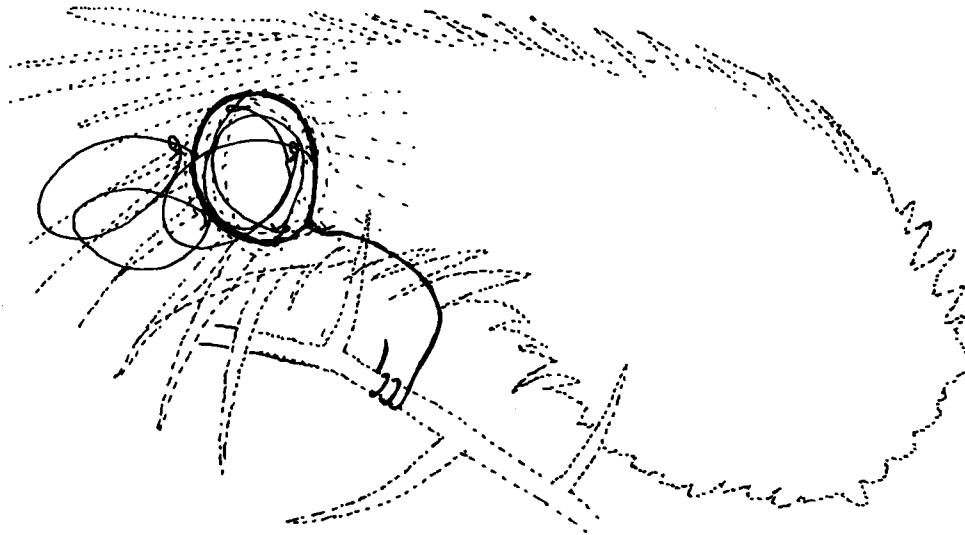


Fig. 2. A modification of the above trap to catch Speckle-fronted Weavers which nest in thorny bushes.

how a noose trap can be used to catch birds on the nest. Its success, however, will depend on the researcher's ability to adapt it to different nesting situations.

Acknowledgments

I gratefully acknowledge the help of A.L.A. Middleton and C.J. Risley in finding some of the relevant literature and M. Dyer for his helpful suggestions. 🍷

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