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A ground trap

Robert J. Pantle

At an annual EBBA meeting I displayed a trap that has been very effective for me while back yard banding. Some banders have asked me for construction details — hence this article. The original trap was constructed in about two days and, since building that first trap, I have constructed eight more with a few modifications. I purposely omitted the dimensions from the accompanying illustration because they will vary considerably and are based upon how many entrances one considers.

Some overall dimensions might be: 8" high x 66" long x 22" wide (20 x 165 x 55 cm). If the trap is more than 8" (20 cm) high, it affords the captured birds too much space in which to fly around and it is more difficult than usual to herd them toward the gathering cage door. If the trap is much longer than 66" (165 cm) and is to be used on the ground, it is difficult to find a perfectly level piece of ground on which to place it. This point is important because the bottom edges of this trap must be perfectly flush with the ground, as any hole will allow birds to escape.

Welded wire, 1" x 1/2" (25 x 12.5 mm) is ideal for construction of this trap, although a larger size mesh could be used, depending upon the species to be trapped. Simply start construction by cutting four sides and a top, making a bottomless rectangle.

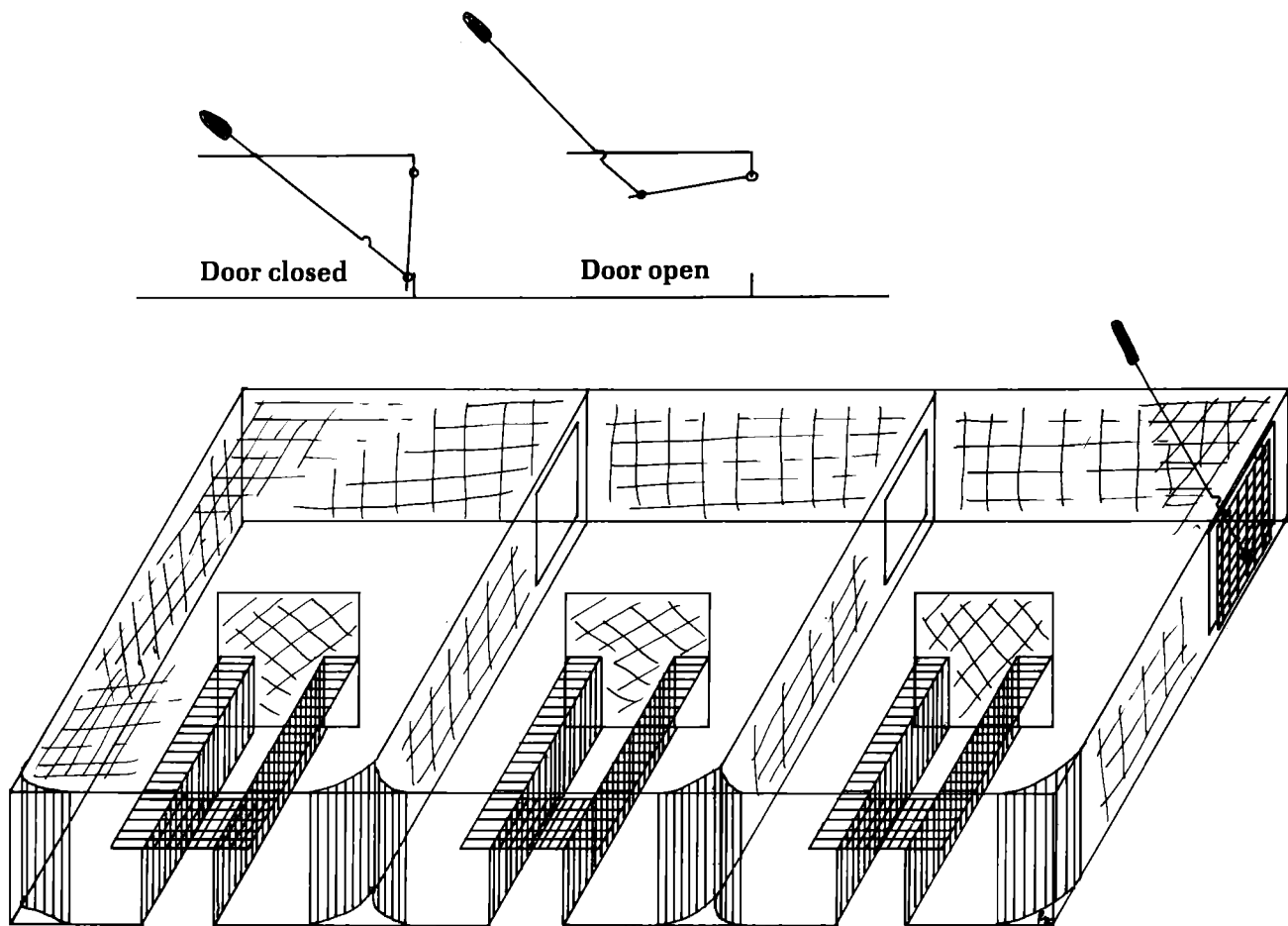
Before the four sides and top are soldered together, all edges must be filed smooth. This step is probably the most time-consuming, and it is very important that care be taken while filing the edges. If the edges are left rough and sharp, captured birds will injure themselves while flying around inside the trap. Also, smooth edges are required for soldering the parts together. Having done the necessary filing, butt the edges of the four sides to the top of the trap. Wire them in place using about four turns of wire to each joint, about four joints to the length of the trap, three to the width, and two wired joints at the corners. I find the wire that the Bird Banding Laboratory uses to string bands to be excellent for this step.

Solder the wired joints using a small amount of soldering paste flux at each joint. After some trial and error with soldering, I have found that a Bernz-O-Matic torch is the most effective tool to solder these joints because it heats very quickly, allowing the flow of solder onto the joint.

Next, using the same 1" x 1/2" (25 x 12.5 mm) wire mesh, cut two cross members and wire them to the top and sides of the trap. Place these cross members so that they divide the trap into three equal parts. Cut a square in each cross member at the opposite side from where you will put the tunnel entrances. These squares allow the trapped birds to move along the rear of the trap towards the gathering cage door. Cut a square in one end of the trap in line with the cross member squares for a gathering cage door. File the sharp edges perfectly smooth. Next, cut 8" x 8" (20 x 20 cm) squares out of the welded wire and bend them so they fit in each of the corners of the trap. Wire and solder them into place. These pieces help to keep the captured birds from staying in the corners instead of moving toward the gathering cage door.

At this point, the tunnels can be constructed by cutting entrances in the front of the trap. Mine are 3" x 3" (76 x 76 mm). These tunnel entrances should be approximately in the middle of each section. Two pieces of wire mesh then must be cut for the sides of the tunnel. I prefer sides 10" long and 6" wide (25 x 15 cm). These tunnel sides are bent in half to 45° angles and then wired to the sides of the tunnel entrance. The end of the tunnel within the trap must be blocked with a piece of wire mesh, wired to the trap top and to the tunnel sides. For the first 4" (10 cm) of the top of the tunnel entrance, a flat piece of mesh must be fitted to the trap so that birds cannot escape. This part of the construction is important and should not be overlooked.

Finally, cut and fit a piece of wire mesh to serve as a gathering cage door, putting it on the inside of the trap. For hinges, I use aluminum flashing cut into 1/2" (12.5 mm) strips about 1 1/2" (38 mm) long.



These are rolled around both the top of the cage door and the trap proper, so as to form a hinge. As a final step, attach a length of stiff wire (I use coat hanger wire) to the bottom of the gathering cage door and have it protrude through and above the top of the ground trap. The accompanying illustration shows the gathering cage door in detail.

I use a gathering cage constructed of the same size wire mesh. It is made as a rectangular box with a floor. The doors of the gathering cage and the trap are of like construction, enabling the bander to butt the gathering cage and trap doors together. The bander then opens both doors, walks around to the opposite side of the trap, and herds the captured birds into the gathering cage.

This ground trap has many advantages. It is very sturdy (mine are ten years old and show little

wear). They can be moved easily. Also, once a few birds have entered and are captured, they act as decoys.

To begin operation, spread a small amount of seed on the ground in the tunnels.

Sparrows are my most commonly captured species. I do not recommend this trap for Evening Grosbeaks (*Hesperiphona vespertina*), preferring to capture this species in three- or four-celled Potter traps. Evening Grosbeaks do not readily enter this type of ground trap; they are also quarrelsome, fighting with one another when in confinement, with a high probability of injuries.

My thanks to Dr. Robert Yunick for his excellent illustrations of this ground trap. 🍷

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