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House Wren fatalities in gypsy moth traps

Peter and Timothy Dring

The Red Schoolhouse Nature Center, located in southwest Cook County, Illinois has had an ongoing research project on the life history of the House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) since 1973. We found that the wood edges, thickets, gardens, and suburban yards which are preferred wren nesting habitats are unfortunately also the locations used for the study of the gypsy moth (*Porthetria dispar*). The 18 cm by 10 cm triangular moth traps have a 3.5 cm triangular opening at each end and are quite similar to some wren nesting boxes (Fig. 1). The inside of the trap is coated with a sticky substance known as tacky trap or tanglefoot. This substance is impregnated with a pheromone that is used to attract the male moths. After entering the trap, the moth becomes stuck and eventually dies, eliminating the moth from the population while also supplying data about the number of moths in the study area.

The Cook County Forest Preserve District started using

the gypsy moth traps in 1972 to monitor the presence of these destructive insects. Between 1972 and 1982 about 142 traps were placed throughout the districts each year. We have documented two House Wren fatalities during this time. A female #1490-76970, banded 2 July 1982 became entrapped by the sticky sides of a moth trap and died. This bird was found in the moth trap 14 July 1982 a short distance from her nest and six eggs which were lost. It is possible she was entering the trap for small insects, mainly midges and mosquitoes, which were stuck inside. We would like to request anyone encountering birds caught in insect traps to provide us with details, i.e. bird species, date, location, and target insect species. We would also like to suggest that the gypsy moth traps be modified to reduce the opening to 2 cm to discourage small birds such as the House Wren from using them.

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Gypsy moth traps — front and side.

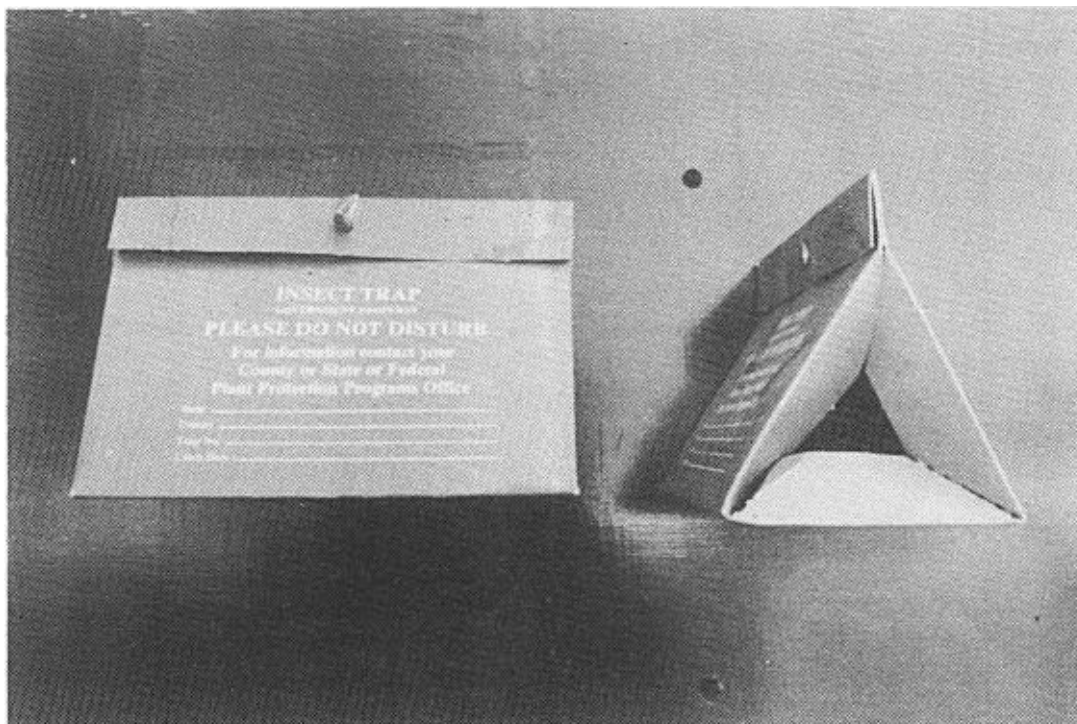


Photo by Peter Dring