

1994

## News, Notes Comments

North American Bird Bander

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### Tie Ups and Tie Downs: a method for securing rolled nets

Those of us with isolated banding stations free from the hazards of vandalism sometimes leave our nets up overnight, rolled and ready to open for next day's work. This luxury allows us to "get-on-line" earlier in the morning when birds are most active. However, strong winds during the night may unroll nets, inadvertently snaring birds. Overnight rain or dewfall may cause nets to sag to the ground or perhaps be knocked down completely. You may also have to deal with furry woodland creatures (deer and rabbits) that like to taste-test your nets.

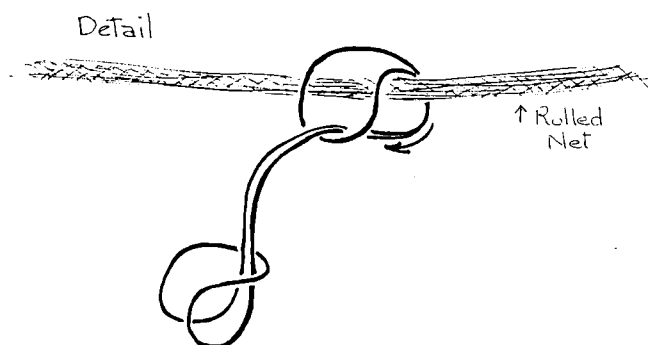
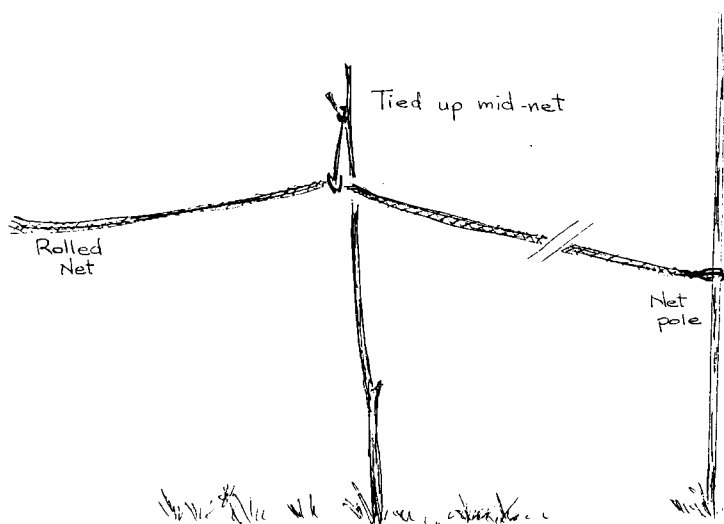
The net securing system which follows works well under all conditions, serving both to prevent unrolling and sagging. Without tangling in the net, the securing device is attached to a trammel loop when not in use, so each net always has its own means of being secured when necessary.

I recommend brown sisal twine or braided twine that is not slick. Cut a two-foot length of twine, and join the ends together to create a loop. Find a long stick (one of your pushsticks may do nicely) and place it on the ground near net center.

After you've closed and rolled the net, cinch firmly around the center of the net using your twine loop (see drawing). This is your tie-down. But don't let go of the twine at this point, because your net will unroll! Here's where the stick comes in . . . make another slip cinch to loop around the top of the stick, and pull it tight. Now the tension of the stick keeps the net from unrolling, and also holds the net up off the ground in case of rain. After removing the twine in the morning, simply cinch it to one of the trammel loops for future use. Using the plastic bag method of net storage (*NABB* 18:49-50), nets may be rolled and bagged with twine attached to a trammel loop. I don't recommend bagging with twine cinched around the middle, since tangles may occur.

My thanks to Keith Brink for suggestions and review.

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## BLUE JAY WITH "CROSSED" BILL

We read with interest the article, "Passerines with Deformed Bills" by Julie A. Craves in the January-March 1994 issue of *North American Bird Bander*, 19:14-18. As only one case of a Blue Jay was listed, we felt that our observation might be of interest.

Margaret Wilson first noted a Blue Jay (*Cyanositta cristata*) at the Speirs' feeder in Pickering, Ontario, Canada, that had a deformed "crossed" bill on 22 June 1993. At that time, it was noted that both mandibles appeared thinner and slightly longer than normal. The bottom mandible curved upward and the top mandible hooked over the bottom curving downward. This bird was observed at the feeder on a regular basis throughout the summer and fall of 1993 but was noticeably absent during the winter months. We were pleased to see it return to the feeder on 6 May 1994, where it has been seen almost daily since then.

In spite of its deformity, this jay feeds very successfully, taking both soft food (lard put out for the woodpeckers) and harder items such as half peanuts and even whole hearts of peanuts which it grasps by turning its head to one side. In June 1993, it was observed "scooping" sideways to pick up food rather than "poking" directly. Just today (30 June 1994) it was observed picking up food more directly and the bill may be somewhat blunter than first noted. Unfortunately, we did not write detailed observations and cannot confirm that the bill length altered over time.

This bird appears quite bright and active. It quite possibly made it south during the past winter and back again. It is currently undergoing a molt and looks very untidy. One tail feather was askew for a while, making the bird easily recognizable even when too far off to make out its deformed bill.

We also have at least five "normal" Blue Jays using the feeder regularly which are frequently noted courtship-feeding. The normal jays appear to be dominant over the "crossbill" but not very aggressively so. The "crossbill" adjusts by darting into the feeder when the coast is clear. Competition for the lard includes about ten European Starlings

(adults and young), four Hairy Woodpeckers (2 adults and 2 young), male and female Downy Woodpeckers, and the occasional Black-capped Chickadee and Red-breasted Nuthatch. Sunflower seeds and peanuts are spread on a table-top feeder about 2 ft. X 4 ft. Competition here includes 3 Red Squirrels, 8 Eastern Gray Squirrels (of which 6 are black and 2 gray), three Eastern Chipmunks, the occasional Red-winged Blackbird and Common Grackle, as well as most of the birds that come for the lard. So a good deal of patience is called for in waiting for the right moment when a lull in activity allows the "crossbill" to dart in and carry off a peanut or other tidbit. This bird also feeds on the window sill, about an arm's distance away from where we sit watching from inside the house.

**J. Murray Speirs and  
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