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HOLDERS for Weighing Birds

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News, Notes, Comments

ERRATUM

Please note that in *NABB*, Vol. 35(1):27, Lucinda M. Rowe and Jared D. Wolfe's manuscript, "Using Alulas and the Carpal Covert to Assess Age in Some Formative and First Alternative Plumaged Western Passerines," captions for figures 4 and 5 should be switched.

The editors apologize for this editing error.

HOLDERS for Weighing Birds

You have probably had this experience. You are in a store looking for something you need to make some piece of banding equipment and the required item was never intended for the use you have in mind. You might not know exactly what you are looking for or what it is called. Inevitably, a store clerk tries to be helpful and asks, "What do you want to use it for?" You hesitate wondering how to reply without adding to the confusion. This happened to me several times as I sought the perfect vessel to hold birds for weighing. My criteria for the ideal holding vessel were relatively simple: (1) birds could not escape from it, (2) it would be easy to use, (3) it would be

durable, (3) it would gently restrain the bird from struggling, (4) it would be easy to clean, and (5) it could be constructed out of cheap and widely available materials. Years ago, I found a solution that satisfied all of these needs. If you do not like your current weighing solution, you might try this one. Many others have copied these weighing cups and liked them.

The holders are simple cups made from PVC tubing and capped on one end. They stand upright on a scale with the open end up. The caps (known as "PVC caps" or "PVC end caps") are commercially available to fit various diameters of PVC tubing. The cap is not glued to the tube, but simply held in place by friction. It is necessary to have various cup sizes to accommodate various birds, but four fit most of the passerine and near passerine species typically mist-netted. The four sizes I use have inside diameters of 1 1/8" (kinglets, gnatcatchers, small warblers), 1 3/8" (most warblers, small sparrows, goldfinches, siskins), 1 5/8" (thrushes, large sparrows, buntings), and 2" (cuckoos, cardinals, blackbirds) (Fig. 1). Many species fit well in more than one size.

A flat-ended cap is necessary for the cup to stand upright on the scale. In the past, such caps were common, but currently most of the available caps have rounded ends. These can still be made to work

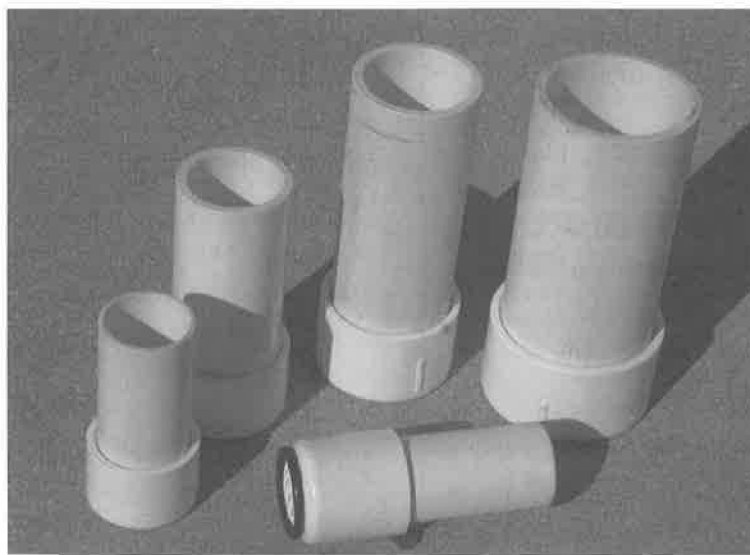


Fig. 1. PVC cups for measuring the mass of birds. The cup in front shows an O-ring glued to the cap.

well by gluing a rubber O-ring onto the rounded end. These O-rings can be found in the plumbing section of hardware stores.

Because you need only short lengths of tubing, try to find leftover scraps. Sometimes, hardware stores will have such scraps on hand. After cutting the tubing to the desired length, be sure to smooth the cut edges. It is not absolutely necessary to use the end cap because the tube alone will stand upright on the scales as long as the cut ends are perpendicular to the sides. However, caps are valuable because their weight makes the cups very stable and difficult to tip over.

To place a bird in a cup, hold it in the bander's grip with one hand and the photographer's grip in the other. Put the bird's head into the tube, then release the hand that was using the bander's grip. Guide the rest of the bird's body down into the tube with the hand holding the bird's legs in the photographer's grip. The entire process can be done swiftly in a fluid motion.

To release the bird, hold the tube horizontally by the open end. Remove the cap and flick your wrist to give the bird just enough momentum to propel it out of the tube. The bird comes out head first and flying. When you replace the cap, put it on lightly. If you push it on too hard, it can be very difficult to remove again. The cups are easy and quick to use. You will get a feel quickly for which cup fits each species best and the "tare" function of digital scales simplifies switching from one cup to another.

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Disposing of Used Nets

When destroying some used nets for disposal, it occurred to me that some banders might not know of this method: one that I determined was the easiest and environmentally sound way to go about it.

I have been told that I should burn the nets to ensure they are not usable before putting them in the trash where they might be withdrawn by individuals that would make inappropriate or unsafe use of them. Burning, however, in the conditions that can be achieved by an individual, results in emission of some rather noxious and hazardous products. I suggest you stop burning nets if you have been doing so.

To destroy nets I am, first of all, careful to close them and fold them neatly, just like a good net, then bag them to take home to destroy. It simplifies the destruction process if they can be drawn out without bunching up.

Use a paper cutter, set at the edge of a table with a trash can below on the floor. (I normally rest mine on my knees, but that is not as safe, so I can not recommend it.) Once set up, it is simply a matter of drawing the net across the table and over the paper cutter, then slicing off approximately 8 to 10 inches of net at a time.

The process takes about 15 to 20 seconds per net and most of the material drops directly into the trash can. When finished, there will be a small amount of tiny fragments on the table and floor that must be cleaned up. The remaining very small pieces of net are unusable and, in my opinion, safely disposed of in the trash. If, as is the case in our county, the trash is incinerated, the incinerator plant is equipped with provisions to deal with the undesirable products of combustion. Since you cut trammels and net at the same interval, there should be no problem with gulls and other landfill feeders becoming fouled in the pieces.

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