

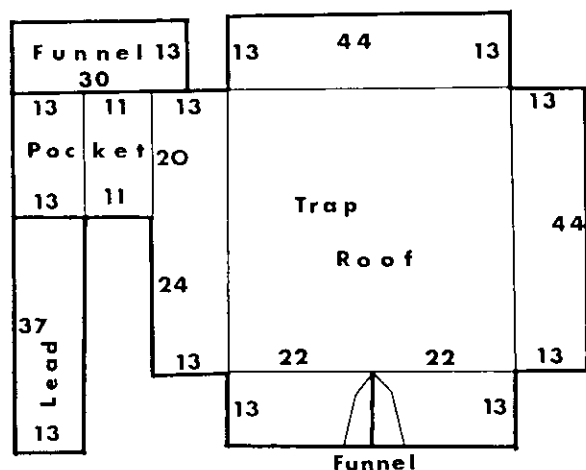
# A Nest Trap For Spur-winged Plovers

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A trap is described specially designed for catching Spur-winged Plovers (*Lobibyx novaehollandiae*) at their nest. It is designed primarily for catching incubating birds, but can also be used over newly hatched chicks. The adult birds enter readily and at once settle on the eggs.

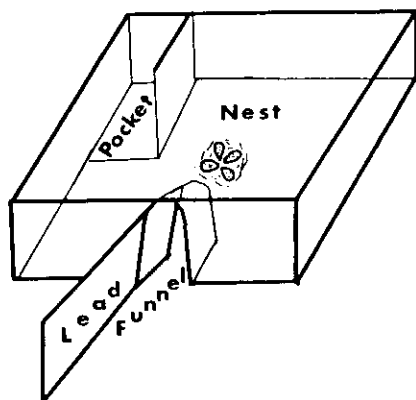
## SPUR-WINGED PLOVER TRAP

FIGURE ONE



Measurements are in inches.

FIGURE TWO



The breeding season of the Spur-winged Plover extends near Canberra roughly from mid-August to mid-November, and offers opportunities for trapping adult pairs on the nest. Some notes on the methods used in a plover banding programme in the A.C.T. and adjacent parts of New South Wales may be helpful to other banders.

The trap used was a simple funnel trap made of 1½ inch mesh wire-netting. It can be constructed in about 45 minutes by one person using wire cutters, a pair of pliers, some flexible galvanised wire, a tape measure and a six by eight feet sheet of netting.

The wire-netting is cut, as shown in Fig. 1, along the thick lines and folded along the thin lines. The seams are bound with wire to form a cage with no floor and a pocket in one corner.

The centre of one side is slit and combined with 2½ feet of foot-wide netting to shape a funnel leading to the centre of the trap. The end of the funnel should be slightly narrower than its mouth, but not so much that the bird would have difficulty in entering.

A wall of netting, 18 inches long and 13 inches high, is hinged to one side of the funnel to serve as a lead. The lead guides the bird into the funnel as it circles the trap looking for a way into its eggs.

When completed, the trap should look like Figure 2. The pocket serves to hold the bird while the trap is lifted with one hand and the captive(s) secured with the other.

When an occupied nest with a full clutch was found, the trap was set over it, the funnel leading onto the eggs, if possible, and short of them by about nine inches to one foot.

One advantage of this trap is that it can be left unattended. Often two or three were standing over different nests at the same time.

With few exceptions, the would-be sitter went straight up to the trap and quickly overcame its suspicions. It usually paced round the structure, seeking a way in, hitting upon the lead and streaking through the funnel to settle on the eggs.

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Diagram by G. F. van Tets.

## Notes on The Rainbow Bird in South Australia

It is well established that the Rainbow Bird or Bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*) is a migratory species, both within Australia and to many of the islands north of the continent, where it is known from the Lesser Sunda islands, Celebes and Papuan region to the Bismarck Archipelago and the Solomons. In Australia, it is more plentiful in the tropical northern and inland regions, but in spring it reaches southern and eastern coastal districts in fair numbers. McGill (1959) states that it is "spread widely throughout most of the State" of New South Wales. In Victoria, it is generally regarded as less common south of the Dividing Range. It has not been reported from Tasmania.

In eastern South Australia, Rainbow Birds begin to arrive in quite large numbers about the first week in October and, after dispersing into smaller groups, the birds immediately start tunnelling out their nesting burrows in sandy soil near creeks and rivers, though quite often they have been found breeding in roadside banks, far from permanent water.

The tunnels to the nesting chambers vary from three to five or six feet in length and I have examined one that was approximately eleven feet long, but I believe this to be unusual.

Egg-laying usually starts by mid-November; 4 or 5, and occasionally 6 eggs comprise a clutch. At first no nesting material is placed on the sandy

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The bird would then incubate undisturbed, and if the trap was left long enough, the second plover was caught while relieving its mate.

Birds in the trap reacted violently when approached, beating repeatedly against the wire and uttering harsh cries. But injuries were slight—sometimes a bruised beak or ruffled feathers, often none at all.

The method may also be used with pairs whose young have just hatched and are still close to the nest. Placed in a wire basket inside the trap, the chicks soon will call in their parents.

The trap was used successfully, also, with nesting Banded Plovers (*Zonifer tricolor*).

• [The author states that no eggs were damaged in his experience of this method though there was one case of desertion. This emphasises the point we have made previously that trapping at the nest should not be undertaken unless incubation is well established. In this instance it is probably unwise to attempt to catch both members of the pair at one time.—Editor.]

floor of the nesting chamber, but as incubation proceeds, a few body-casings of bees appear, and these are more numerous just prior to the time of hatching.

When the young are showing pin-feathers, the amount of "bee shells" in the nesting chamber has become a dense mass and maggots of various sizes are present also. Whether the maggots act as a supplementary food supply for the young, I have not been able to ascertain.

During my first attempts to band Rainbow Birds, I used to approach the entrance of the nesting tunnel with a hand net. Unfortunately, although this was done quietly, the sitting bird often became aware of my presence before I reached the opening to the nest and I soon realised this was not a satisfactory way of catching the birds. After trying several other methods, including erecting a mist-net in front of the tunnel, I began visiting the nesting sites at night. By shining a powerful torch down the tunnel, I found that the sitting bird would walk towards the light and into the hand-net. Quite often both adults were found in the nesting chamber and it was thus possible, to band breeding pairs, though sometimes only one individual could be enticed out and I had to make another trip to the site.

For instance, on December 11, 1963, a Rainbow Bird was banded at a place two miles west of Gawler, a town about twenty-five miles north of Adelaide. The band number was 040-27460. Thirteen days later its mate was captured and banded with ring number 040-27464. This pair successfully reared four young and had left the area by the first week in March, according to a local observer.

One of the above mentioned birds was again encountered the following year (1964). I visited the same area on December 2, when a new tunnel was found about ten yards west of the 1963 site. Two birds were in the nesting chamber, the first to be caught having the band number 040-27464. After a short wait, the mate was trapped and I was surprised to find that it had no band. Four eggs were observed in the nest.

My observations on the behaviour of the Rainbow Bird agree closely with those published recently in the "Bird Bander" (Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 59) by Lane, except with regard to the use of a torch, which he found ineffective. Like Lane, I have had no known cases of desertion of nests following my operations.

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