Another Method For Trapping Kookaburras

In a two year study of the biology of the Laughing Kookaburra *(Dacelo gigas)*, a trap, designed by Mr E. Madeley, was used with great success. About 90 per cent of the kookaburras in my study area were caught by it at one time or another in contrast to the limited number caught in the Bal-Chatri trap discussed by R. D. Anderson (1966). The total number captured, including recaptures and those caught outside the study area, was 88.

Basically the trap consisted of a netted hoop 2½ ft in diameter reinforced with wire and barrel staves and soldered to the action bar of a large rat trap. A stiff wire attached to the tongue of the trap extended approximately 4 inches in front of the trap proper. To this, a piece of meat was attached. The trap was secured to the ground with two tent pegs and set in the usual manner. When a kookaburra alighted and grabbed the meat, the trap was triggered, the hoop flopped over and captured the bird. The kookaburra's first action was to fly upward. If the net had plenty of "bag" to it the bird could not escape. The observer, standing near, removed the bird as quickly as possible and covered its head immediately thus preventing an otherwise loud alarm call that would ward off others of the group from succumbing to a similar fate. With the trap reset, the procedure was repeated. To maintain silence, all the captured birds were kept covered in a hessian bag until trapping at the site was complete. Only then was each banded, measured, and released.

There were two extremes to the success of this method. At times as many as three individuals, all diving for the meat at once, were caught together. Often inexperienced juveniles attempted to take the meat while I was in the process of setting the trap. At the opposite extreme, sometimes one member of a group, usually an older adult, would witness its fellows being caught and could not be lured in at all. Attempts to catch these few who were naturally trap shy or those who had learned trap shyness by escaping after having been caught once, was frequently frustrating. These birds would take diving swoops at the meat, strike it with a force to spring the trap and get away. In these cases I would stop trapping at that site for a time. Subsequent attempts, especially during the breeding season when the nestlings had to be fed, usually proved successful. I might mention, however, that every month for the two years of the study I tried to trap one particular adult male and was never successful, no matter what method was tried.

The success of this trap was no doubt due to the greedy nature of this carnivorous kingfisher. I feel, however, that it would work equally well with other birds of similar feeding habits. With appropriate modification of the trigger to suit various types of bait, it may be a useful means of trapping a wide range of ground feeding birds.

Reference

Anderson, R. D. (1966). 'Trapping Kookaburras'. *Aust. Bird Bander*, 4: 61.

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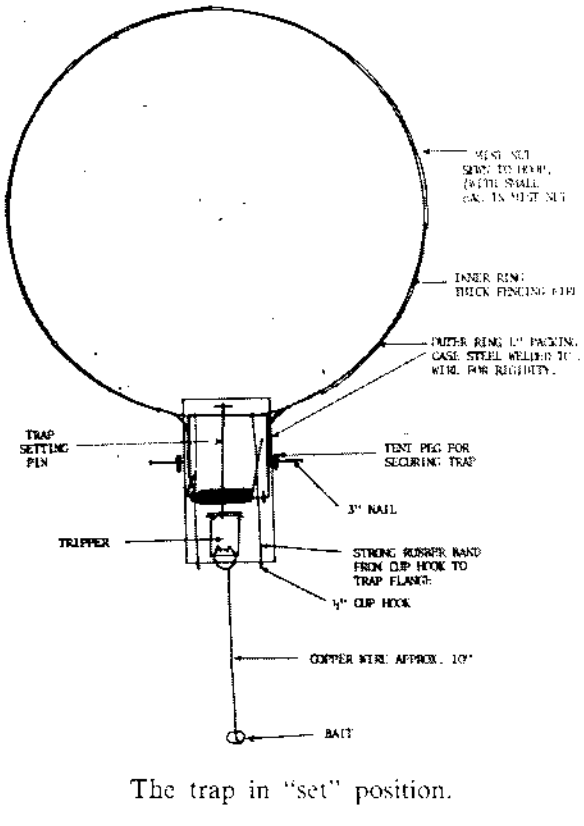

The trap in "set" position.