

# A Proven Method Of Trapping Hawks

S. G. LANE

The writer briefly describes Bal-Chatri traps and their method of use. Many banders have found, to their regret, that mist nets currently in use are quite unsatisfactory for catching raptors, and that trapping remains the most efficient and satisfactory means of capturing them.

The method described here evolved from East Indian falconers, who used live birds as lures in cane cages externally covered with horsehair nooses to catch their hawks. The more modern version of these traps has become known by the Indian name Bal-Chatri.

My experience with this type of trap has been extremely limited and these notes are submitted in the hope that banders conveniently situated, might begin trapping and banding birds of prey.

## Types of Traps

The simply made trap (Figures 1 and 2) was constructed by Dr. Leighton Llewellyn and proved quite successful. It is made from  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch wire netting of double thickness in the form of a pouch with the ends squeezed together and the centre "hollowed" to allow room for movement for the mouse "bait". Metal strips are secured along the underneath edges to provide enough weight and to ensure as far as possible that the trap remains upright when being used. "Running"



**Figure 1.**

- A Brown Falcon held by one of the "snoods" while the mouse sits unconcernedly in the trap.



**Figure 2.**

- The band is applied while the falcon is "in the bag".

nooses made from nylon fishing line are liberally tied to the top of the trap. The size of these nooses and the weight of the trap is dependent on the size of the talons and the species to be trapped. As a guide, the nooses should be about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches diameter for the smaller hawks.

In the U.S.A., Daniel D. Berger and Helmut C. Mueller have had considerable success with traps of different weights and varying strengths of nylon line to suit the specific birds of prey. The basic principle is that the trap is weighted on the bottom only enough to keep it upright when thrown and to prevent the captured bird flying off with it clasped in his talons. The snared hawk should be able to pull the trap along without any injury which might result if it were to struggle against an excessively heavy and consequently immovable trap.

Figure 3 depicts another type of Bal-Chatri, similar to those used by Berger and Mueller.

#### Lures

We used a white mouse four times for five strikes and three catches, without harm to the mouse. He is seen in the photo (Figure 1) sitting apparently quite unconcerned, while a Brown Falcon (*Falco berigora*) pulls the upside-down trap along in an effort to get away. The American Banders found the common brown House Mouse (*Mus musculus*) the most satisfactory lure.

#### Method

The mouse is placed in the "pouch" trap by opening the wire join slightly and squeezing it closed afterwards. In the other type of trap (Figure 3) the entrance door is usually underneath. The nooses are set open and made to stand as erect as possible. The "baited" trap is carried ready in the vehicle until a hawk is sighted sitting on a telephone pole or tree on the roadside. As the vehicle is driven slowly past on the far side of the road, the "baited" trap is thrown carefully from the side of the vehicle farther from the bird and clear of the road, while the vehicle proceeds far enough away to cause no worry to the quarry.

In a few instances, birds flew as the vehicle approached but in cases where the bird remained perched, it was only a matter of minutes before it dropped to the ground to investigate.

#### Results

Two Brown Falcons and one Nankeen Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*) were caught. Each of these

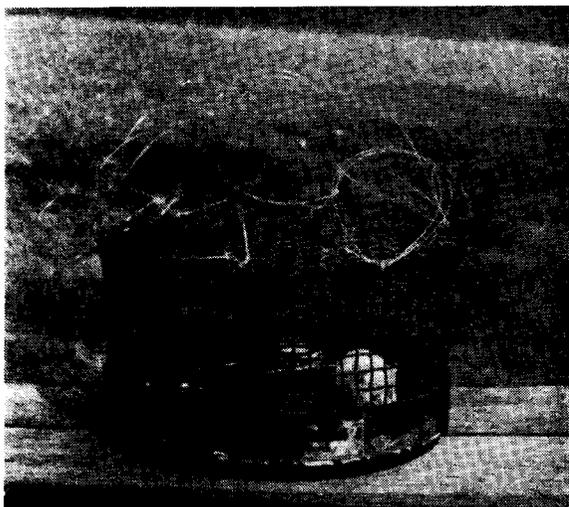


Figure 3.

- A Bal-Chatri similar to those used by the American banders.



Figure 4.

- A Nankeen Kestrel prior to release.

birds alighted close to but not on, the trap before hopping up to it and striking with its talons.

Only shortage of time prevented more birds being caught in this manner, as we had other commitments. We reluctantly drove past a number of hawks which made no effort to leave their roadside perch as the car passed.

Berger and Mueller achieved good results with their Bal-Chatri traps, having, at the time of their paper, caught and banded more than 400 hawks and owls of seven species in two and a half years.

#### Handling

With powerful beaks and strong sharp talons, most birds of prey are a formidable bird in the hand. It is not difficult for one person to hold the bird while a second applies the band. However, if a bander is operating alone, it may be advisable to cover the bird with a cloth or enclose it in a bag before removing the noose and applying the band to the protruding leg (Figure 2).

#### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Llewellyn for providing construction details of his trap and Mr. H. J. de S. Disney, who was also with us at the time, who kindly read and commented on the manuscript.

#### Reference

Daniel D. Berger and Helmut C. Mueller (1959), "The Bal-Chatri: A trap for Birds of Prey", *Bird-Banding*, 30: 18-26.

S. G. Lane, 65 Wood Street, Lane Cove, N.S.W.