A SIMPLE EXTENSIBLE MISTNET POLE

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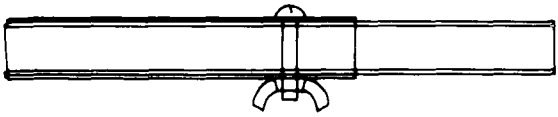
Mistnetting has proven itself world-wide as a remarkably efficient bird-capture technique excellently suited to sampling bird populations if utilized correctly and under compatible conditions. However, when my wife and I were ringing recently up at Crooks' Corner, we must confess to having felt a measure of trepidation with buffalo pats at one mistnet pole and elephant dung at another. On a more celebrated occasion what two of my colleagues retrieved of a mistnet from the horns of an unco-operative ox after a hectic chase was hardly worth mentioning, other than for a stock-taking write-off!

One of the other problems of mistnetting remains the matter of suitable poles which should be light, strong, durable, non-snagging and preferably extensible with regard to length. Having decided fairly recently to commence ringing for pleasure again (now that this is once more acceptable), a problem arose finding poles to suit my purpose. I wished to ring primarily for pleasure, for wide-spectrum survey purposes, and to train interested youngsters as I had been trained.

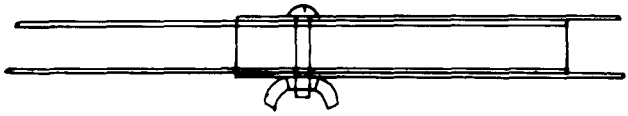
After careful consideration, a relatively simple system was implemented which met all my requirements. This has been tested successfully under field conditions, has been considered efficient enough to be copied, and is consequently described here in case other people may be interested. A favoured material among birdringers was chosen, namely extruded aluminium tubing. Hollow tubing was selected rather than solid, which has its own advantages, but primarily in my case for the greater diameter which was preferred. Round tubing was also preferred to square tubing for theoretical structural advantages.

One disadvantage of aluminium was tolerated: grubby hands after handling. This can be eliminated by more expensive anodised aluminium poles available in a variety of colours. Silvery poles were retained because of the cost factor but also because they are more visible to large mammals. These tend to avoid them due to the innate survival suspicion of wild animals, but domestic livestock are less co-operative. The effect of silvery poles on low-flying birds seems to be to divert them left or right sufficiently far from the vulnerable pole area to become enmeshed. One loses out on a fifty-fifty basis with single net attachment, but I prefer using lines with two nets attached to the same pole. Careful net placement can also reduce this loss.

As shown in the diagram below, a worthwhile innovation is to make provision for a 40% length increase which can be implemented rapidly and with minimal effort when required. This gives one a maximal pole height of 3,5 m but a minimal length for transport or alternative use of 2,5 m. These precise dimensions were chosen for economic rather than technical reasons and are not critical. The commercial supply length of this type of aluminium tubing is 5,0 m, giving two poles of half the length or four extension sleeves of quarter the length. Any deviation from commercial unit length is automatically more expensive.



POSITION A - Mist-net pole in compact position.



POSITION B - Mist-net pole in extended position.

The extension sleeve is held in position by a threaded bolt, 30 mm long and 6 mm in diameter, fitted with a wing-nut for easy field use. A hole of conveniently larger diameter is drilled through both poles simultaneously in position 'A' at a distance of 100 mm from the end of the pole and 25 mm from the end of the sleeve. Thereafter each pair of poles is treated as a unit and not separated. This is because, when drilling on a curved surface with an ordinary hand-drill, the hole is not always in a precise median position. Being drilled simultaneously ensures a precise match or at most a 180° twist when reversing the sleeve to position 'B'. When extended the wing-nut is a minor snagging hazard, while the bolt head is minimal.

There appear to be two suitable pairs of tubing sizes on the market, with the better fit being detailed as follows. The pole is LH 12679, external diameter 19,05 mm, wall thickness 1,63 mm, and mass 0,239 kg/m. The approximate price is about R1,51/m, depending on your contacts and possible discount. The extension sleeve is LH 12681, external diameter 22,2 mm, wall thickness 1,22 mm, and mass 0,216 kg/m. Approximate price is about R1,37/m.

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