

CRESTED BARBET TRAPPING TECHNIQUES

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Various trapping techniques were tried in trapping Crested Barbets *Trachyphonus vaillantii* in a suburban area to colour-mark the resident barbets during a study of territorial behaviour.

METHODS

1. The use of a live decoy Crested Barbet.

The car was parked in a favourable area, or in an area where the barbets had previously been seen or heard, and the trap with decoy barbet was put out. I did not use a stuffed barbet as a decoy bird as I found the use of a live barbet very successful. Wild barbets do attack stuffed decoys (Ward 1986). Therefore, the use of stuffed decoys might be a more convenient substitute. A tape recording of two Crested Barbets' trilling, territorial call (Ward 1986) was played and the decoy bird was watched until it indicated by way of the 'choking' display (Prozesky 1966) and bill wiping that a wild barbet had arrived. The tape recording was then switched off.

- a. A walk-in trap was devised as shown in Figure 1 (overleaf). The original intention was to be able to leave the trap unattended but it was found that the wild barbet normally responded immediately or it triggered off the trap by landing on the top of, or on, the door. The small compartment for the decoy barbet was positioned away from the sides otherwise the wild barbet fought with the captive bird at the side and did not walk around to the entrance. At first, the top was not covered with gauze but was constructed of the normal wire mesh. However, it was found that the territorial barbet then landed on the top of the trap and fought with the decoy through the wire which could result in damage to the birds' beaks and ceres. One barbet was caught on the top of the trap when the decoy refused to release its grip on it after such a fight.

A larger trap (1 m x 1 m x 0,5 m) with mesh tunnels on the sides and a large door that could be dropped by remote release was also used. In this trap the decoy barbet was positioned exactly in the middle. However, this trap was very cumbersome and difficult to transport and was later discarded in favour of the smaller trap.

Because females normally displayed about 1 m from the trap while the male went in, they were seldom caught except on occasions in the large trap when both male and female entered it.

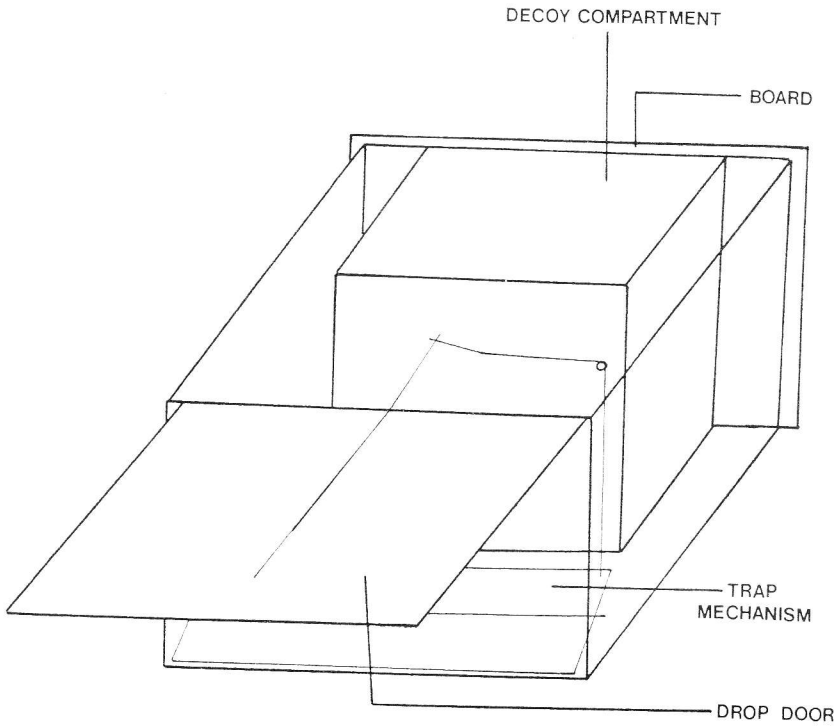


FIGURE 1

THE WALK-IN TRAP

- b. Mistnets were used with the decoy placed in a gauze cage on the ground nearby. The mistnets were either placed at right angles to each other or only one net was used. The wild barbets flew down on the ground to the decoy 'intruder' barbet and they were then flushed into the nets. This method worked well for catching females that did not normally enter the walk-in trap and for juveniles that had just left the nest. The juveniles probably came down more out of curiosity than aggression.
- c. The decoy bird was let loose in an open area and the wild bird normally came down to drive the decoy off. The two birds then grappled and interlocked and the ringer could then run up and catch both birds. Often the female could be caught, especially when the male was sitting on eggs or small chicks during the day. A net was normally useful when the female was interlocked with the decoy as she normally let go and flew off just as the ringer reached the two birds. Although this method worked reasonably well, both birds were always susceptible to damage (loss of an eye, etc.) and especially the decoy when both wild barbets were present. This method is, therefore, not recommended.

2. Taking the barbet off the nest.

Hatches were cut into all the known nests, either before egg laying or when the chicks were about 12 days old. The hatches were lined with black velvet strips to keep light out and ensure a better fit. The cutting of the hatches did not influence the success of the nest.

The female barbets were taken off the nest at around 05h00 when the chicks were about 20 days old. By the time the females were ringed and released it was light. This was the most successful method for capturing the females. Males were taken off the nest during the day as the two Crested Barbet sexes take turns at brooding throughout the day. The nest had to be watched to determine which bird was brooding. No desertions of any of the nests occurred, even when the nest was checked twice daily. The barbets did, however, start to recognise me when I walked into their territory and they gave very intense alarm calls.

To conclude, I found the most successful method of capturing Crested Barbets is to place a live decoy Crested Barbet in front of a mistnet and to flush the investigating barbets into the net. Taking barbets off the nest was also very successful but some nests were difficult to cut open and this method was only useful when the Crested Barbets used nestboxes.

REFERENCES:-

Prozesky, O.P.M. 1966. A study of the behaviour of the Crested Barbet *Trachyphonus vaillantii*. Ostrich Suppl. 6: 171-182.

Ward, D. 1986. Vocalizations and associated behaviour of Crested and Blackcollared Barbets. Ostrich 57: 129-137.

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Female Crested Barbet *Trachyphonus vaillantii* photographed and ringed by Anthony van Zyl on 11 January 1983