NET POLES

C.J. Vernon

This is a method of making net poles which are easy to make, durable and readily transported. The poles were designed and made by Peter Wright, then of the Rhodesian Department of National Parks. The poles are made of aluminium tubing, which while they might be a costly outlay, more than justify the initial expense. The advantage of these poles over any other type I have seen is that they are easy to use, as they are simple and uncomplicated.

Each pole consists of two aluminium tubes, each 1,63 m long and with different diameters. The smaller **inner** tube is 18,8 mm and the larger **outer** tube is 22,2 mm in diameter. I do not suppose that these lengths and diameters *per se* are critical, rather these are the measurements of tubing available to us and so of the poles I have been using since 1970. The one critical factor is that the smaller tube should fit exactly into the larger and be easily inserted and removed.

The outer tube with the larger diameter is indented 0,150 m from one end, to give a long section and a short section of the tube (Fig. 1). Three indentations are made equidistant around the tube with a punch, so that the indentations protrude into the core of the tube. These indentations act as a stop for the inner tube when it is inserted into the outer tube.

To erect the pole insert the smaller tube into the short section, that is close to the indentations of the larger tube. This results in a pole of 2,96 m (which is 2 x 1,63 - 2 x 0,15 m). These poles are perfectly suitable for 6 m and 12 m long mistnets because the poles do not bow inwards towards the net and therefore do not need staying at the top. However, the poles do bow inwards when an 18 m net is used and then do need staying.

To carry the poles, remove the inner tube from the outer tube, turn the outer tube round and insert the inner tube into the long section of the outer tube. The smaller tube will then fit into the larger so that only 0,15 m protrudes and the total length of the two is 1,78 m. The combined tubes are easier to carry around than the two tubes separately, especially if many net poles are being carried.

The problem of erecting mistnets on hard ground when it was impossible to push the poles into the soil, or where there were no trees onto which to stay the poles, was overcome by Peter Wright's design of a pole support which could be hammered into the ground. The advantage of this pole support was that one could erect the nets where you wanted to catch birds rather than where the environment dictated.

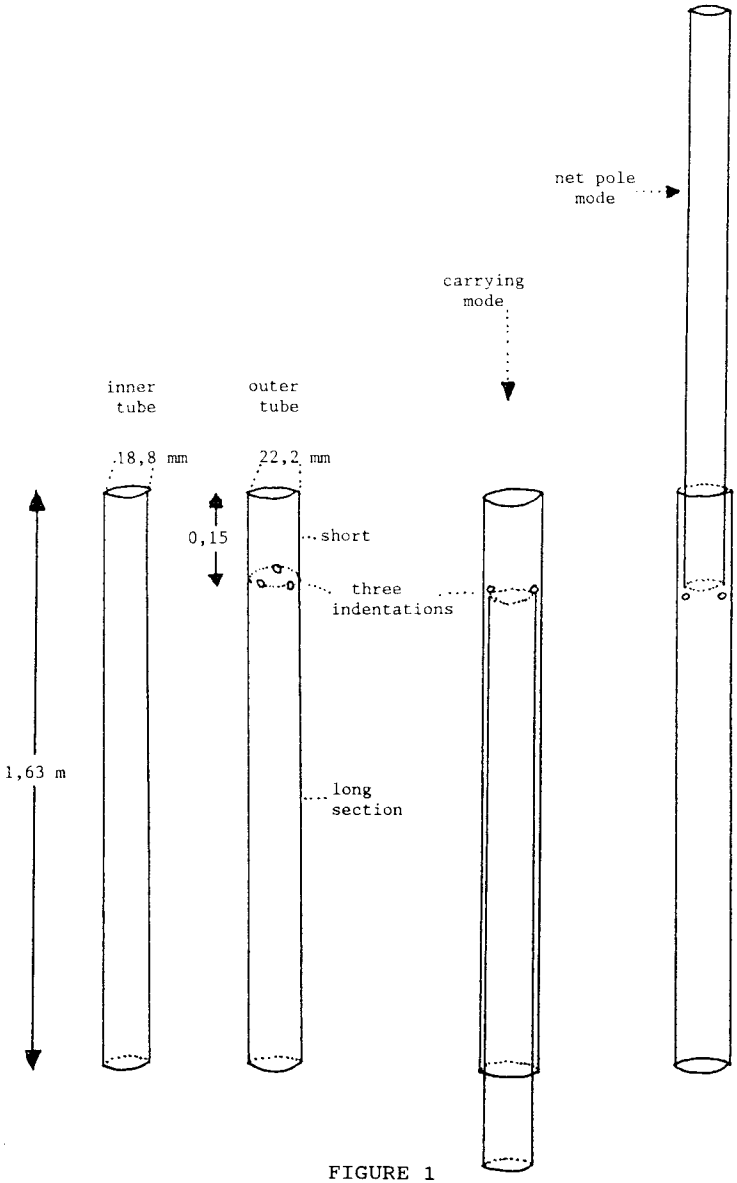

FIGURE 1

DESIGN OF ALUMINIUM NET POLES

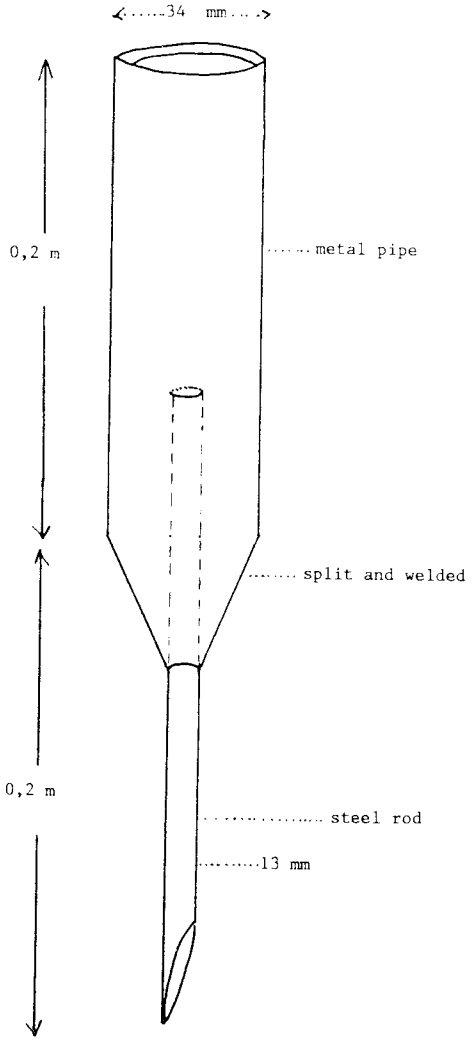

FIGURE 2

DESIGN OF STAND TO SUPPORT NET POLES

The support consisted of a metal pipe welded onto a sharpened steel rod (Fig. 2). The metal pipe used was similar to that used by plumbers for household drains (clearly in the pre-plastic age). The critical measurement is the internal diameter of the pipe, which must be large enough for the outer tube of the net pole to fit into easily but without too much play.

The pole support was hammered into the ground. If a hammer is applied directly to the pole support, the end of the pipe becomes frayed and crimped over preventing fitting of the net pole. To obviate this problem, a large metal bolt was added to the luggage, and was inserted into the pipe before hammering the pipe into the ground.

The combined weight of the poles, pipes, bolt and hammer is more than offset by their ease of use and the independence they give one. I kept the pipes and hammer in a sack and the bolt in my ringing equipment box.

I used the equipment primarily to catch helmet shrikes in miombo woodland in Zimbabwe. I would locate a nest of the birds and return with my ringing equipment plus a mounted owl. The owl had to be kept under a cover of pillow slip until it was needed, because to birds hated owls and would mob the specimen even as I carried it through the woodland.

The *modus operandi* was to erect two 6 m nets using three poles in an open "V" shape near the nest tree. Then the owl was placed between the nets. All the time the brooding adult would watch my activities and would "eye" the owl, but the shrike was forbidden by shrike convention to leave the nest until the rest of the group returned. When the group came back, the brooding bird would lead the attack on the owl and within seconds the entire group would be caught.

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