

TRAPPING THICK-BILLED WEAVERS IN MY GARDEN

H. T. Laycock.

Reference has been made (Safring News 1978 vol 7, no. 1 and 1979 vol 8, no. 1) to an electrically operated trap which, baited with sunflower seeds, has made hundreds of captures in my garden in a Pietermaritzburg suburb. The electric wiring as shown in Fig. 1 involves a 3-way switch E. In position 1 a 6-volt dry battery C lights up pilot bulb F and charges capacitor D (4 cells in parallel, each of 10 000 F). In position 2 this capacitor discharges when a bird entering the trap treads on contact-maker G and operates switch H which in turn rings bell J. In position 3 the capacitor discharges through solenoid B which releases a catch and drops the trapdoor A. In practice one turns the switch to 1 until the pilot bulb stops glowing and then to 2. One can then forget about the trap until persistent ringing of the bell informs one that a bird has entered it. There are switches in three rooms in the house where the bell can be turned off. One hurries to the switch-board and turns the switch to 3 and then walks down to the trap and removes the bird, or birds, with gloves through a small side door.

Advantages to this arrangement are that one can avoid catching birds of species one does not want or, if several birds are about, one can wait until the whole party is inside the trap before dropping the door, remembering at the same time that a bird in the trap is worth half a dozen in the garden!

Recently advantage has been taken of the natural curiosity of the Thick-billed Weaver and its willingness to enter aviaries in order to steal from the inmates. The entrance compartment of my aviary now has a 25 cm square, hinged trapdoor fitted over a hole in its roof. Birds visiting the aviary to "talk" to the inmates soon find this hole and, lured by a dish of seeds strategically placed a short distance below it, they nearly always fly down and start feeding. A contact-maker corresponding to G in the diagram operates the bell mechanism and the trapdoor is closed when a catch is released by pulling an overhead length of string running across the

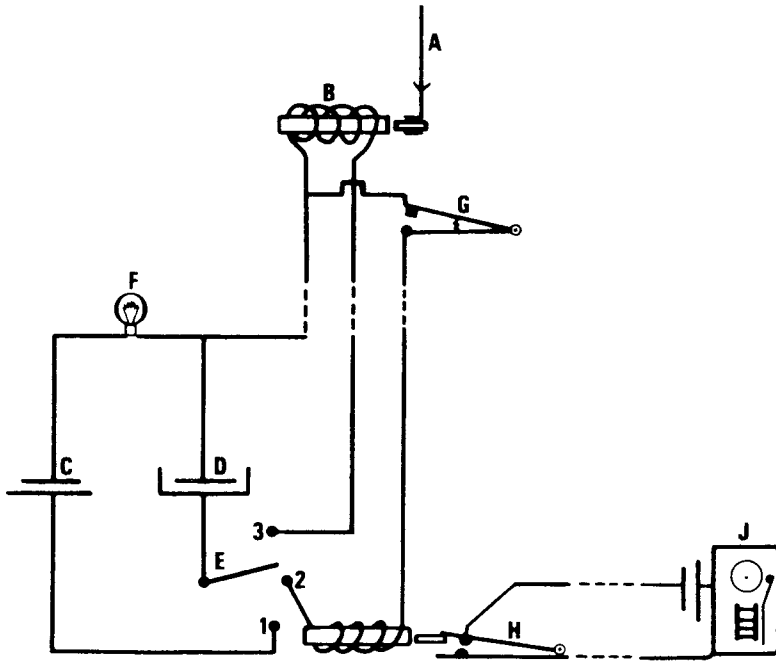


Fig 1. Wiring diagram. Description in text.

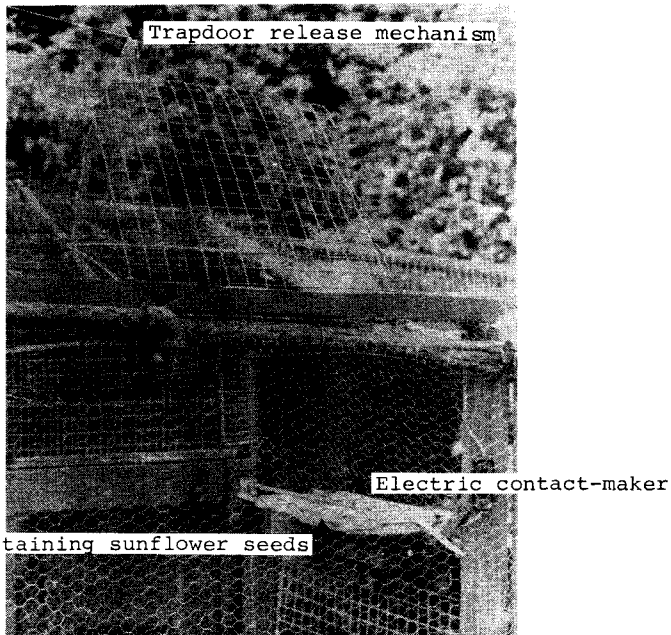


Fig 2. Empty aviary compartment, adapted for trapping.

garden to one of the windows in the house. Offered the choice of this method of getting caught or the original electric trap on the bird table they usually prefer the former. On one occasion two birds managed to get caught simultaneously, one by each method!

One bird (female with ring no. 4-48242) recently trapped by this method had been ringed on 23 November 1976, its first retrap being on 14 December 1979. It almost seemed as if it was desperately trying to make up for lost time! We finally got rid of it by having it released on the other side of town and so far it hasn't returned.

DR H.T. LAYCOCK, 39 Armstrong Drive, 3201 PIETERMARTITZBURG.

MIST-NETTING AT SUNSET

H. T. Laycock.

When nets are put up early in the morning, and are visited at intervals throughout the day by a group of ringers who remove and process the birds that happen to get caught, the whole process can be most leisurely. By contrast, catching birds that roost in large flocks in a reedbed, which means catching them from just before to just after sunset, can vary between the disappointing and the overwhelming. Catching absolutely nothing when you have asked several friends to come along and help can be so embarrassing that I now usually work alone. On the other hand you may catch a lot of the birds you want and even more of the ones you don't and find yourself disentangling your victims by torch light long after night has set in. This note is meant to offer ideas that have occurred to me to others who may encounter the same problems.

I only use one net at a time. Once when I put up two nets in a reed bed a few of the species I wanted were caught in one net and a lot that I did not want in the other. It was quite dark by the time I got them all disentangled and the nets were in such a muddle that straightening them was a long and exasperating business.