



BUILDING AND OPERATING A DECOY TRAP FOR  
LIVE-CAPTURING COWBIRDS AND OTHER BIRDS

AC 211

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The decoy trap (so-called because 5 to 10 birds of the target species are left in the trap at all times to attract other birds) described in this leaflet has been used effectively to remove local populations of cowbirds. Larger versions of the decoy trap have been used to capture large numbers of blackbirds and starlings at concentration sites. Other species of songbirds may also enter a decoy trap; thereby making it useful for banding purposes. A portable version (6 X 8') has been useful in protecting fruit orchards from local populations of starlings.

The cowbird decoy trap was designed in panels to facilitate assembly in the field and transfer from site to site. Sixteen by sixteen feet was selected because it is of significant size to accommodate large numbers of birds without crowding, and is at the same time comparatively inexpensive (a material cost of about \$125).

The cowbird decoy trap pictured in this leaflet is constructed of 2 X 2" rough cut lumber. If finished lumber is used, the pieces should be cut to conform with the outside dimension shown for each panel. The panels are covered with one-inch mesh chicken wire. The side panels are arranged as indicated in Figure 1, and the top panels are arranged as indicated in Figure 2. The panels are placed with the chicken wire to the outside. Figures 3 through 7 show the detail of each type of panel. P 1 and P 2 are similar, except P 2 is two inches shorter in length because the two end panels (P 2) fit inside the side panels (P 1).

The two front end panels (P 3 & P 4) have the same outside dimensions as the back end panels (P 2), but are modified to include a doorway (P 3) and provide an opening for the addition of a collecting cage (P 4).

ASSEMBLY

The panels are nailed together as shown in Figure 1, using duplex or scaffolding nails if they are to be taken apart frequently (Figure 8). The center support beam is then placed as shown in Figure 1 (a 2 X 4" post is used to support the center of the beam), and the top panels (P 5) are located and nailed in place as shown in Figure 2. One top panel (P 5), as indicated in Figure 2, is modified as an entrance for the birds. To do this, the corner braces are removed and the chicken wire in the panel is split (36 to 42") down the middle from the end nearer the center of the trap. The length of the cut is determined by the width of the 2 X 2" welded wire to be used as the bird entrance. The chicken wire is cut back to the edge of the panel at each end of the original cut so that the wire hangs down about 22" on each side of the opening. Additional pieces of one-inch chicken wire are fastened at each end of the opening to form an inverted cage hanging down into the trap. The 2 X 2" welded wire, cut to the size of the opening, is fastened to the bottom of this inverted cage. Care should be taken to make sure the welded wire is fastened flush with the bottom of the inverted cage so that birds inside the trap have nothing on which to perch inside the bird entrance or inverted cage.

A "corralling" baffle, as indicated in Figure 1, is constructed by fastening a piece of 6-foot chicken wire (1" mesh) 12' long to panel 4 and to a 2 X 2" post, as indicated in Figure 1. The wire is then fastened to the top panels and pegged to the ground as needed. This baffle is necessary to funnel birds into one corner and then into a small collecting cage. A piece of chicken wire extending from the bottom of the collecting cage opening to the ground 3 to 4 feet from the front of the trap and fastened to the side panel and the baffle will also help funnel the birds up to the exit.

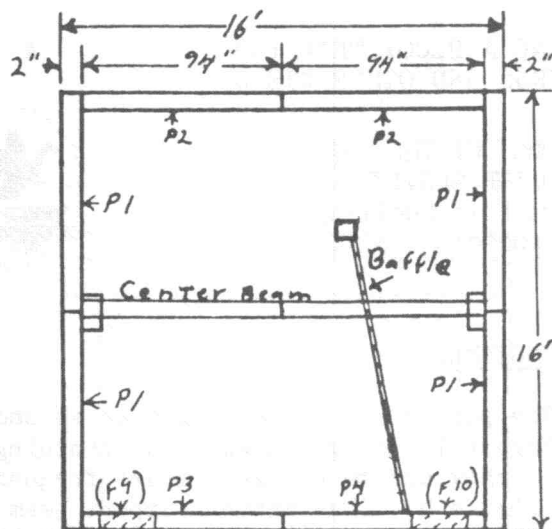


FIGURE 1 - Top view showing location of side panels, top support beam, and baffle.

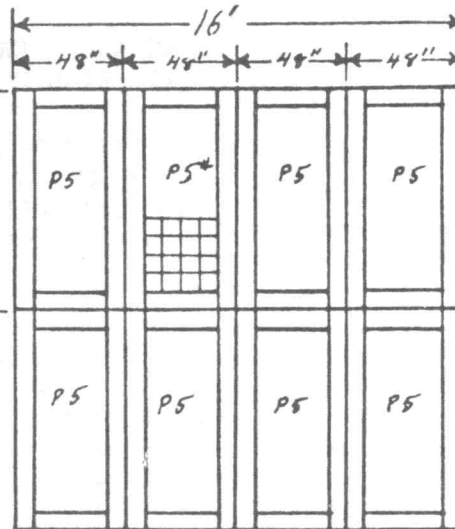


FIGURE 2 - Top view of top or roof panels and location of bird entrance.

A horizontal strip of wire mesh about 18" wide should be placed on the ground and fastened to the bottom of the trap on the outside to prevent predators from digging into the trap.

Figure 9 shows details for an entrance door for panel 3. A button type latch or hook and eye can be installed on the door frame. A screen door spring should be installed on the door to insure that the door remains closed while a worker is in the trap. Details for constructing a frame for a sliding door to close the trap opening when the collecting cage is removed are shown in Figure 10. The door is made of 18 gauge sheet metal, measuring 17 X 20". The frame shown in Figure 10 is nailed over the opening in panel 4.

#### REMOVAL OF BIRDS

A small collecting cage can be constructed and attached permanently to the trap or, if several traps are operated, the cage can be fixed to hang over the exit so that it can be moved from trap to trap. The holding cage should have two openings; one to match the trap opening covered with a sliding door, and a smaller one to allow removal of individual birds. Birds enter an open wire type cage more readily than an enclosed wooded or metal one. The collecting cage

need only be large enough to match the trap opening (20 X 20 X 24"). The birds are driven into the collecting cage from the trap. They are then released (in the case of non-target birds), banded, or placed in a plastic bag to facilitate gassing by gasoline engine exhaust.

#### OPERATION

The trap is baited with an attractive food item or items utilized by the species of bird to be taken. Sunflower seeds have been found to be an ideal bait to attract and sustain cowbirds. The bait and fresh water should be placed directly beneath the bird entrance. In many cases, the fresh water is as important an attractant as the food material. Once the trap is operational, several birds of the species to be taken should be left in the trap to attract others. If decoys are not available when trapping is about to begin, they frequently can be obtained by baiting the trap attractively as suggested above.

Selection of the site upon which the trap is to be constructed is important. The habits of the bird species to be caught should also be considered. Generally, the trap should be in the open near a wooded area or tall trees frequented by loafing or feeding birds. The trap should be tended each day, and all non-target birds released immediately.

A decoy trap can be used to protect fruit crops, to capture birds for banding or other studies, or to remove birds causing damage of various kinds. All trap operators must be familiar with State and

Federal laws protecting birds, and be properly authorized to trap as required by such agencies. Most species of birds are protected by Federal and State laws.

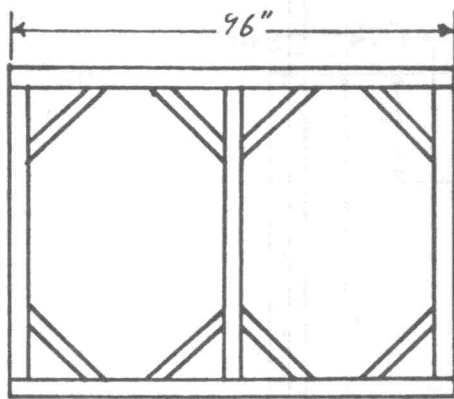


FIGURE 3 - Side panel (P 1) showing outside dimensions.

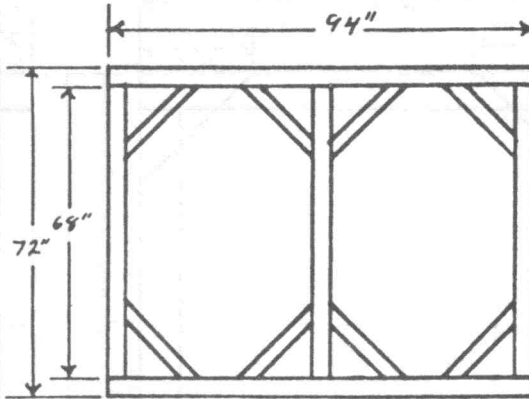


FIGURE 4 - End panel (P 2) showing outside dimensions.

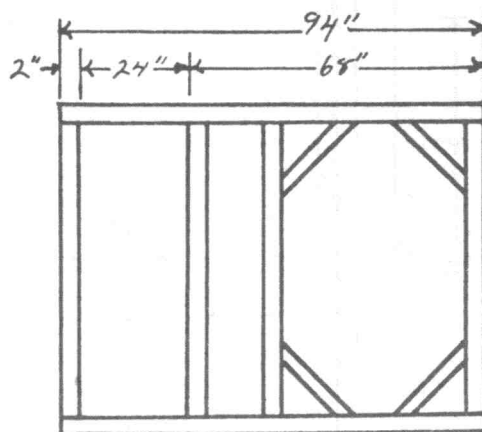


FIGURE 5 - End panel (P 3).

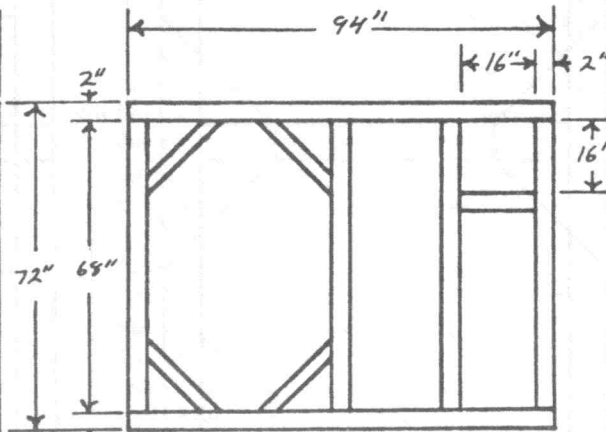


FIGURE 6 - End panel (P 4).

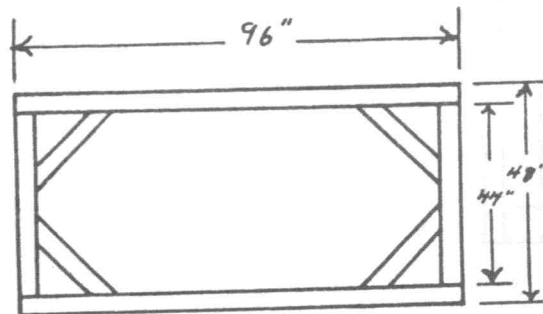


FIGURE 7 - Top panel (P 5).

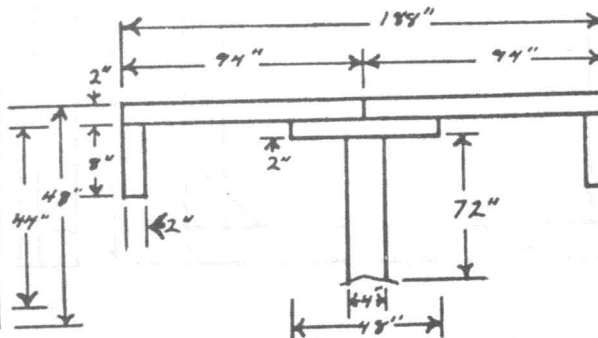


FIGURE 8 - Center support beam showing detail and dimension. The 2 X 4 X 8" blocks at each end of the beam are nailed over the joint of the two side panels so the top of the beam is flush with the top of the side panels.

