

Duck-trapping methods

MISS E. A. GARDEN

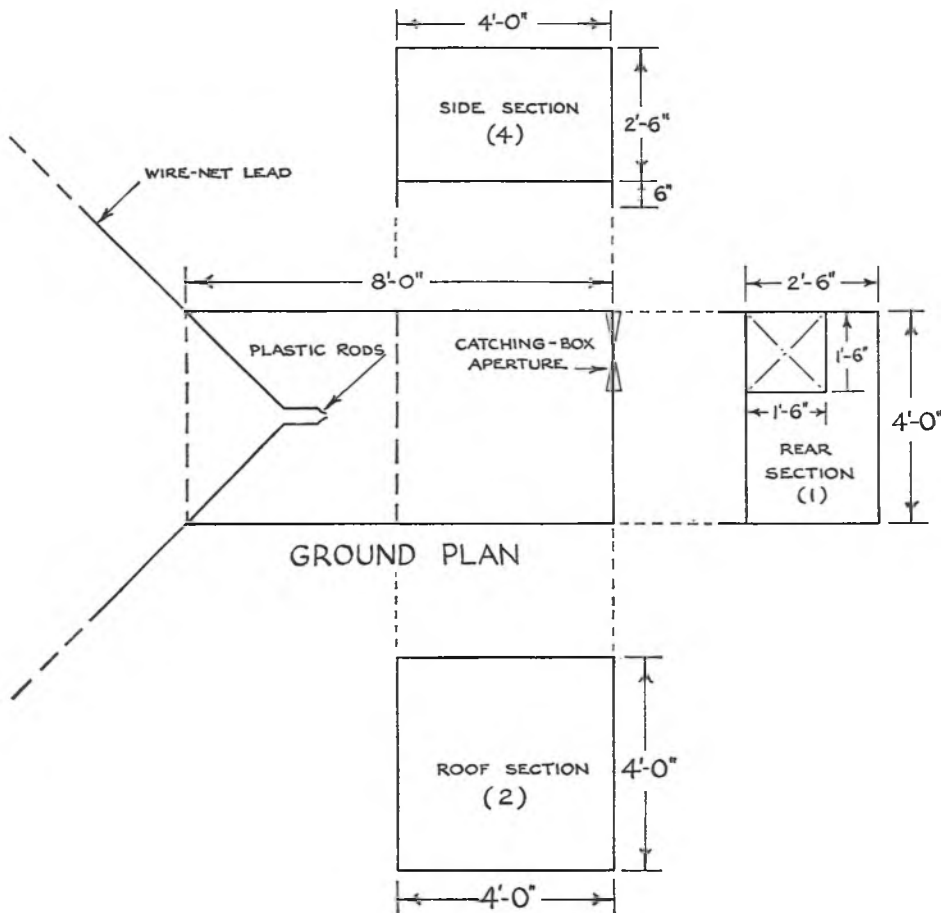
Introduction

Under the conditions prevailing on the Ythan estuary, Aberdeenshire and on the local lochs, 'Abberton' cage-traps (described by Major General C. B. Wainweight in *Wildfowl Trust 8th Annual Report*: 44-47, 1957) have not proved very successful for catching ducks. This has led to various modifications and new designs being tried in the course of the last six years. Three patterns found successful in the prevailing conditions are described here. All traps must be sited on feeding grounds and not in roosting areas.

The 'Garden' trap

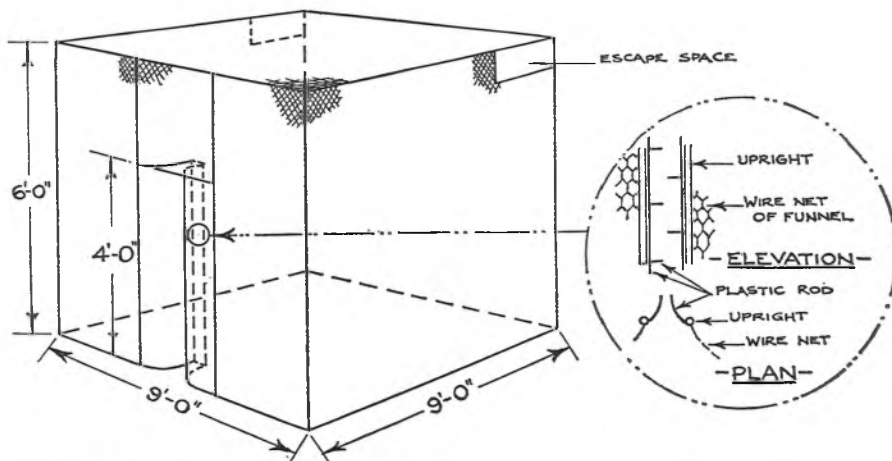
A small, portable trap for use on fresh waters. The dimensions of this trap are shown in Figure 1. The funnel entrance should either face dry land or be parallel to it as ducks swim towards deeper water once they are in the trap and so tend to find

their way out of funnels facing offshore. Guide wires or leads, consisting of 10-12 ft. lengths of wire netting 24-30 ins. high attached to the outer corners of the traps and angled outwards at about 45° are effective. A small catching box at one corner is essential.



GARDEN'S PORTABLE TRAP

Figure 1. Plan and dimensions of a small, portable duck-trap.



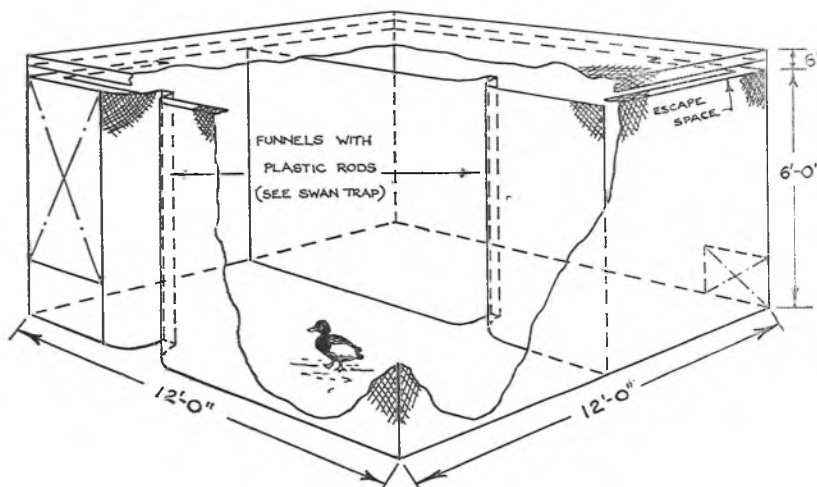
SWAN TRAP

Figure 2. A trap for ducks and swans which can be used in tidal water.

The Swan trap

For use on tidal water, to catch sea and diving-ducks and swans (Figure 2). Traps 9 ft. square and 6 ft. high, with a single funnel at least 4 ft. high, will catch both eiders and swans. The funnel should be about 3 ft. deep, with an entrance 9-12 ins. wide. The trap should be set with the entrance facing shorewards, well below the high tide line. Ducks seem more inclined to enter the trap when it is sited so as to become almost wholly immersed at high tide than when only part of the trap floor is then under water. On the Ythan the trap is set about 25

yds. below high water mark and floods to well over 3 ft. It is, of course, necessary to allow for the possibility of unexpectedly high tides by providing an escape device. A gap of about 1 ft. should be left between the tops of the netting walls and the roof of the trap. Experience has shown that in windy conditions the smaller diving ducks, such as Goldeneye, will climb the wire and scramble out through the gap. This can be prevented by fitting a 6 in. baffle strip of netting pointing inwards at the top of the wall. To prevent waders and other non-swimming birds from being drowned the bottom



MODIFIED ABBERTON TRAP

Figure 3. Modifications of the 'Abberton' trap for use in tidal water.

of the walls should be made of 3 in. chain-link netting, through which they can escape.

This type of trap has caught Eider, Mute and Whooper Swans, Tufted Duck, Scaup, Goldeneye, Mallard and a Pochard.

Goldeneye are extremely difficult to retain in a trap for any length of time. Plastic rods, of $\frac{1}{8}$ in. diameter, protruding at an angle into the funnel (see sketch) greatly decrease the proportion of escapes. These rods are also valuable in the other types of traps described here.

The Ythan-Abberton trap (Figure 3)

The basic 12 ft. Abberton trap has been modified to catch Tufted Duck, Scaup and Goldeneye in the estuary. The major

changes are: (1) elimination of all funnels except those pointing landwards; (2) bisection of the trap with an internal wall parallel to the entrance side, this wall being provided with one funnel not directly opposite the outer entrance; (3) provision of an escape space, as in the Swan trap.

Bait

In Aberdeenshire by far the most effective bait for all traps is barley, with wheat as second choice.

Acknowledgements

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Shelduck trapping methods

COLIN YOUNG

On the Ythan estuary in Aberdeenshire, Common Shelducks (*Tadorna tadorna* (L.)) are trapped for ringing in a specially designed baited trap as they return from the wintering grounds in the early spring. During the last two years over 200 Shelducks have been successfully ringed in this area. The techniques used in trapping Shelducks are slightly different from the usual duck trapping methods. In the first place, Shelducks are usually found in large numbers only on tidal water so that special 'anti-drowning' modifications are required on the traps; and secondly, the extreme wariness of the birds makes it necessary to work well out on the tidal mud flats, often in extreme current and ice conditions.

On the Ythan the trap is situated near the outer edge of a very broad mud flat (Sleek of Tarty) where it has to withstand complete submergence in 13 ft. tides and,

as was the case during the recent severe winters, the ravages of ice floes. The actual position of the trap is extremely important. It must be placed where the birds congregate naturally to feed but preferably not in a spot which will ultimately be occupied as a feeding territory.

The trap itself is illustrated in the accompanying diagram. The special features are: the extra wide outer funnel (Shelducks abhor narrow funnels), the chain link mesh on the inner chamber which prevents the Shelducks from damaging their bills and also allows the smaller waders to escape, and most important of all, the 'anti-drowning' modification in the roof. The last feature prevents the birds from flying out but does provide an emergency escape hatch in the event of very high tides. Barley is used as bait.