

A portable duck trap

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If you have access to property with dams or lakes that have a variety of waterfowl, this trap could provide you with a new and effective way of catching more species throughout the year, particularly during the dry season when food becomes less abundant.

The design (Figs 1&2)

The design is based on the 'Abberton Duck Trap' and although somewhat smaller it is capable of catching good numbers of duck, coot, moorhen, waders and rails. The design is a simple box structure up to 2×2 m across and 1 m high with one or two entrance funnels, is lightweight and inexpensive to build. The trap can be taken in any vehicle, assembled in 30 minutes and can catch during the day or night if left for 6 to 12 hours.

The $2 \times 2 \times 1$ m size will suit most conditions, but smaller box sizes of $1.5 \times 1.5 \times 1$ m will also work and all can be rolled up (including the funnel) fitting into most car boots. The design is an all-plastic framework consisting of 1 m and 2 m lengths of 20 mm diameter PVC electrical conduit with

20 mm junction boxes for the corners and uprights. There are only two 2 m lengths, one for the roof and one for the base, acting as struts bracing each side across the top and bottom giving rigidity. The rest of the frame is made of 1 m sections, forming the box, all joined by the junction boxes. There are therefore 8 upright, 8 top and 8 bottom 1 m sections. There is no need for a base as long as there are no gaps. The 2×2 m roof should be covered with shade cloth. The walls are made of 30 mm plastic garden trellis, which is far kinder on trapped birds than wire mesh for obvious reasons. An 8 m length is needed for all the sides, with an extra bit needed for the funnel (the material comes in a 1 m width off the roll from most hardware shops). It is then attached to the framework with cable ties. The entrance funnels are also made of trellis mesh and are made in an arch 150–180 mm diameter high tapering down to 80–100 mm inside with a gap above the water surface. The idea is for the entering bird to see the gap and push forwards to the waiting bait inside. Birds as large as Egyptian Geese will push through this gap just to get to the bait inside the trap. It is only necessary to have one funnel, but a smaller one can be made on the dry land side for waders and others.

Once the trap has been erected, it is staked down with stout metal tent pegs or reinforcing metal, making sure there are no gaps.

Taking a catch

Once the trap has been positioned and baited in the afternoon or morning, it is left for 6–12 hours depending on the density of birds present. If there are hundreds of loafing coots, then a check can be made after a few hours to make sure the trap is



Fig. 1. Photograph showing the design and use of the portable duck trap

not congested. It is a good idea to be able to check the trap from a distance with binoculars to avoid scattering birds that have just found the bait.

When it is decided to empty the trap, it should be approached swiftly and the cable ties cut from one corner holding the shade-cloth roof to allow the catcher to enter the trap and close it again (a door can also be made by the more enterprising ringers!). A landing net can be used or birds can be caught by hand but one should be careful with the latter technique as coots are fearsome beasts when roused. Birds are passed out to a fellow ringer to be put into large sacks with secured tops.

Waterfowl can be kept for up to an hour in cool conditions and once ringed should be released near to the trapping site. It is possible to catch ducks and coots, etc, ring them and catch them the next day in the same trap!

Guidelines

There are some very important guidelines to using the trap, which really amounts to common sense.

- It is important to make sure the trap is not found by vagrants (who could steal any caught birds or the entire trap), or predators such jackal and mongoose. The trap should preferably not be used in or near a public place. I have tried the trap with great success at Barberspan Nature Reserve in North-west Province where there were quite a few jackal and mongoose. The best use for this trap is over a weekend where its use does not attract predators over a longer period of time.
- The trap must not be left permanently unless it has a side removed rendering the trap useless or can be checked by someone on a regular (i.e. daily) basis.

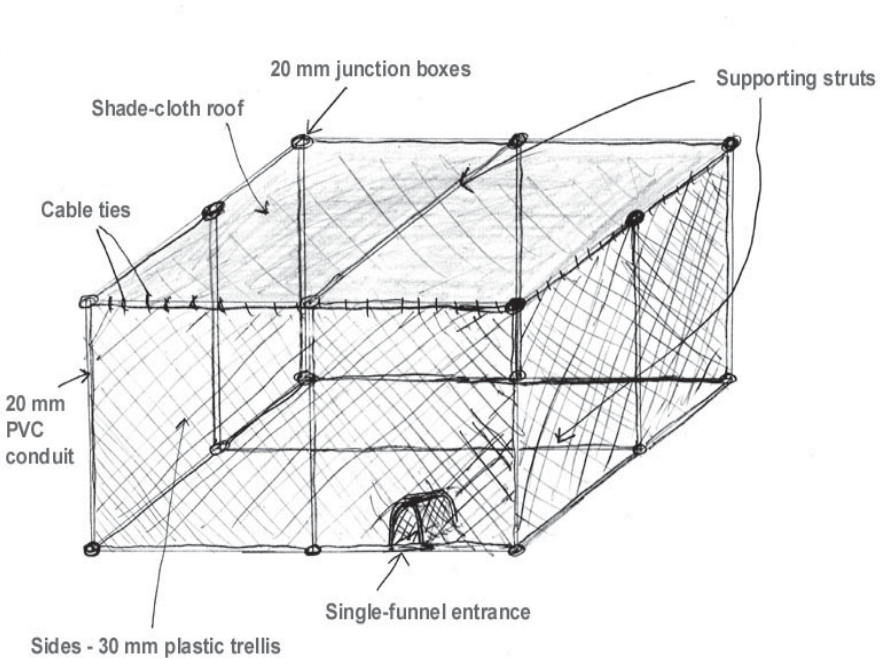


Fig. 2. Diagram showing specifications of the portable duck trap.

- The trap must not be placed where there is the potential of sudden rising water levels.
- The trap can be situated in among reeds where species such as Purple Swamphen, Allen's Gallinule, Common and Lesser Moorhen, Black Crake, African Jacana, small ducks and rails could be targeted. More exposed areas will catch coots, ducks and geese if the trap is placed in regular loafing areas.
- It is best erected in the margin along suitable waterbodies (i.e. half in and half out of the water), the deep end no more than 150mm. It should be baited with corn leaving an enticing trail from

the entrance funnel (which should be positioned in the water) to the middle of the trap. The bait is important as in cold weather enough corn will keep the trapped bird(s) occupied with feeding until the trap is checked. Apart from bait on the shore, some will float and this is how the majority of birds find the bait.

Acknowledgements

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