

HOW DO YOU CATCH YOUR BIRDS?

By Bob O'Grady

It was easy when I kept only parrots. Just take a large net into an uncluttered aviary, devoid of brush, hanging baskets or shrubs, shoo the large and relatively slow flying parrots into the open and place the net over the selected bird. Sure it might take a piece of you as you extracted it from the net, but it was at least quick and easy, if not always painless. Now that my fancy has taken me into the world of finches and softbills, it is an entirely different kettle of fish. The parrot net is too unwieldy for the confines of a planted finch aviary, the birds are a lot faster and being so small and delicate, they can be seriously damaged by a wire rimmed net that is swung like a tennis racquet in an effort to match their speed. No, if you have ever tried to net a Cuban, you will agree that a net is not the answer.

I read in an old magazine that some breeders use a drop trap. This is just a variation on the old shoebox that we all used as kids to try to catch sparrows. You prop the shoe box up on one side with a stick, put some bread crumbs inside, tie on a long piece of string and hide away, waiting for the bird to go for the fine feed. The sophisticated version uses a light wire bottomless box with a small hatch on the top for easier bird extraction and a bait of live food or seed heads. I am of the opinion that this was in fact a trick that Mum used to keep us quiet and out of the way during school holidays because I can't remember ever actually catching any sparrows this way and I have had no more success in the aviary. You may catch an odd bird if you are lucky, but it takes a long time and in my experience it's never the right bird and after the first drop they don't go near it again.

O.K., the next option is to put a bottom on the drop trap and convert one end into a funnel shape to make a funnel trap. This is a much less proactive system. Thereby the trap is baited with a tasty morsel and the birds, because they aren't as smart as us, enter through the funnel to eat the food and are unable to find their way out again. After leaving it for 15 to 30 minutes you return to find the designated bird waiting patiently for you to take it away. It sounds simple and it is, but:

- The bird you want may not enter the trap,

- Entering the aviary every 15 minutes to release unwanted trapped birds is very disruptive,
- If you leave it too long you can bet the first birds into the trap are feeding young and will be unable to return to their nest,
- And if you use it too often something will find the way out and soon they can all negotiate the funnel, they're smarter than they look!

My latest and most successful attempt is a seed trap. You build a cage about a half a metre square around the normal seed tray with a hatch for changing the seed and a doorway giving the birds free access to the seed when it's not being used as a trap, that can be closed from outside the aviary when the bird you want is inside the trap. This system actually works quite well, but there are a few tricks to it:

- Don't build the trap too big, you still need to catch the birds by hand:
- Set the trap door so that it falls open if anything triggers the catch when you are not there as you don't want your birds starving because they can't get to their food:
- You still need to be patient, as the right bird may not enter the trap for some time; but it will happen because they are used to entering the open trap many times during each day.

If you have any better ideas, different systems, improvements or interesting anecdotes about how you catch your birds I am sure the editor would love to hear from you. These systems aren't quick or easy but at least these birds won't take a bite out of me.

I must finish now because that Cuban has just gone under- the shoe box and I think I can get him this time.....