MIST-NETTING WADERS IN DAYLIGHT

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The author reports some interesting results obtained by setting mist nets for Waders in selected locations at Mt. Isa, Queensland, and at Vandelin Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Most banders have reported poor results from attempts to mist-net waders during daylight hours. Experience at Mount Isa has indicated that waders can be caught in quite large numbers in daylight if nets are set in suitable locations. Table I summarises the Mount Isa Group's results with waders for the summer of 1964-65.

Table 1

Waders caught by mist-net at Mt. Isa and Vandelin I., Summer, 1964-65.

R.A.O.U No.	Species	Number Caught Day Banded	Day Retrapped	Night Banded	Night Retrapped
132	Red-kneed Dotterel	80	34	6	2
134	Masked Plover	8(1)*	2	2	
139	Mongolian Dotterel	1(1)			
143	Red-capped Dotterel	18		5	
144	Black-fronted Dotterel	115	36	15	7
146	White-headed Stilt	4		4	
152	Black-tailed Godwit			2	
154	Wood Sandpiper	1			
157	Common Sandpiper	1			
158	Greenshank	2			
159	Marsh Sandpiper	1			
161	Curlew Sandpiper	3			
162	Red-necked Stint	3(1)		2	
	Longtoed Stint	1			
163	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	75	3	5	
165	Great Knot	1(1)		1(1)	
TOTALS		314(4)	75	42(1)	9

* Figures in parentheses refer to birds taken at Vandelin I.

Most of these birds were netted in the vicinity of the Leichhardt Dam, Mount Isa, but a few birds were caught on the beach at Vandelin Is., Sir Edward Pellew Group, Northern Territory. The best catch for the season was 70 in one afternoon using 8 nets. However, at one location using 3 or 4 nets in conjunction with our normal banding activities, we caught 15 to 20 waders almost every Sunday during October, November and December.

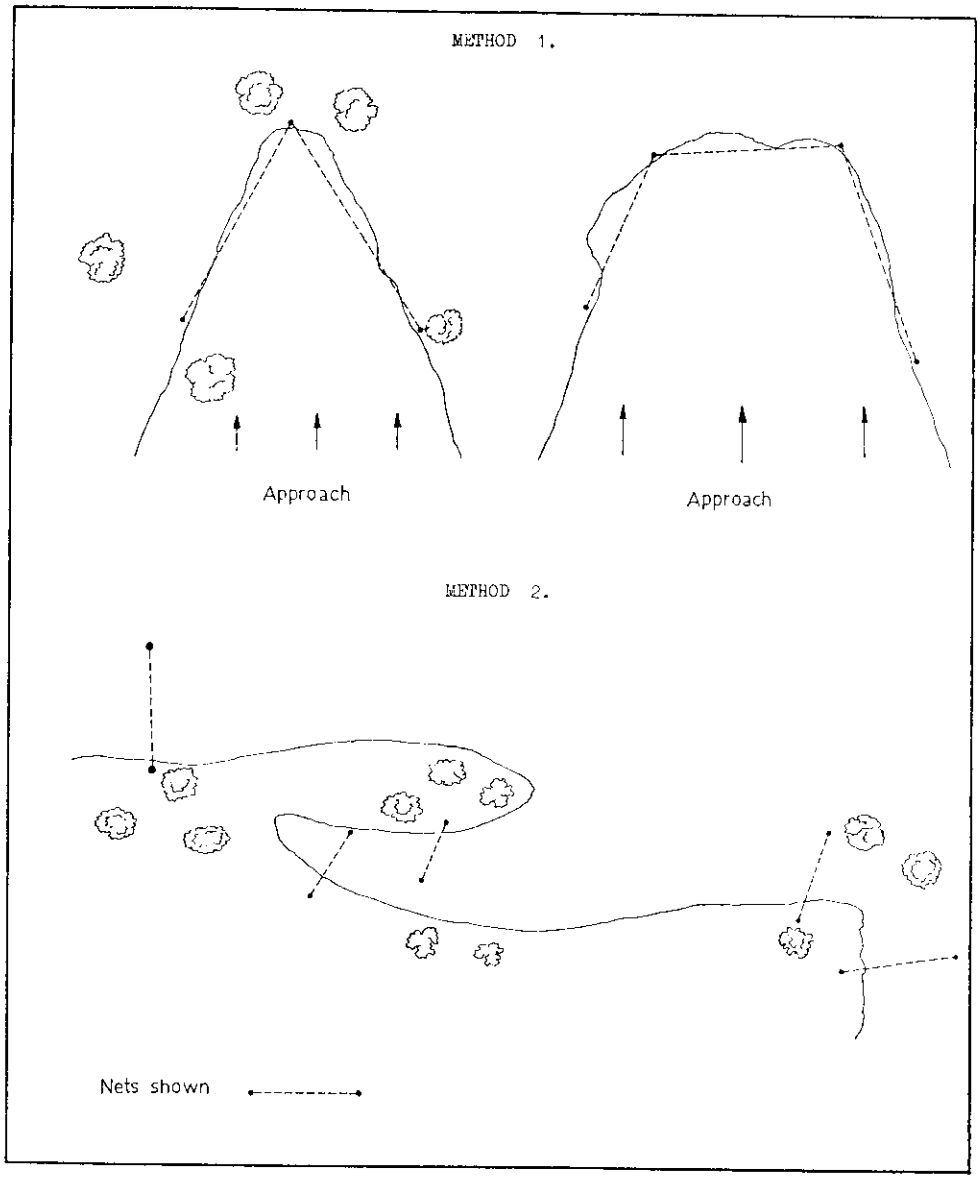
The most successful nets for daylight use are the standard 1¼in. mesh three-panel mist nets, though we also use the heavier 2½in. mesh two-panel wader nets. Nets of all length are used, but the shorter 30ft. and 40ft. nets are preferred in most locations because they are easier to set and have less tendency to sag into the water when a number of birds are caught.

Two behaviour characteristics of waders are the major factors in our success. Firstly, if approached slowly, waders can be driven towards and along the water's edge. Secondly, when flying from spot to spot they tend to fly low over the water parallel to and a few yards off the shore. When doing this their movements are often channeled into quite narrow flight paths by points, by sand spits or islands, or by bushes standing in the water off shore.

To take advantage of these behaviour characteristics we use two types of net settings. In the first we set two, three or four nets in a V or U at the end of a sand spit or mud flat. The bottom cord is run close to the ground. With this set the waders are allowed to accumulate on the spit or mud flat and are then slowly driven into the V or U. When they are inside they are startled into flight by rushing forward and clapping hands and throwing sticks. In their panic many fly straight into the nets.

In the second setting one or more nets are run out from the shore at favourable locations on points or across open spaces between the shore and islands, mud flats, or clumps of bushes. In this case the bottom cord is kept 12 to 18 inches above water level to prevent netted birds touching the water. The banders or helpers travel up and down the shore disturbing the birds and making them fly towards the trapping area. Both settings are equally successful in the day provided suitable locations can be found, but the second setting is more convenient and successful for night operations.

While most of our experience has been under tideless conditions around the Leichhardt Dam, I had the opportunity to test the techniques under coastal conditions during a short visit to Vandelin Island in November, 1964. Tides set major problems. For instance, an unexpectedly high tide one evening resulted in a sizable catch of sea weed plus two Long-Toms. However, I had some success with the U setting at or near high water mark in a small bay adjacent to the mangroves. I also caught two birds by setting a net on a point between two beaches. A rocky reef



between beaches, that is not quite covered by high water, would be ideal and should produce excellent results at night.

As well as waders, these types of settings can be expected to catch a variety of other birds. With the daylight nets we caught a few ducks, numerous rainbow birds, kingfishers, zebra finches and honeyeaters. With night nets we cought Caspian, Gull-billed and Marsh Terns, Silver Gulls, Teal, White-eyed Duck and Black Duck.

Because of the drought and the low level of the Leichhardt Dam, conditions are likely to be somewhat different next summer. However, provided that waders return, we expect to be able to repeat our success by adapting the techniques developed last year to meet these changed conditions. We believe also that banders elsewhere could successfully use these techniques wherever waders can be found in sufficient numbers.

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