

UNUSUAL ROOST SITE SELECTION AND STAGING BEHAVIOR OF BLACK-SHOULDERED KITES

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Communal night roosting in winter has been reported in the North American race of the Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus leucurus*) (Dixon et al. 1957; Bolander and Arnold 1965; Waian and Stendall 1970), as well as for the nominate race (*E. c. caeruleus*) (Cramp and Simmons 1980; Brown et al. 1982). Kites are almost always reported to roost in trees of various species, but Mendelsohn (1988) reported several accounts of kites roosting in reed beds in Africa. Kites coming in to roost usually stage in nearby trees, flying from tree to tree as they approach the roost site. Thus, it was with great interest that we observed over 100 Black-shouldered Kites forming a night roost in a field of sugar cane; many were staging by perching as a group on the ground in a nearby plowed field.

On 20 December 1987 in the late afternoon, we observed a handful of Black-shouldered Kites, all flying purposefully but individually, in the same direction. We followed to locate the presumed roosting area. The birds we followed joined others that were perched close together on the ground in a recently plowed field; the bunch appearing somewhat like a flock of gulls. We counted up to 32 individuals on the ground at one time. While observing these birds, another 30 to 35 flew up from a large (approx. 300 m × 500 m) sugar cane field directly behind us; the latter group milled around in the air for approximately 10 min, then gradually settled back in the cane field; sugar cane plants were 4-5 m in height. As darkness approached, ground-perching kites flew individually to positions above the sugar cane and dropped in, presumably to roost for the night. Just after sunset, most of the kites flew from the cane field and milled around in the air. At that time we estimated over 100 individuals; eventually all again settled back into the cane field. In the late afternoon of 25 December WSC returned to the area to further observe staging and roosting behavior. A maximum of 65 staging kites were perched on the ground at one time in the same area. As darkness approached, each flew into the sugar cane field and roosted as described above. Again, an estimate just before dark of milling kites was >100 individuals. The sugar cane field was located approximately 1 km northwest of the town of Madero, Texas, just north of the Mexican border and about 5 km from Bentsen State Park, where we first observed kites flying to the roost area.

Late in the afternoon of 28 December 1988 WSC followed 4 kites flying north from the Santa Ana National

Wildlife Refuge (approximately 30 km east of the roost area described above) for about 3 km to where each settled into a small (approximately 100 m × 300 m) sugar cane field. Several other kites were seen hovering nearby.

Donahue (Lasley 1986) reported a [night] roost of 79 kites in a [sugar] cane field on 30 December 1985 near the same area without comment; the only reference, to our knowledge, of Black-shouldered Kites roosting communally in anything other than trees in North America. However Bloom (pers. comm.) has several times seen approximately 30 birds roosting 1 m above the ground on dead artichoke thistle flower stalks in California. Groves of large trees were seen within sight of the sugar cane field; the lack of suitable trees can be ruled out as the reason for this choice of roost site.

The number of kites in most reported roosts is typically in the tens, with numbers over 100 rare (Bolander and Arnold (1965) counted 156, and Bloom (pers. comm.) counted 194, both in California). Cramp and Simmons (1980) mention that the usual number per roost for the nominate race is 10-20, sometimes up to 100, rarely 500. On this basis, our sugar cane night roost attracted a greater than usual number of kites. Further, staging behavior in the form of communal ground roosting has been not reported previously for Black-shouldered Kites.

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THE BARTOS TRAP: A NEW RAPTOR TRAP

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Many effective means of live trapping birds of prey are available, including bal-chatri [Berger, D. D. and H. C. Mueller. 1959. The Bal-Chatri: A trap for birds of prey. *Bird Banding* 30:18-26; Olsen, J. and P. Woollard. 1975. The use of the bal-chatri in banding. *Canberra Bird Notes* 3(4):8-9], noose carpet, mist net and dho-gazza (e.g., Beebe, F. L. and H. M. Webster. 1964. North American falconry

and hunting hawks. World Press, Colorado), Swedish Goshawk trap (e.g., Beebe and Webster 1964) and its derivatives, and "flip trap" [e.g., Cam-Hardy universal raptor trap, Cam. G. R. 1985. A universal raptor trap. *Corella* 9(2):55-58]. The most appropriate trap will depend upon target species and circumstances. Sometimes setting a variety of traps is useful to increase the chances

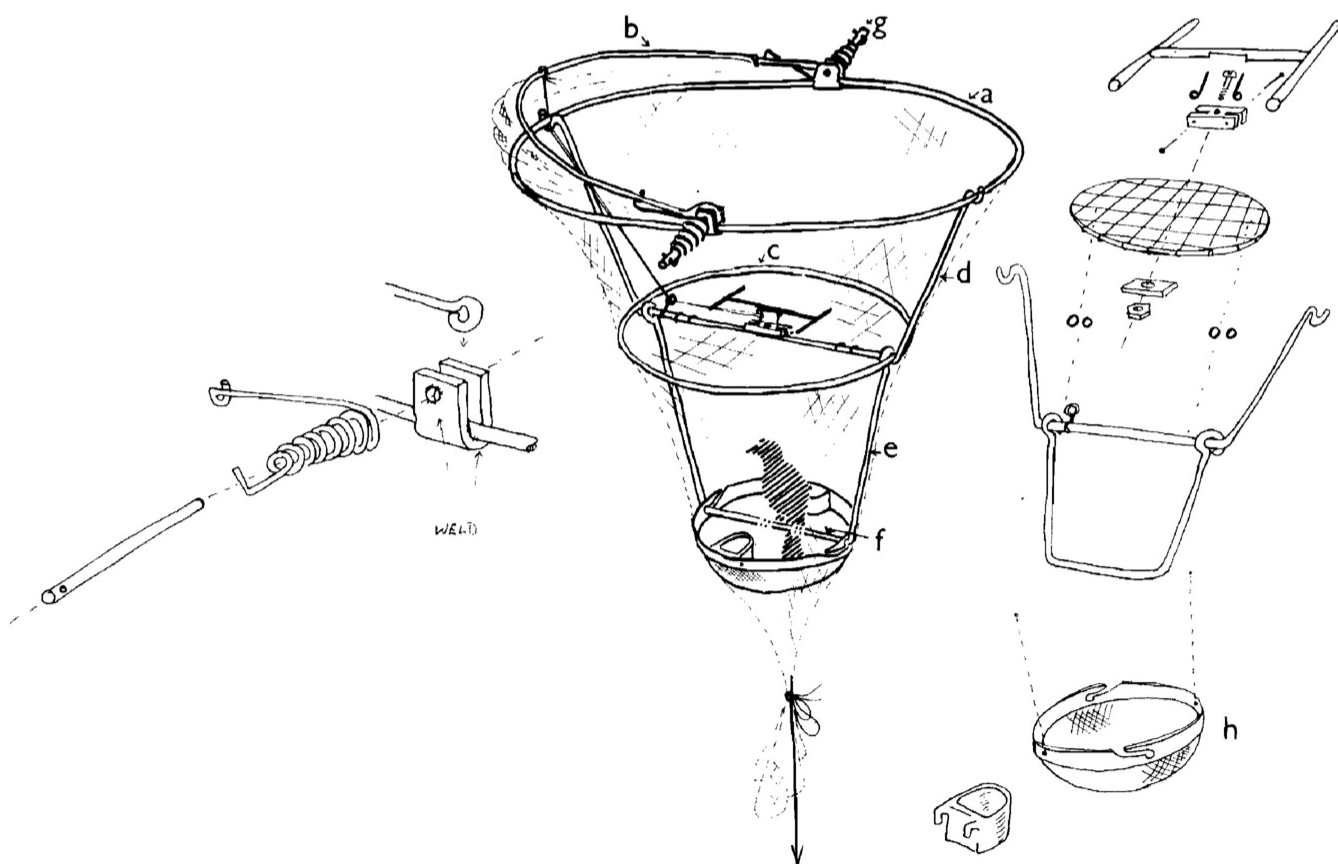


Figure 1. Assembly instructions for the Bartos Trap.



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