

Hawkin' Gear

Paul Hofsommer
Indianapolis, IN

The Art of Disguise



The squirreling, photo by Paul Hofsommer

Decisions, decisions. Which bait critter to use, the squirreling or the starbit?

In Indiana, most falconers take full advantage of our privilege to trap sub-adult (passage) raptors. Most of us go road trapping with BC's mainly because it's easy, convenient and a lot of fun. (I for one got tired of freezing my ass off sitting in a drafty blind with the 15-30 mile an hour wind blowing straight in my face, with no birds showing up for hours and sometimes days at a time.)

Upon stumbling on a great BC design a few years ago, (see Hawk Chalk, August 2000, pgs. 69-70, and California Hawking Club Journal 1998, pgs. 57-58) the next thing that left a whole lot to be desired was the bait.



A noose carpet for catching starlings, photo by Paul Hofsommer

Most pet shop creatures just don't cut the mustard, even if kept in the garage to acclimate them to the outside temperature. As soon as they are in the BC and exposed to the elements, they usually just huddle in the corner and don't move. So the next choice was something like a squirrel, chipmunk or bird.

I tried chipmunks, and they worked well the first or second time. But there is a reason that they are not extinct. They're not stupid! Once a hawk has landed on their head, they figure out real quick that it's in their best interest to freeze. That left birds, and starlings were on the top of the list. Cold weather doesn't seem to affect them, and they constantly move trying to escape. The ideal bait, right? Well not always. I have tossed quite a few starling loaded BC's under redtails before with the raptor barely glancing at the easy meal. Why? Most redtails know they can't catch small

birds.

Solution! Make the starling look like a rodent. Take a rabbit tail (the starbit) or part of a squirrel tail (the squirreling) and tie it onto the top of the starlings tail feathers. It's amazing how much movement you get out of this setup. My good trapping friend Joe Katterhenry and I put the squirreling to the test last fall and caught everything we threw the trap at, including a haggard redbill and a passage hen Coop.

To catch a starling in the winter, a funnel trap works well, but it has to be very cold outside. In the fall, there is too much food around for the birds to go into the trap, but a noose carpet works great. (2' x 2', 1/2" hardware cloth painted flat black with 4 lb, 1" diameter nooses tied on, as many as you want.) Drive around until you spot some starlings (go early in the morning) and toss some bread on the ground. When the birds start eating, bump them

and put your noose carpet down, loaded with small pieces of bread. Once you've caught one bird, the rest of the flock will leave, but one is all you need. You can also put the noose carpet in a water puddle where the birds are bathing.

So this fall get your favorite beverage (remember you still have to drive) and trapping buddy, fill up the truck, load up a few B.C.'s with either a squirreling or starbit and go have some fun. Hey, you might even catch something that has talons!



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