

USING DROP NETS TO CAPTURE FREE RANGING WILDLIFE

Tyler Gehr

Wildlife Capture Services LLC P.O. Box 334 Flagstaff, AZ 86002

info@wildlifecapture.com (928) 527-7972

Live capture of free ranging wildlife has always been a difficult but necessary component in population management, animal tracking, disease investigation, marking, and many other conservation practices. These capture efforts are costly and labor intensive. Several techniques have been developed to capture numerous animals at one time, minimizing the expense involved in these operations.

Drop nets have been used for over 30 years to capture various species of birds and mammals. They have become a preferred method of live capture for biologists and wildlife managers around the world due to their ease of use, relatively low cost and the ability to capture large groups of animals at the same time.

A drop net is simply a large net (up to 60'x60') that is suspended in the air over an established bait site. When the target animals walk under the net to feed, the net is dropped and the animals are quickly restrained by hand and removed from the net for processing. Ungulates can be hobbled and blindfolded for easier handling or loaded into a stock trailer for transport.

Creating an established bait/feed site is the key to successful and efficient drop netting. Once the animals are habitually feeding at the site regularly, the drop net is set up and the animals are allowed to feed normally for several days until they are comfortable feeding under the net. The net height should be between one and two meters higher than the animal's head. At this time the net is prepared for capture by attaching a 12 volt power supply, turning on the receiver and removing the locking pins from the corner magnets. An appropriately sized handling crew is readied in a hiding location approximately 100 meters or less from the net.

Drop nets are highly portable and can be set up by one person. Different net and mesh sizes are available to capture different species. Nets of the same size are interchangeable so different sized species can be targeted with the same drop net system. Net height is adjustable. The number of animals that can be captured at any one time varies by species. The most popular size (40'x40') will capture up to 15 white-tailed deer. The 60'x60' size has been used to capture as many as 26 rocky mountain bighorn sheep. Be sure to have the appropriate sized handling crew before dropping the net.

Wildlife Capture Services (WCS) manufactures commercially available drop nets that operate on a completely silent electromagnetic system that is controlled by wireless remote. These nets have



Fig. 1: Wild Turkey caught in a WCS Drop Net.

been sold around the world for over 8 years to capture various bird species and ungulates weighing up to 600 pounds. Complete drop net systems can be shipped internationally and arrive in four parcels. These systems include everything needed to live capture animals except a 12 volt power supply. WCS recommends purchasing a high quality deep cycle marine battery. These batteries will power the drop net system for up to 20 hours between charges. An instructional video is included with each system and can be viewed on their website:

http://wildlifecapture.com/drop_net.html



Fig. 2: Drop Nets are used to capture a wide variety of animals such as this Bighorn sheep.



Fig. 3: After processing, animals are released without the side-effects of chemical immobilization. There are no lasting physiological effects or post capture myopathy.