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Trapping and handling owls

Other methods of studying owls include telemetry and colour-marking adults. First, you need to trap an owl, and this can be difficult. Some researchers broadcast taped playback of their calls to lure owls into standing nets. This does not work very well with Southern Boobooks, but it does work with Moreporks in New Zealand, and Powerful Owls. See Stephenson (1998) and Soderquist and Gibbons (2007) for details on how to use this method. Below are some examples of other trapping methods commonly used.

Bal-cha-tri and 'flip-traps'

We carried a 'flip-trap' into the field, a sort of automatic bow net (see Colour Plate 8) to catch an adult Boobook feeding a single fledged young. The trap contained a live mouse. Three principles are at work here: (1) owls catch prey with their feet, not their beaks, (2) an owl will see the wire mesh protecting the mouse as dense cover they can crash through, (3) nothing gets hurt, including the mouse or the sparrow used to lure a raptor into a trap.

If an owl attacks the mouse, and hits the trigger-plate on top, a spring-loaded net swings over and entangles the owl. We rush in and grab the owl before it untangles itself and escapes.

Another trap, the bal-cha-tri, a traditional trap used in India, uses similar principles. Nooses on top snare a raptor's feet if the raptor attacks the mouse. The owl 'thinks' it can get through the wire mesh and carry off the mouse, but the trap