

Grackle Bownet Trap Deployment Protocol

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Materials

- Our 5ft (1.5m) diameter bownet with remote control was purchased from Mike's Falconry Supply:
<https://www.mikesfalconry.com/CUSTOM-5-FOOT-DIAMETER-MANUAL-BOWNET-TRAP-p/bn.htm>. *NOTE:* Only use the remote control to deploy the bownet so no string is involved in triggering it and, thus, hand cues can be avoided.
- Our training data sheet, training checklist, and a poster presentation are available at <https://gitlab.com/corinalogan/the-grackle-project/blob/master/README.md>

Prepare the bownet to use for trapping

- Wrap the tubing (on the half of the circle that moves) with dark-colored pipe foam

Training a new person on the bownet

- **WHO can train:** Staff who have completed this training can supervise the training of new people
- **Document trainings:** Establish a record of competency. Document the dates and times of training for each person and write notes on what was learned, what they still need to work on, and when their skill has improved to the level where all team members are confident that the trainee is proficient.
 - *NOTE:* if someone hasn't deployed the trap in the field for 3 months, refresh training as needed, either by having them deploy the bownet with no birds present, or by having them observe during trapping.
- Follow this protocol **WITHOUT** any birds present until all team members are comfortable that the team member in training is proficient in the method. Use Canela, the taxidermic grackle, to mimic grackle placement in the trapping area and practice making decisions about when to deploy the bownet. Trapping is a skill, which means it must be learned.
- Before attempting to catch grackles, each trainee must be trained on:
 - Bownet setup and take down
 - Correct position of the food bowl within bownet
 - Ideal placement of bownet in trapping location, and position of the trapper

- Ideal positioning of bird at the bowl within the bownet for trapping
 - Triggering the bownet from a distance while looking through binoculars
 - Independently extracting the grackle from the triggered bownet
- Once a trainee passes the first step of training in the absence of grackles, they must then observe a trained staff member deploy the trap to catch a grackle
- Subsequently, the trainee must deploy the trap in the field under the supervision of a trained deployer for at least two trapping sessions in which the trap was deployed. The trainer must approve their field proficiency before they are allowed to trap without supervision.

Setting up the bownet

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to set up the bownet (in laminated folder). Ensure that the stabilizing stakes do not touch irrigation lines (look for external sprinkler heads to figure out where the lines are).
- Tie the two arms of the bownet together with the black string included in the stake bag until you are finished with setup (Figure 1).
- Place the food bowl in the center of the inside curve of the bownet such that the near edge of the bowl is within 2in / 5cm of the bow. The far edge of the bowl should not be more than 6in / 15cm away from the bow.
- Push the netting up against the bow to make it more discreet. Be sure to keep netting away from the bow hinges. Leave gaps between the netting and 1) the metal stakeholder, 2) the trigger box hook, and 3) the food bowl (see Figure 2).
- Flip the switch on the remote trigger box to the ON position. Attach trigger box to bownet, making sure the pin is inserted into top hole (see manufacturer instructions in laminated folder on cart). Insert pin far enough through the hole so that the bownet does not deploy on its own, but not so far that it doesn't retract enough to deploy (~0.5in / 5mm of pin extending past the hole should work).
- Fully extend remote's antenna and put the remote in the ON position.
- Test that the remote trigger is functional (i.e., batteries and trigger box are working) without deploying the bownet before every trapping attempt. The bownet will be non-functional for testing because the bows are loosely tied together with string (Figure 1). Press the remote trigger (hold down the gray button) and make sure the pin fully retracts. Trigger the remote at least 2 times. If the pin does not move, or if it moves slightly but not enough to deploy the bownet, replace the batteries and test again.
 - Make sure no grackles are present during this testing to avoid drawing attention to the bownet.
 - Test the remote trigger every 30min-1hr to ensure it is still working.



Figure 1. White string is loosely, but securely tied around the bows to hold them together during testing of the remote trigger and triggerbox batteries.

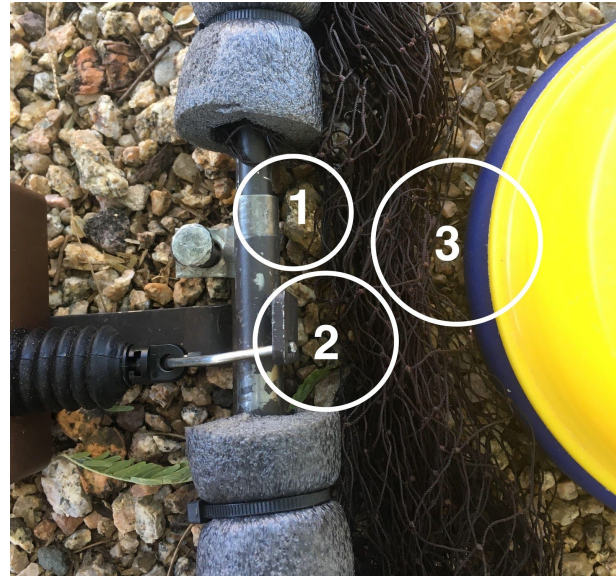


Figure 2. Placement of the food bowl in relation to the bow and the net.

How to trap a grackle with the bownet: When to deploy using the remote

- The trapper should sit with a perpendicular view of the bow so it is 100% clear when the bird is in the correct trapping position. Use the foam piping as a visual cue to determine the bird's position: If the bird's feet are blocked by the foam, then it is too close to either side of the bow and needs to move to a more central location to safely be trapped.
- To avoid a bird being able to try to fly out of the bownet area before the net is fully closed (which means it could get injured by the rim of the net), **ensure:**
 - The bird is facing the bow and eating from the bowl with its head down. Make sure the feet/legs are no more than 1in / 2.5cm from the bowl (Figure 3).
 - Only trigger the net if there is a maximum of 1 bird in the correct position and no other birds are inside the bownet area. When other birds are in the trapping area, it is difficult to keep them safe if the net is deployed.
 - Grackles tend to be jumpy the closer they get to the net, be patient if they jump back and forth. Wait until they are stationary for at least 2 seconds before deploying the trigger.
 - There are no birds in the net area outside of the curve of the bow (e.g., in the middle of the net area) because they can fly about $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ of the distance of the net area between the time of deployment and the closing of the net.

- There are no birds within 3ft / 0.9m of the outside of the bownet area or the bow's trajectory that might get caught in the closing net
- If possible, a second person will be on the lookout for other grackles in the area. This person will let the trapper know if there are any grackles that can see the bownet and whether it is safe to deploy the trap (i.e., are they far enough away for the trap to be deployed).



Figure 3. Canela, the taxidermic grackle, demonstrates the correct position for a bird to be safely trapped.

In case of emergency, call the vet

In the event of a bird getting hit by the tubing of the bownet, one team member removes it from the net (if possible and if it does not exasperate the bird's condition) and holds it in the hand or puts it in a cat carrier, while another team member immediately calls the veterinarian. Consult with the veterinarian about any observable injuries and discuss whether to euthanize it, bring it into aviaries for rehabilitation, or release it. Before making a final decision with the vet, wait for a period of time (unsure of how long - 15 min? Discuss with the vet on the phone) and watch the bird to determine which symptoms are due to shock (in which case, they will pass), and which are due to an injury.