

Netting *Rhynchocyon*

The nets I used to capture *Rhynchocyon chrysopygus* in the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest of coastal Kenya were modified fishing nets made of multi-filament nylon (twine = 210D/Z/6) with a 3-inch stretch mesh and coloured light brown. They were 26 mesh deep and 50 yards long. The manufacturer was Double Fish Brand, Peoples Republic of China. Although mono-filament nylon may be less visible, it is likely to cut entangled sengis. To reduce net visibility, I recommend using dark tones of brown, gray, green, or blue. I also recommend that light coloured clothing be avoided to reduce visibility.

Each net had to be prepared by stringing a line through the mesh at the top and bottom, so that it could be anchored and hung. This line was also multi-filament (soft) nylon, dark (black), and about double or triple the diameter of the net twine. The ends of the top and bottom lines were each tied into a loop so that they could easily be identified while the net was stored. The loops were also used to anchor the ends of the net to a bush or tree.

I strung one or more nets end-to-end vertically along the forest floor so that about 1/4 or 1/3 of the net was loose on the floor of the forest, and the rest formed a vertical panel about waist high (*ca.* 1 meter). The nets were suspended by the top line from bushes, branches, and small sapling stakes pushed into the ground. Generally, nets were strung along existing trails through the forest, but rudimentary and quickly cleared paths were also made. In all cases, the nets worked best if they were strung loosely with little or no vegetation near the base that would foul the netting and entangled sengis when they thrashed around.

I often left nets set for several days, but when not tended I lifted or collapsed them so nothing would be caught. I did not open the nets at night because sengis were not active after dark and at night I often caught small antelopes, which often ruined the net. When open, it is critical to check nets every 1-3 hours. If left in the nets for longer periods of time, sengis can wind themselves up quite tightly and brake their rear legs and grind soil into their eyes. Also, there are always predators that would be pleased to find a sengi already captured for them. It is very important to check the nets frequently.

Sengis became entangled in the nets when they encounter them in their normal activities. They normally did not try to walk along a net and they rarely turned around and backtracked away from a net. Instead, they attempted to bully their way through the net, and became entangled. It is also possible to gently herd a sengi into a standing net by cautiously walking an animal towards a net and then at the last minute frightening it so that it bolts into the net. When sengis hit a net at full run, they sometimes bounce out, but they usually will make further attempt to pass through the net and eventually become entangled. It is also possible to set a long series of nets end-to-end and then with the help of a dozen or so assistants, loudly drive animals into the nets. Although sometimes effective, this technique is disruptive and crude and can result in numerous non-target creatures being captured. I recommend patience.

Nets are easily stored in small cloth sacks or pillow cases (they will not dry in plastic bags if they become wet). Sengis do not bite or chew, so they are also best kept in sacks, in this case breathable cotton. When handling sengis, be careful with their rear legs because they are strong and capable of inflicting scratches that easily become infected. When in-hand, sengis tend to become docile and then burst into a fit of thrashing; they are easily lost if one is not prepared. However, their legs are long and thin and easily broken if handled too roughly. I suggest that one hand be used to hold the animal carefully around the neck, while the other hand be used to hold the animal by the rear legs.

A bush-wise local resident can be hired to assist with netting sengis. This will allow more nets to be set and monitored and save a lot of time that can be used to carry out other observations. Be careful, however, to maintain complete control of all nets or they might be used to capture all kinds of critters for the food pot.

Nets similar to those described above can be obtained from the Nylon Net Company, PO Box 592, 615 East Bodley, Memphis, TN 38101. Toll free 1-800-238-7529. Internet: <http://www.nylonnet.com/> They carry numerous nets, but I think the closest to what I used in Kenya is made of #277 nylon twine with 1 1/2-inch square or 3-inch stretch mesh with a ten-foot depth. This netting is sold by the pound (ca. 38 feet per pound). The color of the netting is white, but a brown dye can be purchased from Nylon Net. A slightly lighter (#208 twine with 2 7/8 inch mesh) version of the above is also available. In 2003, Andrew Perkins, David Ribble, and I purchased a bright blue fishing net in Pangani, Tanzania, nearly identical to those that I used in Kenya in the 1970s (except for colour). This net was made in China and was labeled "Double Selvage, 21D/18 twine, 3 inch mesh, 26 MD deep, and 50 yard length". The cost was about US\$15.00, I think.

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