

KILLER KICK NETS

by Konrad Schmidt, St. Paul, Minnesota

Kick nets, dip nets, or riffle nets are identical to an angler's landing net in construction and design except that they have a much finer mesh.

In streams, they are extremely effective on darters and other riffle species. The hoop is held stationary and flat on the bottom while rocks are kicked on the upstream side of the net. Undercut banks and submerged logs can be handled in a similar manner.

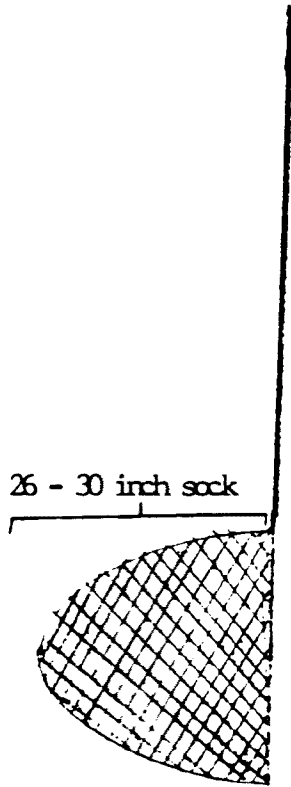
In pools, schools of fish can be herded by walking upstream with the net extended out to one side. As the school congregates at the upper end of the pool, the net is positioned immediately downstream in the deepest water available. A circling charge is made to outflank the school and come back on it from the rear. Most of the fish funnel down through the deeper water and into the net. Polarizing glasses provide a tremendous advantage in tracking the school.

Kick-netting at night usually produces much greater catches and often larger fish. Five-to-ten-pound carp, redhorse, and catfish occasionally hurl themselves into the net at full speed, giving the kicker's shoulder a surprisingly powerful yank followed by a thoroughly drenching shower as the trophy is hoisted from the water.

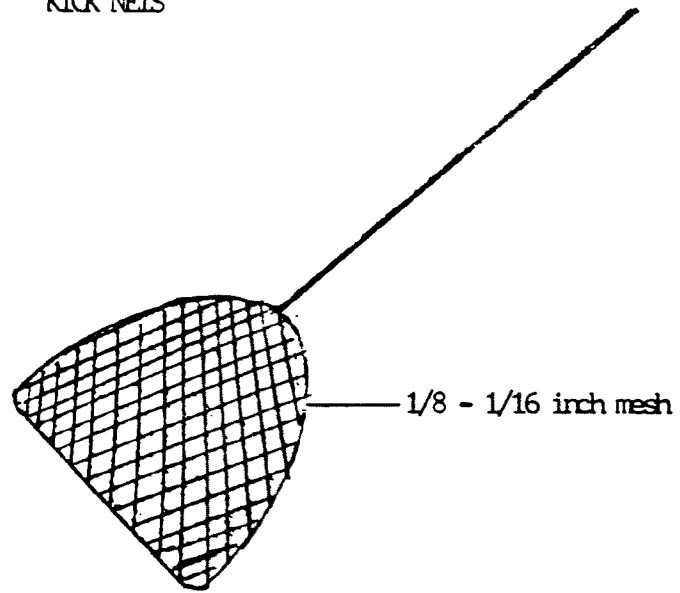
The spines of madtoms are another little hazard kickers should be wary of. Probing recklessly through the catch can end in a searing sting from which violent finger-shaking and a continuous string of obscenities provide absolutely no relief.

In lakes, a completely different approach is used. The net is plunged like a pool cue at a slight angle under a nearby school and then scooped up to the surface; however, the scooping stroke's effectiveness is quickly lost in depths over two feet. Some nets have telescoping handles which can greatly extend the collector's reach to an unsuspecting school. The "plunge and scoop" method also works very well along stream banks where grasses and shrubs lean over into the water or around floating mats of aquatic plants. One important tip to remember: these types of habitats conceal fish extremely well, and your quarry almost always must be pursued blindly.

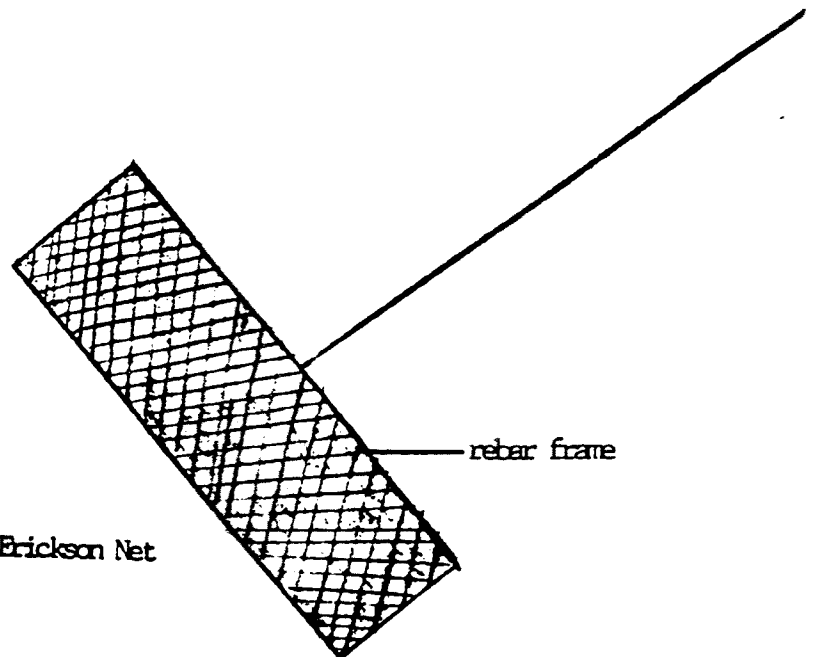
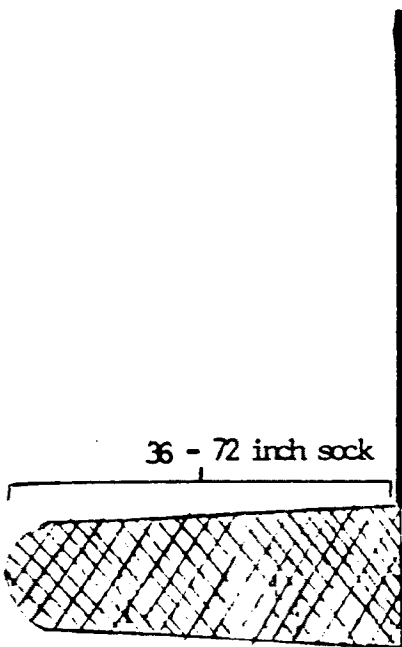
Finding a kick net with a fine mesh can be a problem. Fortunately, landing nets can be easily modified by replacing the sock with 1/8" or smaller mesh. This does require a Singer or the old standby, needle-and-thread, but honestly,



KICK NETS



Landing Net Design



anyone can do a respectable job. Fabric material can be ordered from Nylon Net or Memphis Net and Twine in Tennessee. Suitable substitutes (e.g., mosquito netting) can be found at camping or army surplus stores. Socks which are deep and loose give fleeing fish a false sense of security and also make it difficult for them to find the way out. Socks which are too shallow and tight lose most fish as they slam into the bottom of the net and immediately "ricochet" out. Ideally, the kicker should be able to comfortably reach the bottom of the net and sort the catch while standing (approximately 26"-30" deep). If the sock is too deep, the net will have to be laid out on shore after every kick.

The Bell Museum of Natural History in Minneapolis uses a slight variation called the Erickson Net. Its designer was Jim Erickson, who studied the Banded Darter in Minnesota.

The hoop is rectangular with a frame made of rebar, and a sock 3'-6' deep. This much heavier net does work very well when held stationary in riffles, but peaks in performance when slung over the back and dragged through riffles. It really catches the fish and is exceptionally selective for darters. Any direction through a riffle works--upstream, downstream, or even across. Tall people can hold it in one hand about mid-handle and brace the butt of the handle against a shoulder blade. The net's only drawback is rapid fatigue for the operator because of the great weight and resistance, especially in swift currents.

Regulations vary from state to state. Minnesota permits a hoop net up to four feet in diameter, but it can't be used for a short period in the spring when the Walleyes are running. Texas recently banned dip nets state-wide. Where this occurs, a potential option may be a special use or scientific collector's permit. It's definitely worth looking into.

Editor's Note: Texas reportedly revised its proposed ban. Anything less than 210 sq. inches is OK. This report appeared in an AC or DARTER during the past year.

###