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Paul Wedeking

Hannah Suthers

Jean Bickal

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A Simple Method for Removing Leg Bands

*Paul Wedeking
Hannah Suthers*
Jean Bickal*

**Princeton University
Department of Molecular Biology
Princeton, NJ 08544*

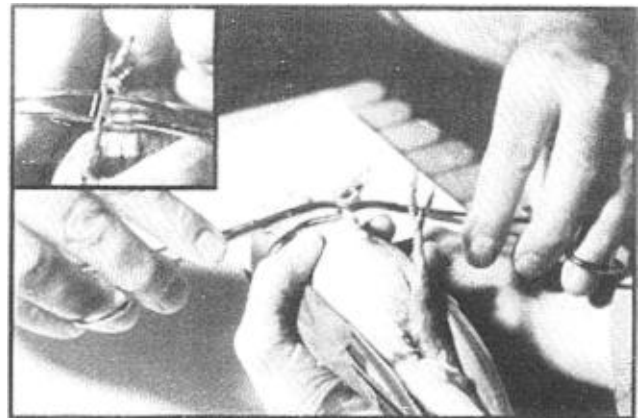
Banding pliers are available for placing a band around a bird's leg. Sometimes there are instances when it is necessary to remove a leg band, but there are no tools available specifically designed to remove them. As a result, researchers are presented the task of prying the band open by whatever means possible. We have, on occasion, used lengths of wire or spanning pliers inserted between the band and the leg to facilitate removal, but this has placed the bird's leg at risk of being injured.

We have recently discovered, however, that 5-inch curved hemostats can be used to efficiently remove leg bands from small birds. The procedure is simple, but it requires two people. One person holds the bird (the hand holding the bird should rest on a bench or table top); the person removing the band rotates the band so that the closure seam is facing upward. With the curved tips pointing down, the serrated tips of the hemostats are then used to grasp the butt ends of the band span-wise, one pair on each side of the seam. (The hemostats should be held with the ring finger and thumb as shown in the photograph.) When both hemostats are securely holding the band, one hemostat is held immobile (by resting the hand holding it on the bench or table top), while the other hemostat opens the band wide enough for removal by deliberately and slowly pulling and slightly rotating the hemostat away from the seam.

The procedure is simple, but it must be practiced. Practice is necessary to gain a "feel" of the hemostats gripping the band to minimize having the hemostats slip off during the opening operation. We practiced on unattached closed bands and on bands placed on salvaged window kills. It took varying amounts of practice for each of us to gain a satisfactory proficiency. In addition,

we found that it was not helpful to lock the hemostats on the band; locking the hemostats can crush an aluminum band and possibly injure the leg.

Although other tools (i.e., needle-nose pliers) can be used with this procedure, we have found that curved hemostats work best. They are easy to hold and manipulate, and the curved tips allow an excellent view of the band-removal operation. Finally, the distinct advantage of this band removal procedure is that nothing is inserted inside the band for leveraging the band open which greatly reduces the risk of injuring the bird.



A Mourning Dove is held for band removal. The curved hemostats are placed correctly on the butt ends of the band span-wise. (Inset: The band on a House Finch leg is opened by slowly pulling and slightly rotating one hemostate [left side of inset] while the other hemostat is kept stationary.)