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Stainless Steel Bands 1A & 1D: Suggestions for Use

Though difficult to open and close, stainless steel bands may be more appropriate than their alloy counterparts for use with certain species.

A certain percentage of the Loggerhead Shrikes (*Lanius ludovicianus*) I band cannot comfortably wear standard alloy size 1A band. In most instances, I have been able to form the band into an oval to improve the fit, but this is not wholly acceptable.

In 2004, I acquired some stainless steel 1A bands from Canada and started using those for most of the shrikes I banded. These bands have a larger

inside diameter, so that the fit is much better. In 2005, BBL made this band available as size 1D. So I now use, and highly recommend, stainless size 1D for all Loggerhead Shrikes.

Another western species with which I have had experience is Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*). In a rather short period of time, the standard alloy 1A band on many towhees shows dangerous wear on the bottom edge of the band. This is caused by the bird's foraging behavior; as the bird scratches around in dry dirt, fine grit is deposited on the leg beneath the band. The band slides up and down the leg as the bird hops about, honing the lower edge of the band so it becomes sharp enough to damage leg scutes, in effect "shaving" the leg. Banders should consider using stainless steel 1A bands for Spotted Towhee to avoid this damage. Other ground-foraging species in arid habitat might also be candidates for a stainless band. Banders should examine the lower edge of the band on recaptures to check for harmful wear; if present, consider replacing the alloy band with stainless.

Unfortunately, these stainless bands are hard to open and hard to close. (They will break the prongs on your banding pliers!) To open them, I use a pair of snap ring pliers, available at auto supply stores. I had to grind off the inner edges of the pliers so they would close more tightly, which allows the tips to fit inside the band. If you get pliers with replaceable tips, use the tips that curve up in a 90 degree angle so that the band opens without distortion.

Stainless bands are hard to close because of the springiness of the steel. To close the band initially, use the 1A opening in your pliers. This will close the band enough to keep it on the bird's leg, but you will see a 1-2 mm gap remaining. Using the next smaller opening on your pliers, position the band so its opening is at 45 degrees from the pliers' opening. Squeeze and recheck the closure. When the band is closed completely, again position it in the 1A slot and squeeze till the band is rounded correctly. I have not yet lapped a band using this technique, but it does require some practice.

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