

2005

## Incidents of Woodpecker Toes Being Caught in Leg Bands

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### Recommended Citation

Refsnider, Jeanine M.; Refsnider, Ron L.; and Clair, Siah St. (2005) "Incidents of Woodpecker Toes Being Caught in Leg Bands," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 30 : Iss. 3 , Article 12.

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**Addendum to the  
Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird  
Second Rectrix paper in  
NABB Vol. 30(1):22**

In Figure 1B, the depth of the notch (e) and the depth of the emargination (f) were measured by extending a straight line (in figure, shown as dashed line) from the margin of the feather at the tip to the margin of the feather at the lower edge of the indentation.

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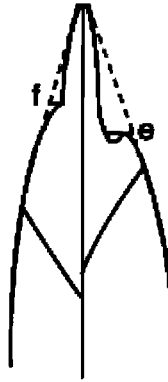


Figure 1B

### **Incidents of Woodpecker Toes Being Caught in Leg Bands**

The authors have conducted bird-banding programs at two nature centers around the Twin Cities metropolitan area, Minnesota continuously since 1987. Birds are banded at Springbrook Nature Center, Anoka Co., every three to four weeks and at Eastman Nature Center, Elm Creek Park Reserve, Hennepin Co., every eight weeks.

In September 1999 and in March and November 2000, three adult Hairy Woodpeckers (*Picoides villosus*), one male and two females, banded at Springbrook Nature Center were recaptured there, each with the shorter of its rear toes caught inside its band. The caught toe on each woodpecker was fully extended such that it was parallel to the tarsus and was lodged inside the band against the tarsus. Each bird had been banded with a size 2 band, which (along with size 1A) is a size approved by the Bird Banding Laboratory for Hairy Woodpeckers. The space between the band and the tarsus was sufficiently large to allow the band to slip over one of the toes, presumably when the bird was moving vertically on a tree trunk. One Hairy Woodpecker

had worn its band for 11 months, another for 19 months, and the third for 10 months before they were recaptured with their toes caught in their bands.

The first Hairy Woodpecker was recaptured once, and the second four times, during this intervening period; the third bird was not recaptured between initial banding and the recapture when the caught toe was noted. The duration between the recapture when the toe was caught and the most recent prior recapture, when the toe was observed to be normal, was 9, 8.5 and 10 months. It was noted that the claw on the caught toe on the male was "very long," indicating that it had been caught in the band and was prevented from wearing down for some time.

In fall 2004, a male Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*) was caught at Eastman Nature Center with its rear toe caught in its size 1B band (see Figure) in the same manner as that of the Hairy Woodpeckers. This bird had been recaptured twice in the 44 months since being banded, including one recapture 10 months earlier with no observed problem with its band.



The caught toes of all four woodpeckers were extracted carefully from the band; in one case the band had to be opened slightly to release the toe. Upon extrication, the released toes appeared to be functional but somewhat weak. Subsequently, one Hairy Woodpecker has been recaptured 10 times over five years, and another was recaptured once after a year. In all cases, the previously trapped toes were in their normal position and appeared to

be fully functional. The Downy Woodpecker has been recaptured only once since its toe was released. At that time, six months later, the claw on that toe was still nearly twice the length of the corresponding claw on the other foot, indicating that the claw was experiencing less wear, perhaps resulting from decreased use or weakness of the toe.

In 17 years of banding at these nature centers, a total of 429 Downy and 91 Hairy woodpeckers have been banded, and we have recorded 842 recaptures of Downy and 171 of Hairy woodpeckers. While the incidence of toes being caught in bands is very low, we have modified our banding procedures for Hairy Woodpeckers to further minimize its occurrence. The Bird Banding Laboratory approves sizes 1A and 2 bands for Hairy Woodpeckers. Because 1A bands are too tight for some Hairy Woodpeckers, and because bands on woodpeckers often experience extreme wear leading to illegible numbers, we had routinely been using size 2 bands on all Hairy Woodpeckers. However, since the 2000 incidents, we have been sizing all Hairy Woodpeckers with a leg gauge and selecting the smallest band size that slides easily on the leg, ensuring a fit that reduces the likelihood of their toes getting caught in the band. Since adopting this practice, we have seen no additional problems with Hairy Woodpeckers. Only size 1B bands are approved by the Bird Banding Laboratory for use on Downy Woodpeckers, so using another size is not an option for this species.

The problem of toes being caught in bands may occur in other species as well, but it seems more likely to occur in woodpeckers, which have relatively short tarsi, potentially allowing bands to slip more easily onto a claw or toe during their vertical hopping movements up and down tree trunks. The fleshy pads on the toes may then prevent the band from sliding off. Ill-fitting bands could be detrimental especially to woodpeckers, because losing the use of a rear toe will weaken a bird's grip on tree trunks and decrease its ability to secure food items. We recommend that all recaptured woodpeckers be checked carefully for this problem.

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## **Errata**

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In the bottom right hand corner of "Turkey Vulture Marking History," NABB 30:59, one line was inadvertently omitted. Please substitute "440" for "450 or 460" and add: "of them near Hampton. Coles then banded additional vultures at".

In the second line of page 60, substitute "all" for "most".