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A Technique for Marking Parrots

Parrots Are Difficult to Mark

Few studies have been completed on *Amazona* parrots using marked individuals because of the bird's agility and tremendous bill strength. The parrot has the ability to manipulate its feet in ways most other birds cannot, and then, with its bill, it can tear or cut loose the marker. In Australia, biologists have used plastic and metal markers applied with stainless steel wire to the patagium of wings. Retention was up to 10 years. The patagial markers, however, entangle in vegetation and inside nesting cavities, causing the death of nesting parrots. The markers on the wings may also interfere with flight.

I apply plastic leg bands to parrots that are safe and that allow identification of individuals as far away as 50–100 m (using binoculars) and 200–300 m (using a telescope). The plastic is a PVC material called Wardle Storys Cobex (manufactured by Storeys Industrial Products, Ltd., Brantham, Manningtree, Essex C011 1NJ, England; telephone 0206-392401). I used yellow, red, and white colors for the tests.

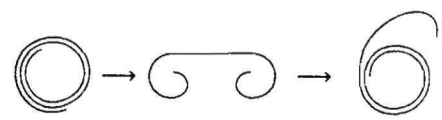
Make a Leg Band

Cut the band material in 5-mm-wide strips from flat sheets and long enough to coil 2½ times around the parrot's leg with 4 mm between the leg and the inside of the band—that is, the inside diameter of the band is 4 mm more than the diameter of the widest point on the tarsus. The band should appear loose when on the leg. Sand the corners and edges of the band to blunt the sharp edges before molding. Place the cut and sanded Cobex material in boiling water for a few seconds. Quickly remove the plastic from the hot water and begin coiling it around a wooden dowel that has a diameter 4–5 mm larger than that of the parrot's leg. Continue to mold the plastic around the dowel by placing the dowel and plastic in the hot water or form the coil while both in and out of the water. A perfectly rounded coil of plastic with no gaps in the overlapping areas can be obtained with care.

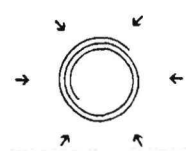
Secure the Plastic Leg Band

1. Practice applying the band on a dowel before attempting to band a parrot.

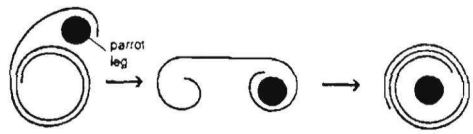
2. Invert the band. This will relax the coil, allow application of waterproof epoxy glue (5-min set), and make it easier to apply to the parrot's leg.



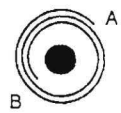
3. Apply epoxy glue to the outer edge of inverted band.



4. Reinvert the band (band is now in its original form) with parrot's leg under the leading end of the band. Apply additional epoxy glue to overlapping areas of the coiled band.



5. Securely clamp band ends (A and B) with small needle-nosed pliers (modified for banding with small-diameter tips) for 10 min. Be sure the band has a 4–5-mm total gap between the inside of the band and the parrot's leg.



6. Put a very small steel hose clamp around the band, making sure glue is not on the outer surface, and allow the glue to set for another hour while the parrot rests in a darkened cage. Remove the clamp.

Bands Evaluated for 24 Months

I attached 18 bands to 17 *Amazona* parrots (one parrot was banded on both legs) during the last 2 years. Two bands have been lost—possibly because of poor coiling of the material when molding and possibly because I used PVC cement on three bands. The PVC cement does not fill gaps in the coil as well as the epoxy glue does. Bands on released birds were examined using a telescope (×85–155) and showed no damage. I continue to monitor the marked parrots and have recorded bands intact after 14 months. One parrot was recovered dead after 13 months and the band examined. The bird's leg was in good condition, although the glue was no longer present. I have documented many cases of swellings, infections, and problems with standard butt-end and lock-on FWS bands on parakeets and parrots but have not seen any problems with the plastic legs bands on the 17 marked parrots. More than 500 sightings of these parrots have been made during the last 2 years.

For further information contact

J. Michael Meyers
Patuxent Environmental Science Center
Puerto Rico Research Group
P.O. Box N
Palmer, PR 00721-0501
(809) 888-2930