

A SIMPLY MADE BAG FOR WEIGHING BIRDS.

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As I have little time at my disposal for making long excursions to band birds I decided I'd get as much information as possible with each bird banded and, to begin with, weight and length seemed the obvious things to record. To facilitate weighing the birds a series of bags or rather cylinders were made from rectangular pieces of plastic fly-wire. These allowed the birds plenty of air, yet held them firmly. To make the bags the rectangle is rolled into a cylinder and the edges stapled together. One end of the cylinder is pinched in in three places and the three segments secured with staples (see diagram). This ensures that one end of the cylinder does not collapse. The bird is inserted head first into the cylinder and will usually move **along to** this end. The other (open) end is then squashed flat just behind the bird's tail and is held securely by a skewer or long pin (I use an old fashioned small hat pin with a conspicuous knob). One pin only is used for all the bags, and weight of bag and pin is written on a piece of tape stapled to the bag. For convenience the weight was made up to round figures by adding extra staples to the joins. The bird is held firmly and rarely struggles, particularly if placed on it's back on the scale pan. At present I use a medium sized letter balance which has proved satisfactory for birds up to about 12 inches long (Wattle Birds and Rosellas) provided a level surface is available and there is not too much wind. However, it might be better to use a larger version of the instrument used to check the weight of gramophone pickup arms.

However, to revert to the weighing bags, these can, of course, be readily washed if this should be necessary, and dry almost at once. My three bags which I use for birds from a few inches to twelve inches long were made from rectangles of the following dimensions: 7 in. x 7 in. 8 in. x 9 in. and 9 in. x 13½ in.

One of the first birds I banded was a Willie Wagtail (Rhipidura leucophrys) which weighed 23 grams on both 8.9.62 and 18.9.62. On 24.9.62 it's nest with three eggs was located. Three youngsters left this nest on 22.10.62, and the last of the three was caught, banded and weighed. It was almost as heavy as it's parent - 22 grams. Three days later the original bird was recaptured. It's weight had fallen to 17 grams!! For the parents to bring the body weight of three chicks almost up to their own in about three weeks is pretty good going, and I

suppose one should expect them to lose a little during this period. When next caught (in January) it's weight had returned to 22 grams.

(We asked Mrs. Paton how she caught the Willie-Wagtails. Her answer - in the mist net (adult) and by hand (juvenile). It appears that the other member of the pair has so far proved too wary to be caught in this fashion. -Editor.)

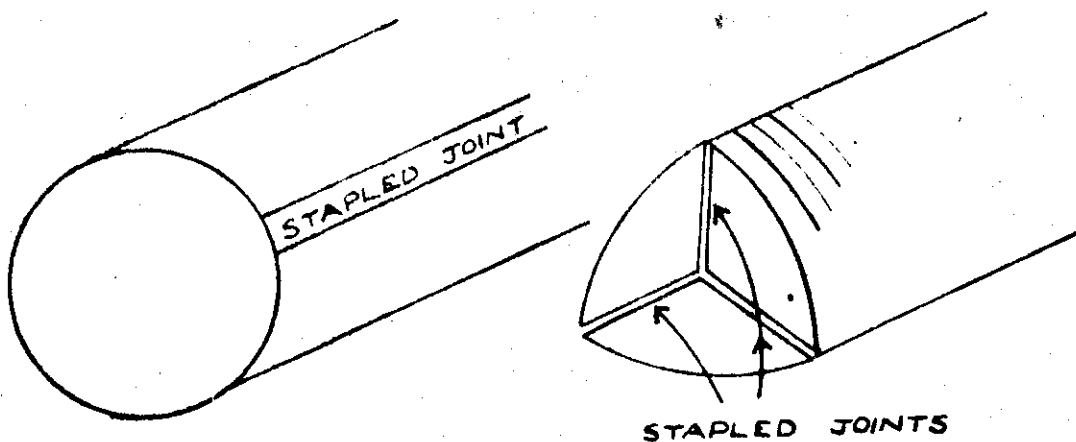


Diagram showing how weighing cylinder is folded.

BIRD IN THE HAND

H. J. de S. Disney, Australian Museum, Sydney.

Many banders will not have at their disposal all the books available on plumage variation between sex, due to age, or main points between similar species. G. M. Mathews in the "Birds of Australia" and A. J. North in his "Nests and Eggs" give detailed descriptions of the birds, but these vast tomes are not readily available to banders. It is proposed to publish the important differences for a few species in each issue. These are only guides and will follow the lines of the similar work being done by the British Trust for Ornithology in the United Kingdom, who publish a pamphlet under the title "Bird in the Hand". We gladly acknowledge their prior use of this title. They should be checked by banders and I would be grateful for any information banders themselves have on this subject. This information should be sent to me at the Australian Museum, College Street, Sydney.