

The Use of Colour-bands on the Tibia of some Wading Birds

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Since 1971, ibis and herons have been kept, for behavioural studies, in large enclosures containing wetland habitats at 'Gungahlin' Division of Wildlife Research, CSIRO, Canberra, A.C.T.

The birds were released in these enclosures after each had been wing-clipped and banded on the tarsus with a metal band and with one or more celluloid colour bands*. It was soon found that when birds fed in shallow water, the bands were invisible. Moreover, when the birds were standing on land the bands were often of little use because their colours were obscured by a layer of mud.

During 1975 the colour bands were removed from the tarsus and replaced with new ones, which were fitted to the tibia. In every case the same band size as recommended for the tarsus fitted perfectly on the tibia. The ends of each band were cemented with acetone. The birds appeared to have no difficulties in walking. There was sufficient room on the tibia for most birds to be fitted with two colour bands on each leg.

When it was found that the colour bands could still be covered by mud, and that they faded badly, strips of Scotchlite tape** were applied over the bands. This self-adhesive tape does not fade and mud does not stick to it. It is available in several bright colours and, as it may be used in narrow strips, different colour combinations can be put on one band for individual marking.

Species which have since been banded by this method at 'Gungahlin' are: White-necked Heron,

Ardea pacifica; White-faced Heron, *Ardea novae-hollandiae*; Large Egret, *Egretta alba*; Nankeen Night-heron, *Nycticorax caledonicus*; Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus*; White Ibis, *Threskiornis molucca*; Straw-necked Ibis, *Threskiornis spinicollis*; Royal Spoonbill, *Platalea regia*; Yellow-billed Spoonbill, *Platalea flavipes*; Black-tailed Native Hen, *Gallinula ventralis*; Dusky Moorhen, *Gallinula tenebrosa*; Swamphen, *Porphyrio porphyrio*; and Coot, *Fulica atra*.

The same banding method could possibly be applied to species of crakes, waders and gulls; however, in some cases the size of band used on the tarsus may not fit the tibia. For example, in banding studies by Lane and van Gessel on Kooragang Island, Hunter River, N.S.W. (*pers. comm.*) it was found that larger bands were required to fit the tibias of Pied Stilts *Himantopus himantopus*, Whimbrel *Numenius Phaeopus* and Japanese Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii*.

Colour banding on the tibia of birds has been successfully carried out for the last decade on European Spoonbills, *Platalea leucorodia* in the Netherlands.

* Obtainable from: A. C. Hughes, 1 High Street, Hampton Hill, Middlesex, England.

** Obtainable from: Booster Industries, 45 Perry Street, Matraville, N.S.W.