

Sick and Injured Birds

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Banders will almost certainly encounter both sick and injured birds at some time or another and if attempted, treatment may be successful in some cases. But sick, injured or rehabilitated birds should never be banded without the prior approval of the Secretary of the Banding Scheme; in the event, any recovery will be of doubtful value unless complete details of the pre-release circumstances are available.

Disease

Disease in birds may be difficult to detect but may be evidenced by an excessive number of ecto-parasites, dull dirty plumage, very low weight for the species, excessive lethargy, sores or blebs on the feet or facial flesh, or a discharge from the eyes, nostrils or mouth. Birds so affected should not be banded (see *Bander's Manual*) and should be handled carefully since some infections can be transmitted to humans.

The danger of infection is not great, but this should not be neglected since a non-human disease can be very difficult to diagnose and treat.

If a bird dies and a suitable pathological or veterinary research centre is known, it may be sent there as little is known about disease in wild birds.

Treatment of diseased birds is rarely successful.

Shock

Trapped birds which go into a state of shock may be either placed in a darkened box or cage and kept quiet or placed in a quiet, safe spot near the banding site until they recover.

Most honeyeaters respond very well to sugar and water mixture. Dr McClure (of MAPS) also uses this for any shocked bird that he can get to accept it.

Injured Birds

Leg injuries are the most likely ones encountered while banding and these do not appear to unduly incapacitate most birds. I have records of a Pied Oyster catcher *Haematopus ostralegus* with both feet severed, incubating and getting

about quite well on the healed stumps; I have also seen many birds which apparently suffer little inconvenience from a single badly damaged or missing leg.

If a bird has a simple broken leg it may be splinted with matchsticks and thread and the bird cared for until the leg has healed. If the leg is badly broken and the bone protrudes through the skin it should be amputated at the next joint and treated with antiseptic before releasing the bird.

Some birds, particularly waders seem prone to entanglement of the feet and legs with wool or string etc.; gulls and terns also are very prone to such entanglement by nylon fishing line. Frequently these obstructions are so tightly worked into the leg that it is impossible to remove without cutting; this should be done carefully using the tip of a scalpel or a small pointed sharp pen knife blade (usually most pen knife blades are too large and blunt).

When a bird is incapacitated by the loss of a wing or has an obvious disability which could prevent it leading a normal existence, but it is otherwise healthy, the following courses are open. It may either be kept in an aviary (see Editor's note), sent to a zoo or museum or released. If released it will probably quickly fall victim to a raptor or other predator.

Badly injured birds, particularly those suffering from gunshot wounds or ones struck by cars should be destroyed as soon as possible. Small birds may be killed by pressing the thumb strongly on the left side of the breast until the heart stops. Larger birds may be killed similarly by pressing with the knee or foot. Do not try to wring a bird's neck; apart from being very difficult it is frequently unsuccessful. Any neces-

sary killing should be done in seclusion in the interests of public relations and out of deference to anyone who may be upset by such process.

Oiled Birds

Until the *Torrey Canyon* disaster in Britain it was believed that oiled birds could be successfully rehabilitated. But after the massive rescue operation on that occasion by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds it has been shown that the success rate is extremely small.

If only slightly oiled a bird may be treated with a good chance of success, but the treatment must be done and the bird released quickly without destroying the waterproofing of the plumage. Slightly oiled birds should be fed, kept warm and dosed with a small quantity of castor oil to assist in the purging of any oil which may have been swallowed. After this has been done, Fullers Earth (a moisture absorbing substance) may be worked into the feathers to remove the oil.

If other than slightly oiled, treatment is likely to prove a waste of time and it is probably better to destroy the bird.

Problems

The birds one is most likely to encounter will be nestlings which have "exploded" from the nest prematurely, those taken from cats, ones hit by vehicles or those that have flown into obstructions such as overhead wires or windows. Nestlings can often be reared and some injuries can be treated successfully but success is rare with small birds.

Such an interest may become a problem in itself. In England one of my friends became known as a "bird doctor" and after five years in the area he had become the keeper of a large flock of half-tame gulls which found it easier to wait for him to feed them than to forage for food. When I left the area he was under constant siege from this ever increasing flock.

Public Relations

As mentioned earlier, it is not the birds one normally encounters during banding for instance which prove difficult, but those which are brought in usually by a child or a parent. Frequently

such birds are too badly injured or too young to be treated and must be destroyed. Where children are involved, it is best to tell the parent what must happen, delaying the inevitable until after the child has left. A young child can be advised subsequently that the bird "died".

Disposal of Bodies

Dead (fresh) birds should be taken to a museum or institute for preservation. Even if sufficient specimens exist in a collection there may be a requirement for skeletal material, spirit specimens or exchange skins.

Bodies can usually be kept in a refrigerator for well over a week without deterioration; they should be wrapped first in newspaper, then placed in a plastic bag.

Conclusion

Treatment of sick and injured birds requires great patience and considerable time. In many cases the prospects for recovery are minimal and numerous disappointments will occur.

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NOTE.—*The fauna protection laws vary in each state or territory. However, usually the keeping of any protected species without approval from the appropriate fauna authority is illegal. Anyone intending to keep sick or injured birds for more than a few days should seek the advice and/or the approval of the fauna authority in the state or territory concerned.—Hon. Editor.*

Helmeted Honeyeater Research Centre

The Bird Observers' Club Helmeted Honeyeater Research Centre at Yellingbo, Victoria, is open for inspection by members and visitors on the first Sunday of each month from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. You are invited to visit the Centre during these times. Mr Frank Stephens who is in charge of the Centre will gladly explain the project to visitors.

Coming from Yellingbo the Centre is situated one mile from the Yellingbo Bridge on the right hand side of the road to Monbulk and Macclesfield. Watch for the sign and the small white building.