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DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF A TECHNIQUE FOR INDIVIDUALLY MARKING EGRETS

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A project studying the breeding biology, ecology and migration of egrets required a system of marking individual birds which could easily provide information on species, colony, season of banding and individual identification from observation made by non-expert field observers. Multiple Darvic or Celluloid leg bands proved slow and cumbersome to apply and observation of bands in the field was obscured when the birds stood in water, reeds or long grass. Bands often became obscured with caked mud and loss of bands created problems in identifying the birds. A system of patagial tagging has been developed which is simple and practical in the field and provides the required information from observations by non-experts in computer-compatible form. Pennant Flag Cloth or Fluorescent Banner Cloth have been found suitable for tag manufacture. The details of the tags and their application are described. Extensive observation of tagged nestlings, fostered birds raised in captivity, and adults in the field over four years, reveal no evidence to date of physical problems to the birds. Tagged birds have been seen alive at distances of up to 2100 km in Tasmania, Victoria and New Zealand. No evidence has been found that the breeding success of the tagged birds is different from the success of birds not carrying tags.