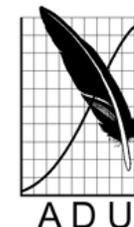


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FITTING METAL RINGS ON THE LARGER BIRDS

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Fitting stainless steel, monal or incoloy rings is not as straightforward as one would think.

In Africa, where there are extreme weather conditions, mainly very hot, fitted rings over time can open to reveal a gap which can be problematic and even fatal for birds. The biggest group of large birds ringed in southern Africa are the raptors (*and seabirds – editor*). As these mainly occur in areas of high temperatures, making sure the ring is fitted correctly is vital.

Unlike aluminium rings which close easily to an 'abutted' position with pliers, hard metal rings have a much higher tension memory and as such do not keep the immediate required position. Therefore additional manipulation is needed to achieve this.

In the SAFRING Ringing Scheme, the rings which come into this particular category are; 7.0mm, 8.0mm, 9.0mm, 10.0mm, 11.0mm, 12.5mm 14.0mm, 16.0mm and the 26.0mm clip ring.

The correct position for these rings to be closed properly is the abutted position where there is no gap or overlap (the latter in some extreme cases) and no 'ridge' on the inside which can cause additional chaffing.

Firstly on large birds the tarsi diameter measurement should be made, taking into account the 'plinth' or 'ankle' where the tarsus joins the foot. Enough space must be left so that the ring freely moves up and down the tarsi and does not get stuck in a position on the actual tarsi, but sits comfortably on the 'upper slope' of the ankle without being too loose.

When the first squeeze is made to close a large ring, it will come open again to reveal a gap which will not abut no matter how many more times this first movement is repeated.

The second squeeze is made again with the ring rotated 90 degrees which will close the gap a little more. The next series of

manoeuvres are crucial.

Starting on one side of the ring, gently 'dip' it under the other end without changing the shape of the ring, until the ring tension holds it abutted.

Next 'dip' the other end under the first so to repeat the same thing. The result is that both ends of the ring are 'held' abutted under pressure.

In the case of the 19.0mm 'J' ring (including 14.0mm and 16.0mm) it can be taken a step further. This ring is made up with more incoloy in the metal and as such is slightly softer and rather springy. Again 'dipping' the ends of the ring is done but this time the result should be to overlap the ring on the second dip. Once this is done, take circlip pliers and gently open the ring until you hear it 'click' back into the abutted position. This can be done several times on the ring until there is enough pressure built up to keep the ring closed. Make sure that there is no 'ridge' or 'edge' and the ring ends are perfectly aligned.

The 11.0mm ring

One of the hardest rings to close is the 11.0mm stainless steel and requires great dexterity to fit it to an abutted position. This ring should be fitted by dipping the ends a lot more times than the 10.0mm for example. The same applies to the 8.0mm and 9.0mm, the former being harder than the latter.

The 26.0mm 'G' clip ring

This is in another category altogether and can even be fitted without using the large ringing pliers.

The most important factor when fitting this ring is to have the female end of the ring fit over the male end so that the male 'nipple' is exactly centred and revealed through the female ring end. The male nipple is not always in the same position.

First of all to achieve this, make sure that both male end and the opposite surface are in a flush position when meeting. This is achieved by bending the angle out, otherwise when the female end is closed over the male, it will be short.



Once this is done, bend from the fold of the ring, keeping the ring end straight and when flattening the female end over the male, put extreme pressure on the fold as well as the surface area around the hole.

Do not try to bend or flatten the whole clip end flush against the side of the ring as it can misshape it and creates a snag.

Other Rings

To a lesser extent, this applies to the smaller incoloy and stainless steel sizes where 'dipping' is important to achieve a correctly fitted ring. With the smaller rings a mixture of 'dipping' and 'bouncing' the ring several times can achieve the correct result.

Spiraling

This occurs when the ring has not been placed in the pliers squarely and so when the ring is closed, both ends 'miss' each other by a few mm causing edges that stick out. Make sure the ring is firmly seated in the pliers before the first close. If the ring is loose in the pliers, it will usually spiral.

Overlapping

Overlapping rings should be done in extreme cases where the tarsus diameter is such that the two successive ring sizes are either too small or large. This can occur very rarely between the sizes of 16.0mm and 19.0mm where the 19.0mm ring is overlapped slightly.

Ringers should have a complete set of ring sizes if ringing

large birds. If on occasion rings are used up, and the circumstances are that the opportunity is too great, then overlapping the next size up can be done and not the next size down. Ringers should have a full set of rings at all times for that 'surprise' in the net.

An example was once when catching migrant warblers in my Uganda garden. One net caught a Garden Warbler, Dark-capped Bulbul, Black Kite, Eurasian Hobby and a Wahlberg's Eagle, and I did have all the ring sizes!

SAFRING 'practice ring'

SAFRING have a limited number of old rings which are no longer of any use and so if required, can be sent to ringers who would like to practice manipulating a few of the larger ring sizes as if it were on a bird.

Using a wooden dowel, broom handle or stick, spend the time getting to know how rings respond to 'dipping', overlapping and using circlips to achieve that satisfying 'click' as you gently open the ring.

Editor's note:

If you don't have the correct ring for a bird, you may consider using a ring one size up but a better option is to leave the bird unringed. For rarely caught birds the chances of a recapture or recovery are very slight, and you can still record the biometrics. When I started ringing, I caught a Striped Cuckoo and released it without a ring. Needless to say, I have not caught one again after 20 years of ringing!