

NOTES & NOTICES

The following note by Mark Pokras is reprinted from *North American Bird Bander* 11:91, 1986. Although relatively few woodpeckers are ringed in southern Africa, all our species have barb-tipped tongues and so should be kept well clear of any velcro apparel

Ed.

A CAUTIONARY NOTE FOR HANDLING WOODPECKERS

Anyone who has handled woodpeckers is familiar with their tendencies to peck vigorously and to use their extraordinary tongues to explore anything within their reach. It was this last fact that almost led to disaster.

In March, 1985, a female Pileated Woodpecker *Dryocopus pileatus* with a badly broken humerus was received at the Mass. Audubon Society's Animal Care Centre in Lincoln. Due to the severity of the injury the bird could not be released. But after suitable treatment and recuperation, arrangements were made to place her in a large zoo for education and exhibit purposes.

In preparing the bird for the trip to her new home I wanted to make one last careful physical examination. Although I took all the normal precautions, I didn't think to remove my new wristwatch that had a velcro band.

Halfway through the exam the woodpecker's probing tongue encountered my wrist and instantly the barbed tongue tip was ensnared by the numerous tiny loops of the velcro. Naturally the bird panicked and began thrashing. Luckily my assistant stayed calm and immobilized the bird while I hastily searched my emergency kit for a tiny pair of iris scissors. It was then only a minute's work to gingerly cut the 10 or 20 loops trapping the woodpecker's tongue. Other than a little initial discomfort and puzzlement, she showed no sign of lasting damage.

I conclude this cautionary tale by reminding banders and rehabilitators of the widespread use of velcro in today's outdoor wear. Had the bird been less tame or my assistant less experienced, the result would probably have been serious trauma to the bird.