

A TRIAL OF COLOURED ANODYZED METAL BANDS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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In 1989 we, together with other banders who were regular users of colour bands, were asked to assess the readability of numbered metal bands, anodized in the following colours: red, blue, yellow, violet and black. These bands were being considered for a cooperative banding expedition to the Nullarbor Plain between South Australia and Western Australia, with the object of trying to discover direction of movement of itinerant birds.

The anodized bands were all size 1 (2 mm internal diameter) and this small size limited our choice of trial species. Sedentariness is desirable for repeated observation, and using too many of these bands on closely-studied, celluloid-banded species is inviting confusion because celluloid and anodized colours are not a good match.

These considerations did not generate much banding result, until one day when mistnetting for Silvereyes *Zosterops lateralis*, we caught a pair of Grey Fantails *Rhipidura fuliginosa*. Correct band size, resident with a nest near the house and a species not previously colour-banded or studied by us - or anyone else as far as we knew. A blue anodized band was put on the male and a red on the female - a backyard trial was launched.

On our 2.5 ha property we had two other pairs of nesting Grey Fantails and during other banding sessions, in November and December, we mistnetted two of these birds, both females, and we banded them with a yellow and a violet band respectively. From the three breeding pairs we then had one male and three females identified for observation.

The anodized bands were intended for identification in the field, of year and/or

place of banding, by amateurs and professionals. With this in mind in two seasons of regular observation of the Grey Fantails, and less frequent observation of some put on fairy wrens, we arrived at some definite conclusions.

We found blue to be the best colour under all weather and light conditions. There was little to choose between red, violet or yellow, for readability but red and violet could be confused. Black was useless.

In our experience the colours of the anodized bands were not as clear in the field as the celluloid, but the colour of these does fade with age. The anodized bands have not been tested for a long enough period to ascertain how colour-fast they are; also we were unable to fit them without damaging the anodizing with the banding pliers which could possibly shorten their period of usefulness. However when banding large numbers of birds it would be quicker to use one numbered anodized band instead of a normal metal band and a celluloid colour band.

This simple field trial of anodized bands brought information we had not anticipated and as the birds, and their nests, so closely resemble the Bluemantled Flycatcher *Trochocercus cyanomelas*, we include it here as it may offer relevant comparison.

The Australian Grey and the African Bluemantled Flycatchers resemble one another in appearance, aerial foraging from perches and in the construction of "wine glass" nests. Grey Fantails are a common Bush species and companionable with humans - albeit more for reasons of stomach than of bonhomie, the reason being that an active human disturbs a satisfying quantity of insect prey. They participate in almost every banding session, perching on guy cords and shelf strings but their agility and quickness is such that they rarely become entangled. Thus we were well pleased with the capture of four out of our six birds. They all remained with us through the winter to nest again in the Spring.

Females built the nests in both native and exotic trees, at heights from 1,25 m to 6 m. A most disconcerting observation was the number of failed nests due to damage by other birds stealing the material to build, or more probably to line their own nests. In some cases, before completion of the clutch, eggs went with the nest material. We saw three different species of bird thieves, two honeyeaters and another flycatcher, Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*. In the second nesting season, between September and

January, female Red built three nests; the first was damaged and the other two successful. Yellow built four nests, two successful and two damaged. Violet built nine nests and lost all but the last one.

Height above ground appeared to have no effect on success but the better record of Red was probably due to the selection of sites near the house, our presence deterring theft. It would be interesting to know if Bluemantled Flycatchers are similarly victimised.

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REPORTBACK ON COLOUR-MARKED WADERS

In summer 1987/88, members of bird clubs were alerted through newsletters, *Birding in Southern Africa*, *Safring News* and *SABAP News* to watch out for colour-marked waders from Dubai in the Persian Gulf, on a potential migration route to southern Africa. Similarly, in 1991/92 they looked for waders marked in the Taimyr Peninsula, the breeding ground for many waders migrating to southern Africa. The brief comment is that no sightings were reported from our region.

However, there were other results. The Dubai expedition retrapped a Curlew Sandpiper that had been ringed by Paul Martin in the Swartkops estuary in the eastern Cape, and one of their colour-dyed Little Stints was subsequently seen on Crete, in the Mediterranean Sea. Pavel Tomkovich reports from Moscow that a Knot he ringed in the Taimyr last July has been recovered in Denmark, and that there have been sightings of colour-dyed Knots in the United Kingdom and Portugal, although details of these have not yet been confirmed. In addition, he retrapped a Curlew Sandpiper on a nest with an Australian ring at the same site in the Taimyr at which he had found a South African ring on a Sanderling one year

earlier - this bird had been ringed at Kommetjie on the Cape Peninsula. [See page 29, this volume].

We urge members of bird clubs to keep on the lookout for birds with plumage dyes and colour rings. Projects using these methods are being undertaken in a variety of places, involving not only migrants but also "resident" species. Besides the date and place, please report the colour and part of the plumage that was dyed. For colour rings (sometimes several rings may be used) carefully note the positions of rings; information should, for example, be in the form: "red over green on left leg, blue over metal on right", etc. Also, please check dead birds for rings, trying to note cause of death. The chances of finding a dead ringed bird are slender, but remember that on average 1,1 dead ringed bird is found (and reported to SAFRING) per day, and the African Seabird Group averages one ring recovery for every 186 dead seabirds found on beach walks!

Please send all reports to Mr T B Oatley, SAFRING, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7700 (Telephone 021-650 2421).

Les Underhill

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