



*Morning weigh in, a standard procedure.*

# Closed Banding Your Macaw

by Joanne Abramson  
Fort Bragg, California

The decision to band your baby birds may originally be difficult for you. All of us have heard stories over the years about injuries to birds that have *open* bands left on from quarantine stations. Years ago our vet warned us about the problems associated with these bands. He had seen multiple injuries ranging from broken legs to mutilations and death associated with them. After we listened to his stories, it seemed like the only humane thing to do was remove them. Since he checks all new birds, the bands are removed at that time, along with routine blood tests and cultures.

In 1986, New York passed a law requiring all birds coming into the state to be *closed* banded. While there were



*The young scarlet macaw is obviously older than the blue and golds but only with bands can one keep accurate records if many birds are involved.*



*Greenwing macaw babies ranging from 52 to 62 days of age.*



*Solid colored birds are the hardest to tell apart. Bands are very helpful distinguishing one from the other.*

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mixed feelings about the validity of the law, the fact remained that it was, indeed, a law and therefore had to be obeyed. Since I had several people wanting macaws in New York I dutifully ordered bands and started pulling my birds at an earlier age in order to closed band them. We specialize in breeding the larger species of macaws, so they are closed banded between 16 and 20 days (depending on the species and how long they are left with their parents). At first this was a hassle. My breeding macaws are very capable birds, eager to raise their own young, and doing a great job of it as well.

This is now my third year of banding birds and so far I've had no problems with injuries (although I believe they are still possible). Loose wires or broken cage bars could trap them. What is a surprise to me is the advantage of banding. There are stages in a clutch of macaws where the babies look vastly different — let's say when you have babies that are 9, 12 and 15 days old. However, when these birds grow up and are around 40 to 50 days old, their weights start leveling off and they still don't have extreme feather differences (mainly because they don't have lots of feathers). Also, at the early stages the feathers look similar when the birds are from the same parents or species. There is not much difference in feathers on a solid colored bird such as a hyacinth macaw.

Like many aviculturists, we weigh our birds every morning. Before we started banding, the hatch date separated the macaws on the weight records. When we were raising only a few macaws and only one pair of a given species bred in the same month this was fine. However, when two or more species decided to go to nest in the same month it became a bit difficult. As I see it the advantages and disadvantages are as follows:

*Short Range Advantages:* 1) Initial identification linking the baby with a hatch date and genetic information, i.e. hen and cock, clutch mates, weight records. 2) Positive sex determination linked to the band number, after feather or surgical sexing.

*Long Range Advantages:* 1) Using information gathered from your short range advantages being able to provide unrelated breeding stock with positive identification. 2) Possible use of the band if the macaw is stolen (there is the chance that the thief will remove the band). 3) Band number linking the bird to a weight record that, in conjunction

For information about contacting any of these member clubs, please call that club's closest state coordinator. There is a state coordinator listing with phone numbers elsewhere in this publication.



with the rest of your records (see below), will assist you in creating a database file to help you in the future.

**Disadvantages:** 1) Potential of band getting caught and hanging the bird. 2) While the birds are infants, the bands collect feces and have to be cleaned often. This is because of the substrate material used: toweling, diapers, paper towels, etc. Once they are about six weeks old (depending on the substrated used under the baby) the situation corrects itself. At this stage our birds are in Dorskocil tubs! on wooden shavings (not sawdust!) with toys to play with.

3) They must be put on very young birds, which requires the macaws to be removed from their parents possibly earlier than you may want to start handfeeding, although, if you incubate eggs this is not a problem. 4) The timing of banding the birds is critical. I've sometimes banded a bird in the morning and by the next feeding the band has fallen off. Yet the birds grow so fast that 12 hours later I struggle to get the band on. Birds of the same species, even of the same clutch, band on different days.

Bands do not allow an excuse for bad record keeping. They need to be used in conjunction with the rest of your data. Each bird ideally has a band number linking him with a nest and weight record. The nest record includes the hen and cock, number of eggs (fertile, infertile, dead in shell), hatch dates and clutch mates. By themselves, the records have a great value. After several years of record keeping the combined mass is a gold mine of vital information. We are currently using a stainless steel band made by the Donna G. Corp. size 9/16 for all the macaws, military through hyacinths. This is the largest size made and works best for us. They are a round band, not flat, and don't seem to bother the baby macaws. We have some of our own babies that we have kept for breeding stock that are now three years with no problems from them trying to chew them off or injure themselves. I believe bands to be a vital part of aviculture at this time. It is essential that rare birds can be identified to insure genetic variability. Often, birds change owners more frequently than we could have foreseen. ●

#### References

1. Dorskocil "Fote Bin," P.O. Box 1246, Arlington, TX 76004-1246, phone (817) 467-5116.
2. Donna G. Corp., 4903 N. Ardsley Drive, Temple City, CA 91780, phone (818) 286-3776.

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