A DEVICE FOR APPLYING CELLULOID BANDS TO BIRDS' LEGS

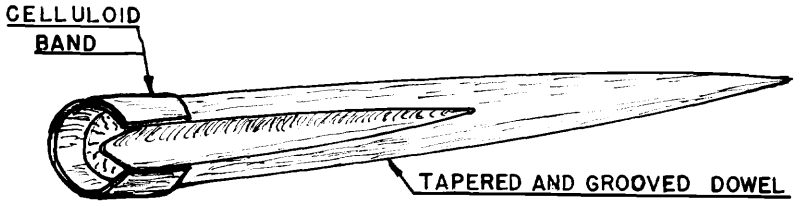
BY B. M. SHAUB

The writer has recently been assisting in the research on the movement of Evening Grosbeaks in the western part of New England initiated by Mr. Edwin Mason, Superintendent of the Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary at Northampton, Mass. One of the phases of this research program is the use of distinctive color bands by the seven banding stations. This color banding, of course, facilitates the reporting of the movement of the banded birds by the many persons who maintain feeding stations and who are ready and willing to contribute their observations.

The attempt to apply the celluloid band to the bird's leg was, as many have experienced, a trying and difficult operation always attended with the fear that a slip sooner or later might result in an accident. It seemed at once that there must be an easy way to accomplish this operation.

The necessary procedure involved was obviously one to expand the tightly rolled band and bring the open edges around the leg of the bird before the expanded band was released. It was soon discovered that these two operations could be performed by using a tapered round rod of wood having at the large end a V-shaped slot cut about three-quarters of the diameter into the rod and tapering out to the surface in about two inches more or less depending on the diameter of the rod. The rod is four or five inches long and tapered to a point slightly less than a sixteenth of an inch or small enough to enter the hole through the tightly rolled band.

To apply a celluloid band to a bird's leg the band is slipped over the tapered end of the rod and pushed to a position where it overhangs the large end of the rod at the base about half the width of the band. The rod should be large enough so that the ends of the expanded bands are about even with the surface edges of the tapering slot, Fig. 1.



The bottom of the slot in the rod carrying the expanded band is then placed against the bird's leg and the band pushed over the base of the rod with a sliding push of the thumb while the rod is held in the hand. The pressure should be applied at one end of the opened band so that it will lead the other end and begin to wrap around the leg ahead of the other. When the band is released from the rod, its spring causes it to encircle the leg with a snap and a motion too fast for the eye to follow.

The operation is extremely easy and with reasonable care the maladjustment of a band rarely occurs. If it does happen, one can carefully expand the band by holding the edge of the band with a fingernail and remove it almost as easily as when the band is free and without injury to the bird.

Different sized rods will be convenient for different sized bands and the circumference of the rod should be about a third larger than the length of the unrolled band. The slot should, of course, be sufficiently deep so that the bird's leg will lie well within the edges and at the end of the rod slot when the band is released. An old-fashioned match stick provides an excellent medium for practice as well as some entertainment.

The rod can be whittled from any suitable piece of wood, but it can be made most easily from four- or five-inch pieces of hardwood doweling of sizes from one-quarter to one-half inches in diameter. While the bands are not distributed in sizes they do, however, vary considerably in length. A dowel five-sixteenths inch in diameter is satisfactory except for the extreme lengths of bands.

A rather sharp-edged, half-round wood file is an excellent tool for pointing the rods and for cutting the grooves.

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THE FATE OF BANDED KENT ISLAND HERRING GULLS[1]

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For the past thirteen years Bowdoin College has maintained a scientific station on Kent Island, Grand Manan, New Brunswick, Canada (Bay of Fundy, Lat. 44°35′N., Long. 66°45′W.). The island, an ornithological paradise situated at the junction of the Transition and Canadian faunal zones, is composed of one hundred and fifty acres of variable terrain. The northern end of the island supports a few

[1]Contribution number 17, Bowdoin Scientific Station, Kent Island, Bay of Fundy, New Brunswick, Canada, and Osborn Zoological Laboratory, Yale University.