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# Bird Amputees

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**M**any years ago, in fact it was the summer of 1937, while birding along Lake Michigan shores, I saw a sandpiper with but one leg. It ran freely, seeming quite able to keep up with the rest of the flock, and flew off with them. It's behavior was so normal that it was some time before we had realized it was an amputee. So unusual did this seem that we spent some time wondering whether the leg had been lost to hunting, a predator or some mechanical mishap. Ten years later, I learned of a woman who banded small birds in her back yard and one year noticed several missing one leg—all on the same side. This was the side where she had been placing 2 metal bands. Careful scrutiny of recaptures revealed the cause—the continuous tapping together of the two bands caused them to form a collar by swaging of the metal and this was sharp enough to gradually cut through the leg and leave the bird an amputee! I used two anodized metal bands on the same leg of Canada geese in captivity in order to designate age and sex and be observed at a distance. After two years the legs showed no injury; the bands had swaged but were constantly worn smooth on the inside by friction with the tough, leathery skin of the shanks of the geese.

In banding small birds I have never used 2 metal bands on the same leg but have used 2 butt-to-butt plastic color-bands on one leg and never saw sign of difficulty. It was with much surprise that I found a banded male Red-bellied Woodpecker with his right leg missing. He had been banded #602-36046 on his left and blue-over-blue on the right April 6, 1969. Not until April 12, 1970 did he show up with his right leg missing just below the feathering. He was again seen in January, February, March and April, 1972. He climbed by means of fluttering and seemed very adept at feeding. He was last seen April 22, 1972 having survived two full years with his severe handicap. I only regret that I did not learn whether he was mated while an amputee. Copulation surely would have been difficult considering the use of the feet in positioning during mounting.

The next amputee I found was a male Downy Woodpecker banded #108-172156 on the right leg on January 16, 1971. A single green band was placed on the left. This leg was missing February 8, 1974.

Another Downy Woodpecker, a female, was banded 1161-93748 on the left and orange-over-black on the right, December 10, 1975. Seven years later on February 21, 1982, she was caught again and the right foot was missing. She was last seen a month later.

Seeing the great vigor and strength with which a bird jerks to loosen one of its claws from the screen wire on the bottom of my feeding tray, I can't believe that the light weight color-bands would stay on the leg if one got caught in a thorn, string, or vine. However it is conceivable that a color band could work up over the ankle and form a tourniquet naturally cutting off circulation to the foot which could result in the foot being sloughed off. Many years ago, D. L. Austin (*Bird-Banding* 2:167, 1931) found that injured birds requiring surgical amputation of one leg seemed to fare as well as normal birds of the same species which he had banded.

It would indeed be interesting to know what amputees have been found by other banders?

**JOINT EBBA-NEBBA  
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