
A Safe and Effective One-Handed Band Removal Method

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ABSTRACT

The efficacy of using scissors to cut open small bands at the butt joint is presented.

DISCUSSION

Banders may need to remove leg bands that are too worn for continued service, improperly applied, or inappropriately sized.

Several methods for removing aluminum end-butting leg bands have appeared in the literature:

1. McClure (1984, p.268) recommended sliding pieces of fine wire (such as band stringing wire) on each side of the butt joint, then pulling the band ends apart.

2. Wedeking et al. (1995) suggested using two curved hemostats, one placed span-wise on each side of the joint, to pull open the band.

3. Rose (1962) used reshaped surgical forceps inserted inside the band and forcibly pulled apart. Now banders use retaining ring pliers (also known as snap-ring or lock-ring pliers) in place of the surgical forceps because of their availability at hardware and auto parts stores and because they spread the band when squeezed. The forceps technique requires that the grips be pulled apart.

Methods 1 and 2 require two people, at a minimum. They are of little value to a solo bander. Additionally, as those techniques offer the bander no mechanical advantage, the bander must exert a force somewhat in excess of the bending strength of the band. This can be substantial. A slip by the

bander or an inopportune movement by the bird could cause an injury to it.

Method 3 can be performed by one person with relative ease, particularly when the retaining ring pliers are used. The mechanical advantage offered by the pliers requires little physical effort by the bander. This affords the bander greater control and reduces the chance of injury to the tarsus. But this method has its limitations. Two plier tips have to be inserted in the space between the band and the tarsus, one on each side of the butt joint.

Retaining ring pliers seem best suited for passerines with asymmetrical tarsal radii in band sizes 2 and above. Below that size there may not be sufficient space between the tarsus and the band to insert the plier tips without tearing the covering of the tarsus. Fleishy tarsi, like those of Mourning Doves (*Zenaida macroura*), at times may present similar constraints with bands above size 2.

I have found that the use of a small pair of scissors to open bands is an efficient and safe technique that can allow one person to open any band from size 0A through size 3A. First, the smaller scissor point is inserted between the band and the tarsus directly under the band joint. The scissors are then used to "cut" the joint. This widens the joint without the scissor point significantly pressuring or contacting the tarsus. Additionally, as the "cutting" motion is down the tarsus, contact with it is less likely to tear the covering. Once the band is partially opened, retention ring pliers are used to open the band to the point that it is removed easily.

Because only one scissor point is inserted between the band and the tarsus, this technique is

particularly effective with the smaller bands: sizes 0A - 2. As the force of the scissors is directed at the joint itself, it maximizes the leverage of the scissors' blades at the ends of the band. Again, the less force the bander is required to generate, the greater his/her control of the process and the less likely that an untoward event will injure the bird. And, no new skill is required. Finally, this process is less likely to warp the band than retention pliers alone.

While field experience has proven the efficacy of using small scissors on small bands (up to size 3A), like banding pliers, larger bands will require larger scissors.

Figure 1. Retaining ring pliers (left) and small scissors. (photo by Gordon E. Howard)



Figure 2. Small scissors used to open a size zero band on a Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*). (Photo by Gordon E. Howard)



Equipment - There are many models of retention or snap-ring pliers on the market. Retention rings come in two types: those that fit in a groove around the outside of a shaft, and those that fit in a groove on the inside of a shaft. The outside rings must have the ends pulled apart to remove the ring from the shaft. Hence, the tips of the "outside" pliers open when the handles are squeezed. This is the type needed by banders. "Convertible" pliers are available that can be configured to open or, alternatively, close when the handles are squeezed.

Some pliers come with interchangeable tips and others have fixed tips. Tips can be straight or have a 90° angle. The solo bander will find the right-angle type cumbersome to use alone. However, it becomes desirable when one bander holds the bird and another removes the band. Also, my experience is that the smaller models are easier to use, particularly with the smaller bands.

Both of the models that I have used, and the ones I reviewed for this article, will require that the tips be filed to allow the pins on the tip to come closer together. Depending on the model, the outer end of the tips may need filing to fit size 0A and 0 bands. Some, like the Blackhawk (in Fig.1), do not have a spring closure. A rubber band or "O" ring can provide that function, if desired. I used a bit of innertube for the closure on the Blackhawk in Figure 1. Here are some models.

Sears: Catalog #45490 convertible retaining ring pliers. \$11.99. These are similar to the model #PT-1285 Blackhawk purchased at a NAPA store, if memory serves me correctly. Smallest.

Advance Auto Parts: AmFro Model T-73310. \$9.99. Middle.

Chan Nel Lock: Model 907. \$17.86 at Lowe's Home Improvement. Largest.

The scissors pictured in Figure 1 are designed for camping and backpacking, so look for them in camping supply and sporting goods stores. Their small size makes them suitable for working with small bands. And, they can be carried safely in a pocket in the folded position.

Super Snips: \$3.95. Shown in Figure 1. Origin unknown.

Coghlan's: Sportsman's Folding Scissors No. 7600. \$2.99. Available from Campmor #22143-F (www.campmore.com).

LITERATURE CITED

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