Techniques

Adapting normal pliers for bird ringing and ring removal

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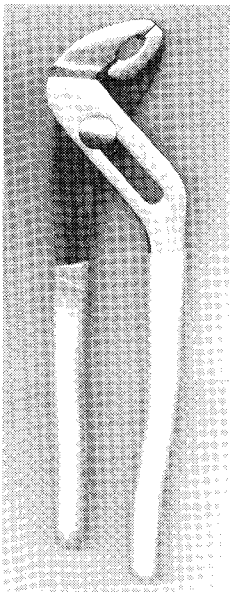
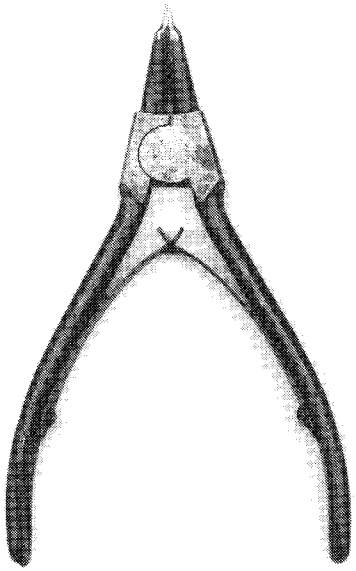
With the cost of ringing increasing every year, it is perhaps a good opportunity to look at possible ways of adapting existing tools, rather than purchasing purpose-made ones.

One such solution was found by adapting a normal pair of pliers for use on large rings. The method can be applied to a Will 190 mm (no bigger) or any other brand of waterpump pliers, and merely requires careful grinding and polishing of the serrated parts of the concave areas of both sides of the pliers (Fig. 1a). Then, just by adjusting the ratchet, rings from 8–20 mm can be comfortably closed.

Another simple alteration produces a very useful tool for opening overlapped rings, or rings that fit too tightly, or loosely, on the leg. This is an expected occurrence when working with students, but it also happens to more experienced ringers. A normal pair of circlip pliers can be reworked for this purpose by grinding down their tips into thin and sharp points. In this case (see Fig. 1b), a Will 140 mm pair of circlip pliers (opening) for circlips between 3–10 mm, was successfully tested by opening a 12.5 mm incoloy ring — with an uptight Hadeda's leg inside it! It has been used to remove overlapped stainless steel rings in size ranges of 5.25, 4.3 and 3.0 mm, as well as smaller-diameter rings. It even proved effective in removing 1.8 mm





Adapted pliers: 1a – a pair of waterpump pliers; 1b a pair of sharpened circlip pliers.

aluminium rings, overlapped too tightly on legs of sunbirds and white-eyes.

Removal of small rings is perhaps more difficult than large ones, because of the small space available to insert the plier points between leg and ring. Since the points are sharp, care should be taken not to injure the bird. Small rings should be opened by carefully inserting the pliers to a depth of one millimetre, no more, and then applying some pressure to widen the opening for further insertion. This process should be repeated until the ring can finally be removed. Small aluminium rings do get damaged and should be discarded, but stronger rings can be re-used. This technique can be used by a single person, is very quick and reduces the stress on both bird and ringer. Care should be taken to protect the tips during storage and transport (a piece of tubing for 5.25 mm rings will do), as well as from puncturing unsuspecting or careless humans.

Another tip, adapted from an idea of Sam de Beer, is to fine-polish the inner parts of ringing pliers to remove rough surfaces. This reduces friction when closing rings and also reduces that horrible creaking sound significantly. Rings that are more difficult to close, such as 3.0 mm stainless steel rings for instance, will close more easily. The polished surfaces must be kept oiled to prevent rusting.

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Cape Sugarbird Ringing Project

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I would like, through the medium of *Safring News*, to get in touch with ringers who may be currently ringing the Cape Sugarbird *Promerops cafer*. As I am already involved in a project involving this species, it would be useful if I could communicate with them about my objectives.

Since October 1998 I have used the Helderberg Nature Reserve as my main site for the study of this species. There is a high concentration in the area and I hope to establish more about their local movements away from the Helderberg and perhaps why this is done. I believe that a similar study was undertaken in the 1980s which revealed some interesting migrations. My own project has been prompted by the recapture at two sites of birds ringed elsewhere, one quite a considerable distance away – CC 17092 ringed 28/12/1994 in Anysberg Nature Reserve (3324 2245) and controlled in the Helderberg Nature Reserve 3/7/1997

The first phase is to establish a series of ringing sites along the protea 'chain', encompassing the Helderberg and Overberg areas. I currently ring at the following sites, with colour rings (right leg) indicated:

- ❑ Helderberg Nature Reserve – white on metal
- ❑ Kogel Bay Resort (3402S 1851E) – orange on metal
- ❑ Green Park, Betty's Bay (3421S 1858E) – yellow on metal
- ❑ Salmonsdam Nature Reserve (3425S 1937E) – light green on metal
- ❑ Amanzi Farms (3404S 1928E) near Greyton – purple on metal
- ❑ Eagles Nest, Pringle Bay (3405S 1851E) – red on metal
- ❑ Hottentots Holland Reserve (3404S 1902E) – pink on metal

Ringers who live close to any of the above sites or may be ringing Cape Sugarbirds elsewhere and who might be interested in collaborating on this project should please contact me.