TECHNIQUES

COLOUR TAGS FOR PENGUINS

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During 1975, I made a study of the behaviour of the Jackass Penguin, Spheniscus demersus, at Lamberts Bay on the Cape coast. In order to recognise individuals I marked them with coloured flipper tags. These proved very suitable and they are described here.

The tags were made from plastic STERKOLITE striped in white with green, red, black and yellow, and from a similar material in plain colours. The striped material was cut in such a manner as to produce various combinations of the colours e.g. green on the right, white on the left, and vice versa, green above, white below, and vice versa. The tags were made in three shapes:- rectangular, circular and triangular.

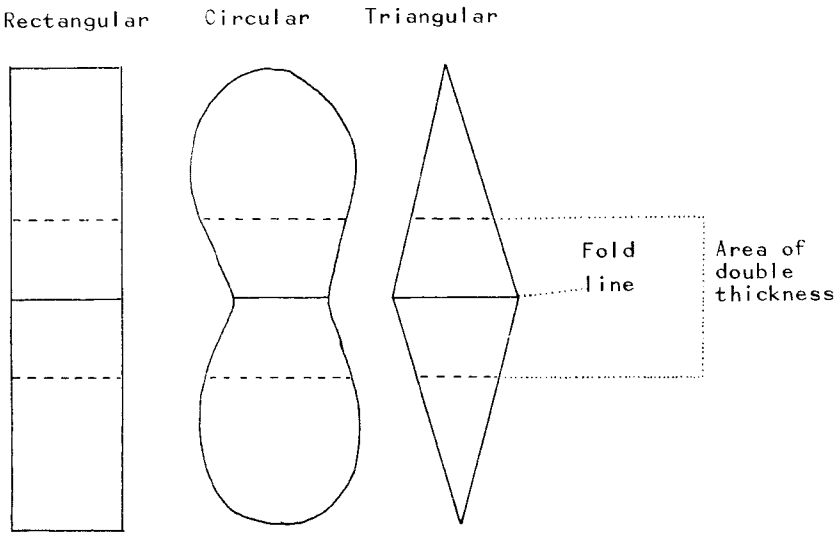
A three-letter code describes each tag. The first letter signifies the shape of the tag, e.g. R for rectangular; the second gives the colour, e.g. G for green; and the third gives the type of tag, e.g. P for plain colour, U for colour uppermost and so on. Thus CRU is a circular tag with red uppermost and white below.

This system of tagging the penguins has proved very successful although anyone attempting a similar exercise in the future would be well advised to tag both flippers. The tags do not appear to inconvenience the penguins. After six months of wear the SAFLAG tags are showing no signs of wear but the colour of the STERKOLITE tags is beginning to show flecks of white, the green and red tags apparently suffering most. Even so, they will probably be readable for at least another year, if not longer. In the event of a bird losing its tag, or the tag becoming unreadable, the bird will be left with its ring number and its tagged identity can be discovered by reference to the master schedule.

Of the colours used, red, green, pale blue, lime green and orange are the most successful although all are conspicuous, with the possible exception of the yellow against white at a distance in strong sunlight. The mustard and orange tags could be confused by an observer unfamiliar with them.

The tags were cut according to the templates shown. The central portions of the tags were double thickness as reinforcement against abrasion by the metal ring. The tags were folded in half and the two sides stuck together with Goodyear Pliobond glue leaving the top unstuck to enable the tag to be threaded onto the metal ring. The tags were then placed in a bookpress overnight. Before being threaded onto the rings the tags were machine-sewn with plastic "invisible" thread.

TEMPLATES FOR TAGS



FINISHED TAG