
News, Notes, Comments

Recommended Band Size For Inca Dove

This note warns about the possible danger of using current recommended band size for Inca Dove (*Columbina inca*).

Our station is in the Botanical Garden of Santo Domingo, downtown Oaxaca, and immersed in an urban setting. The vegetation type is a collection of various plants from the state of Oaxaca, including bushes, small trees, cacti, agaves and arid scrub. Up to now, we have had 3503 captures of which 161 correspond to Inca Dove, with 36 recaptures.

This species is known to be sedentary, so it is likely that there are minor differences in populations separated by hundreds of miles. Mueller (1992) and Pyle (1997) mention that most of the southern population are darker without recognizing a separate sub-species. Baptista et al. (1997) recognizes Inca Dove as a monotypic species. A general reference for Inca Dove is the species account by J. Mueller (1992).

The Inca Dove's tarsus is fairly variable. In Texas, the length is known to range from 15 mm to 16.5 mm (Oberholser, 1974). We have not collected tarsus length data in our local population of this species. However, we have become concerned that the standard U.S. band may be too tall for some or all of our Inca Doves.

The Bird Banding Laboratory recommends the use of band size 2 or 3 for Inca Dove (BBL, 2005, Pyle 1997). The size 2 band has an internal diameter of 3.8 mm and is 7 mm tall. The size 3 band has an internal diameter of 4.8 mm and is 7 mm tall. We have tried to band Inca Dove with band size 3; but the internal diameter is too big for the leg of this species (photo #1 shows the band on the intertarsal joint). We have used bands size 2 made in U.S. for resident species, with just a number as inscription. Because of doubts regarding these bands for this species, we began to use personal bands made in Mexico with special size specifications since October 2003 (photo # 2).



Photo 1 : Band size 3 on intertarsal joint.



Photo 2 : Special band size for Inca Dove.

We have banded a total of 39 birds with the recommended band size 2. On 21 Nov 2004, we recaptured a bird with band number 1665. This bird was banded in Apr 2003. Between the leg and the band, there was a black deposit of debris stuck to the skin of the leg. We removed the band and cleaned the leg, which was beginning to turn reddish (photo #3). We placed a new band, made in Mexico, number MG.E0013, on the other leg. Both legs were still in good shape, in spite of the fact that the previously banded leg was reddish but without signs of infection.

On 5 May 2005, personnel from the Botanical Garden caught and collected another Inca Dove, which was practically dead. This bird had been banded on 28 Nov 2002 with band number 1621. The banded leg was completely swollen, and the band had no movement. The bird died a few hours after it had been captured and we collected the leg and band (photo #4).

Dr. Robert Tweit in the U.S., who has banded and recaptured more than 1400 Inca Dove using size 2 bands exclusively, has not observed this problem in recaptured birds (pers. com.). It looks like the internal diameter of the size 2 bands is adequate for this species; but we think that the height is

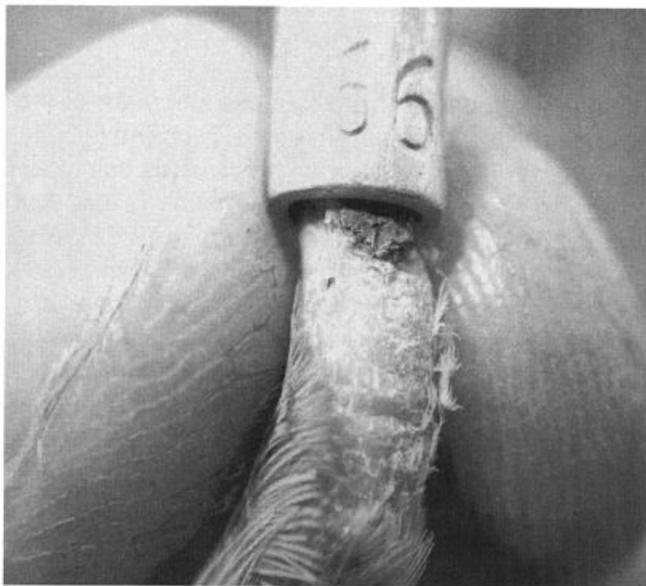


Photo 3 : Debris between leg and band.

excessive, preventing the band from having enough up and down movement, particularly in the case of birds with a short tarsus.

To facilitate movement, and avoid trouble, we have designed and produced a special band 5 mm tall, with a slightly larger internal diameter of 4 mm. This custom size allows for good movement of the band without injuring the leg or the bird.

We recommend special care for short tarsus species (dove spp., kingfisher spp. and swift spp.). For small doves (*Columbina* spp. and *Claravis* spp.), we recommend the use of a band 5 mm tall. So far we have had no trouble with these new specific bands on Inca Dove legs, with 110 banded birds and 21 recaptures.

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Photo 4 : Leg of dead bird with band

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Stainless Steel Bands 1A & 1D: Suggestions for Use

Though difficult to open and close, stainless steel bands may be more appropriate than their alloy counterparts for use with certain species.

A certain percentage of the Loggerhead Shrikes (*Lanius ludovicianus*) I band cannot comfortably wear standard alloy size 1A band. In most instances, I have been able to form the band into an oval to improve the fit, but this is not wholly acceptable.

In 2004, I acquired some stainless steel 1A bands from Canada and started using those for most of the shrikes I banded. These bands have a larger

inside diameter, so that the fit is much better. In 2005, BBL made this band available as size 1D. So I now use, and highly recommend, stainless size 1D for all Loggerhead Shrikes.

Another western species with which I have had experience is Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*). In a rather short period of time, the standard alloy 1A band on many towhees shows dangerous wear on the bottom edge of the band. This is caused by the bird's foraging behavior; as the bird scratches around in dry dirt, fine grit is deposited on the leg beneath the band. The band slides up and down the leg as the bird hops about, honing the lower edge of the band so it becomes sharp enough to damage leg scutes, in effect "shaving" the leg. Banders should consider using stainless steel 1A bands for Spotted Towhee to avoid this damage. Other ground-foraging species in arid habitat might also be candidates for a stainless band. Banders should examine the lower edge of the band on recaptures to check for harmful wear; if present, consider replacing the alloy band with stainless.

Unfortunately, these stainless bands are hard to open and hard to close. (They will break the prongs on your banding pliers!) To open them, I use a pair of snap ring pliers, available at auto supply stores. I had to grind off the inner edges of the pliers so they would close more tightly, which allows the tips to fit inside the band. If you get pliers with replaceable tips, use the tips that curve up in a 90 degree angle so that the band opens without distortion.

Stainless bands are hard to close because of the springiness of the steel. To close the band initially, use the 1A opening in your pliers. This will close the band enough to keep it on the bird's leg, but you will see a 1-2 mm gap remaining. Using the next smaller opening on your pliers, position the band so its opening is at 45 degrees from the pliers' opening. Squeeze and recheck the closure. When the band is closed completely, again position it in the 1A slot and squeeze till the band is rounded correctly. I have not yet lapped a band using this technique, but it does require some practice.

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