

Why does my canary have a band on it's leg?

Q & A

To a first time bird owner, the metal band on a bird's leg is often a surprise. Many worry that it is 'unnatural' or restrictive. Some ask for the band to be removed. Breeders take leg bands as a familiar part of the hobby and seldom think much about them, until a newcomer asks "WHY?"

What is a leg band?

There are plastic and metal leg bands, and they also come as split, with a cut, or closed, which is a complete, unbroken ring. The closed band is slipped on a very young chick, while it's feet and toes are small and able to slip through the ring. A split band is applied by a tool that holds the split apart until placed around the leg of any size/age of bird.

What are the numbers or letters stamped on a band?

Most leg bands have the following stamped or engraved: a club's initials, the year, and a series of numbers that are kept by a band registrar, as a record of which breeder purchased a certain range of numbers.

Why do birds need bands?

Pet owners and breeders use leg bands as **identification**.

If a club's leg bands are used, a lost-and-found bird can be traced back to it's breeder, as a very primitive version of a microchip. If the breeder kept records of who purchased that particular bird, the owner could be found. Plastic bands are generally not recorded and can not be traced back to a specific breeder.

Breeders use leg bands to identify individual birds, to match to pedigrees which are used within their breeding program. Band numbers are used at many song contests and shows to distinguish one bird from the others.

Bird buyers can refer to a closed leg band as an **indicator of the age and breed** of the bird, since the band must be applied soon after hatching.

There may be **legal reasons** a bird must have a leg band. Various parrots and similar birds may not be imported or sold without a valid leg band that proves it was captive-bred, not wild-caught. The new Animal Welfare Act is requiring birds to have individual identification.

Are leg bands safe?

The leg band is simply a part of routine care, needing attention in the same way as toenails, for example. Bird keepers will check on the leg band regularly, insuring the band moves along the leg freely, not becoming too tight, or slipping to the thigh above the leg.

It is not a cause for concern if a bird seems to pick at his band, if the leg is not sore and the band moves freely on the leg. The bird may simply be reacting to stress or boredom.

Birds 'rung' as chicks, accept the bands and pay them little attention. An older bird with a recently applied split band, may need time to become comfortable with the new band.

If a leg band does need to be removed, do not panic. If there is no avian vet, who routinely cares for small birds, and your only option is a small animal vet, ask if he has a band cutter that is designed to remove bands from small birds, and if he has done it successfully. The procedure is a simple one, and with the proper tool, you may feel comfortable doing it yourself, same as nail clipping.

– IFFCA Staff

Susan has posted a helpful video of the removal of a band with a tool designed specifically for the job. She also lists two sources for purchase of the band cutter.

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