

Banding Your Chicks

by Darrell Horst

Banding can be a little tricky until you get used to the process. Hopefully I can share a few helpful suggestions that were passed my way and I learned by trial and error.

I pull the nest from the breeding cage and place it in a green strawberry container. (Those green plastic containers strawberries come in). The nest fits in these containers well and will not tip or roll while I am working with the chicks.

I start with the largest chick. I pull one chick at a time from the nest and place it on a Kleenex or paper tissue I keep handy. I've found 99.9% of the time chicks will poop when handled and I want them to do that on the Kleenex, not me. Tissue is also very absorbent and will absorb this watery poop.

I grab a band with my left hand and get it in the right direction and pick up the chick with the other hand. It takes practice, but you should be able to hold the chick's foot in your fingers and have its body supported in your hand while the band is in the other hand. Since you want to place the band on the chick's right foot, placing the band in my left hand gives me the right position.

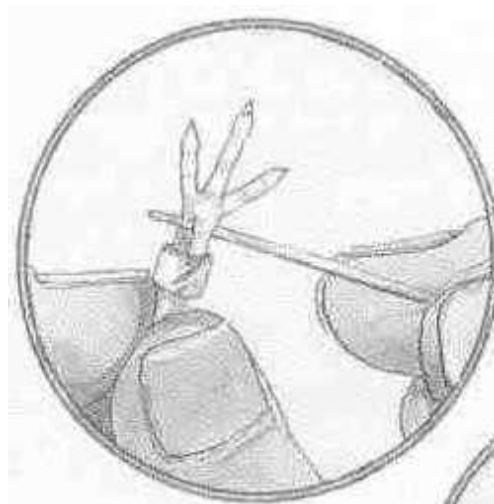
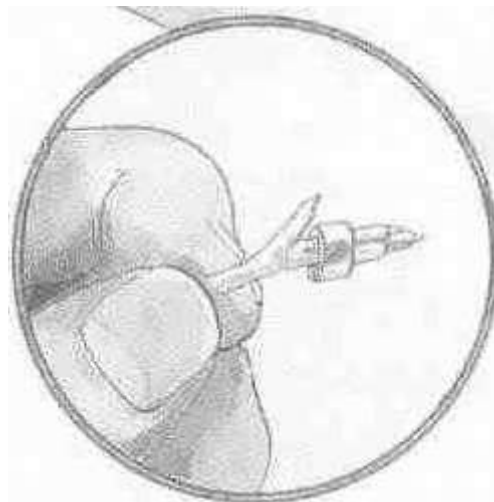
In the illustrations, the leg is held with the left hand and the band is placed on the leg with the right. This is opposite from my method, but each person needs to do what is comfortable.

Carefully hold the chick's right foot so the 3 front facing toes are pointing forward toward you. Carefully slip the band over those 3 toes and slowly push the band toward the ankle as you pull the toes the opposite direction.

Make sure you have all 3 toes through the band before making the last final push over the ankle joint. At this point my left fingers are holding the 3 front toes and my right hand fingers are holding the band. I do more of a pull on the toes then a push on the band. Since the middle front toe is longer, it is easy to sometimes not get all 3 toes in the band properly. If the chick insists on curling its toes, just be patient and try to grab the toes nearer the tips and the chick will straighten them out. Being patient makes slipping the band on much easier.

Once the band is over the 3 toes, gently pull the toes forward as you guide the band over the ankle joint. Once the band is over the joint, carefully push it back far enough to free the back toe. Sometimes you need to grab the back toe and pull it out of the band. You can now move the band back toward the ankle joint and you are done.

If the band goes on too easy and you can move it over the ankle joint easily, wait another day before banding. If you band the chick



to early, the band will more then likely be taken off by the hen and you will lose it. Remember a snug fit over the ankle joint is what you want. Proceed to the next chick if they are the same size. If the other chicks are smaller wait a day or two to band them.

If you find you are routinely re-banding the babies, then you are banding too early.

Wait until the chicks are approximately 7 days old. Even this suggestion can vary a couple of days. Chicks grow at very different rates. The quantity of food they are getting is a major factor in their growth rate.

This 7 day suggestion is based on using American made bands. European bands, which are becoming more readily available, are smaller. Banding with these bands requires banding the babies when they are several days younger.

Banding of your baby canaries is an important step in the process of responsible breeding. Banding with closed bands insures the canary can be properly identified in the future.

The band contains the year the bird was born, the club selling the band and the actual band number. Clubs selling bands keep records of bands sold and can trace the band to the original breeder.

While you have the nest out and banding your birds, it is a good time to inspect the nest and trim the excess nest material and poop from around the top of the nest. You may also want to reshape the nest to give the growing chicks a little more elbow room.

What happens if you wait too long to band?

Place a very small amount of lubricant on either the inside of the band or on the chick's ankle joint. (Using a toothpick or cotton swab may be helpful). Using too much lubricant, will just create a mess. Getting lubricant all over your fingers can make them slippery and hard to work with.

Also using a little lubricant to stick the 3 front toes together may also help. It's usually the ankle which is hardest to get the band over. Just be patient. Of course there is a point where it is just too late.

Some breeders suggest enlarging the band slightly. Using something similar to an ice pick will work. This can be done, but only ever so slightly. Enlarging the band could disqualify you from showing your birds.

The key to successful banding is patience and good recordkeeping. I place a red clothes pin on breeding cages with babies and place a yellow clip on their cages when I need to watch them for banding.

