

Danger! Do Not Band! Danger!



Scientists band birds. When scientists catch birds, they carefully place bands on the birds' legs. The bands are small and light. They have numbers. The banded birds are then released. The bands help the scientists keep track of where the birds go. They help them keep track of how many birds there are.

Scientists learned the hard way that some birds shouldn't be banded. Condors are big birds. Condors are among the biggest flying birds in the world. Condors shouldn't be banded. Banding condors is very dangerous. It's so dangerous it can cause the bird to grow very ill and die. Other birds are not harmed by being banded. Why is it so dangerous for the condor?

When condors are hot, they cool themselves in a special way. They cool themselves by going to the bathroom on their legs. As their waste dries, it cools their blood. When a condor is banded, the waste collects around the band. It builds up. It glues the band to the bird's leg.

When this happens, the condor's leg can get infected. The condor can become ill and die. Today, scientists do not use bands to track condors. They use radio tags. The radio tags are put on the condors' wings near the shoulder.

Shing and the World Record Holder

One morning, Shing went for a walk on the rocks along the seashore. Suddenly, Shing saw something. Shing ran close and saw that it was a bird. The bird was caught in some fishing line. It was struggling to free itself. Shing ran and got the park ranger. “Come quickly,” said Shing. “A bird is caught in some fishing line. It is struggling to free itself. I think the line needs to be cut. Please come quickly!”

Shing led the park ranger to the bird. The park ranger very carefully cut away the fishing line from the struggling bird. Before the park ranger released the bird, she did something. She looked at a band on the bird’s leg. She carefully wrote down the number, the date, and where the bird was found. Only then did she let the bird go.

The park ranger told Shing, “This bird is an arctic tern. The arctic tern holds a world record. It holds the world record for how far it migrates. The bird flies from the Arctic Circle. It flies to the Antarctic Circle. It flies halfway around the world. It goes back and forth every year. No other bird migrates so far. How did scientists learn this? They learned it by banding birds.”

