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A WING-TAGGING SYSTEM FOR MARKING LARGER PASSERINE BIRDS

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The principle of putting patagial wing-tags on birds to aid identification of individuals is well-established. The central component of such tags is a pin which holds all the other parts together. Other workers have commonly made this pin from a short length of either monofilament nylon rod or stainless steel wire. In both cases the ends of the pin are enlarged to prevent the other components of the tag from becoming detached: the nylon rod is heated at the ends; the wire is curled round.

We have found that such pins are difficult to fit when under field conditions, and, in the case of the nylon rod, also insufficiently durable. We have devised another system, based on a readily available commercial product, namely, the 'pop-rivet'. DCS has used this system successfully for two years to mark Magpies Pica pica on Anglesey, north Wales. It is simple to make, simple to assemble in the field, and robust in terms of length of life.

Each complete wing-tag comprises the following: the rivet part of a pop-rivet, two nylon washers, a stainless steel washer and the tag itself (Fig. 1).

To attach the complete tag to the bird's wing, one needs also a 'threader', for which the mandrel of a pop-rivet can be used. But, in addition, a rivet, two nylon washers and a piece of distinctively coloured material (e.g. orange PVC/nylon - vide infra), should be added to the mandrel to

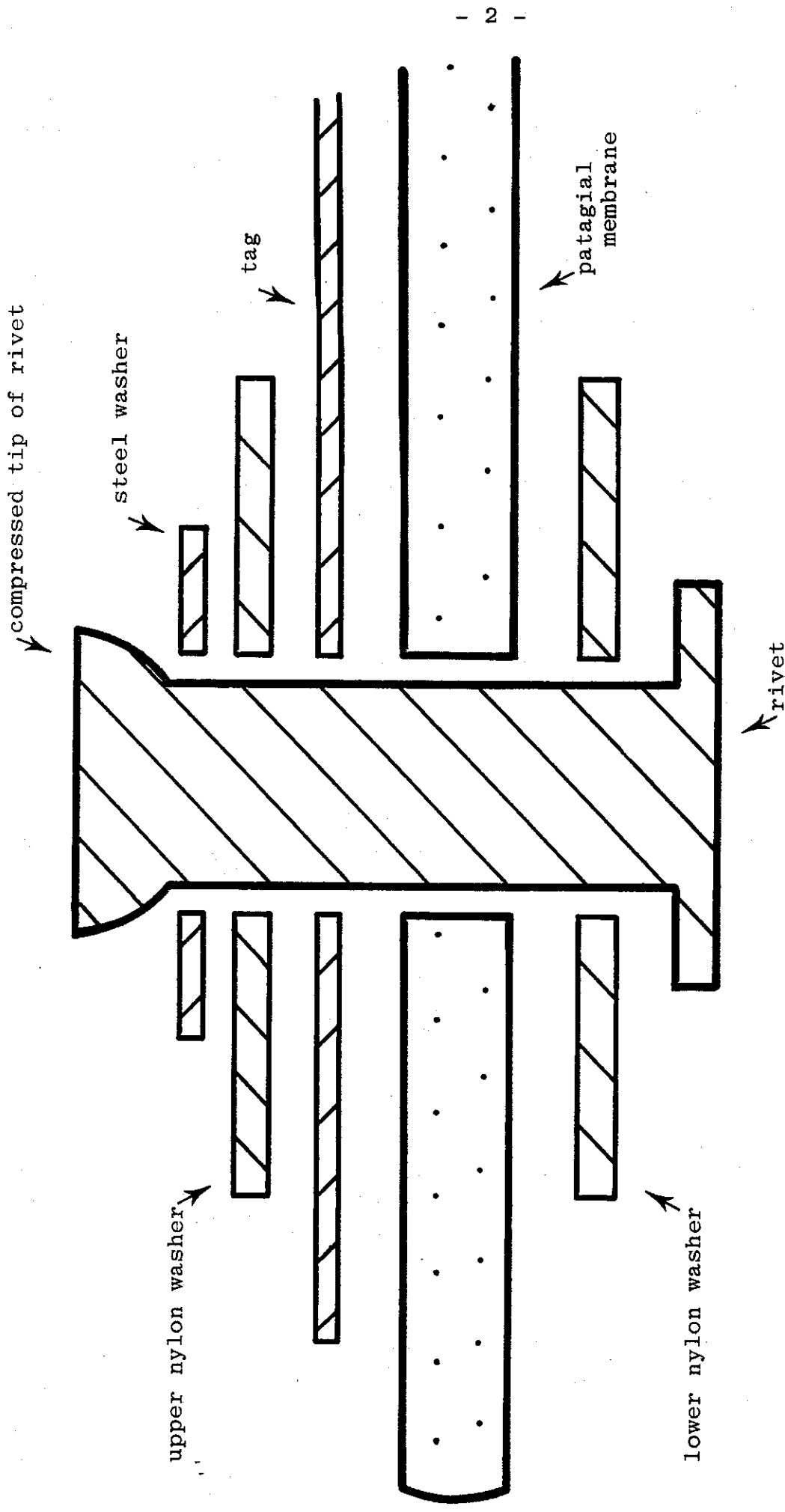


FIGURE 1. Transverse section of wing-tag for use on larger passerine birds, in situ, on the patagial membrane of one wing

make a 'flag' to help one re-find the threader when it has been accidentally dropped on to the ground (Fig. 2).

The following points need emphasising, but dimensions are not given, as these will depend on the body-size of the bird species being marked. An example, however, for the Magpie is given in Appendix 1.

Construction of the complete tag. The rivet needs to be sufficiently long to prevent the tag itself being held rigidly against the wing: the tag should be capable of being rotated against the wing to minimize obstruction of the wing's movements. The holes in both the nylon washers and the stainless steel washer must be of such a size that they all fit the rivet closely.

Fitting the complete tag to the bird. The parts of the tag are assembled on the spot with the bird held in the hand. The threader provides the means of assembling the parts. First, the rivet is placed on the threader, followed by the first nylon washer. Then the pin of the threader is pressed smartly up through the centre of the patagial membrane on one wing of the bird. The tag itself is now dropped down the pin and on to the rivet, followed by the second nylon washer, and lastly the steel washer. The threader is slipped back out of the rivet, and, finally, using the ringing pliers, which one would be carrying at the same time for attaching a conventional numbered leg-ring, the top one millimetre, or thereabouts, of the rivet is squeezed to secure everything to the wing. Before the rivet tip is squeezed, the immediately

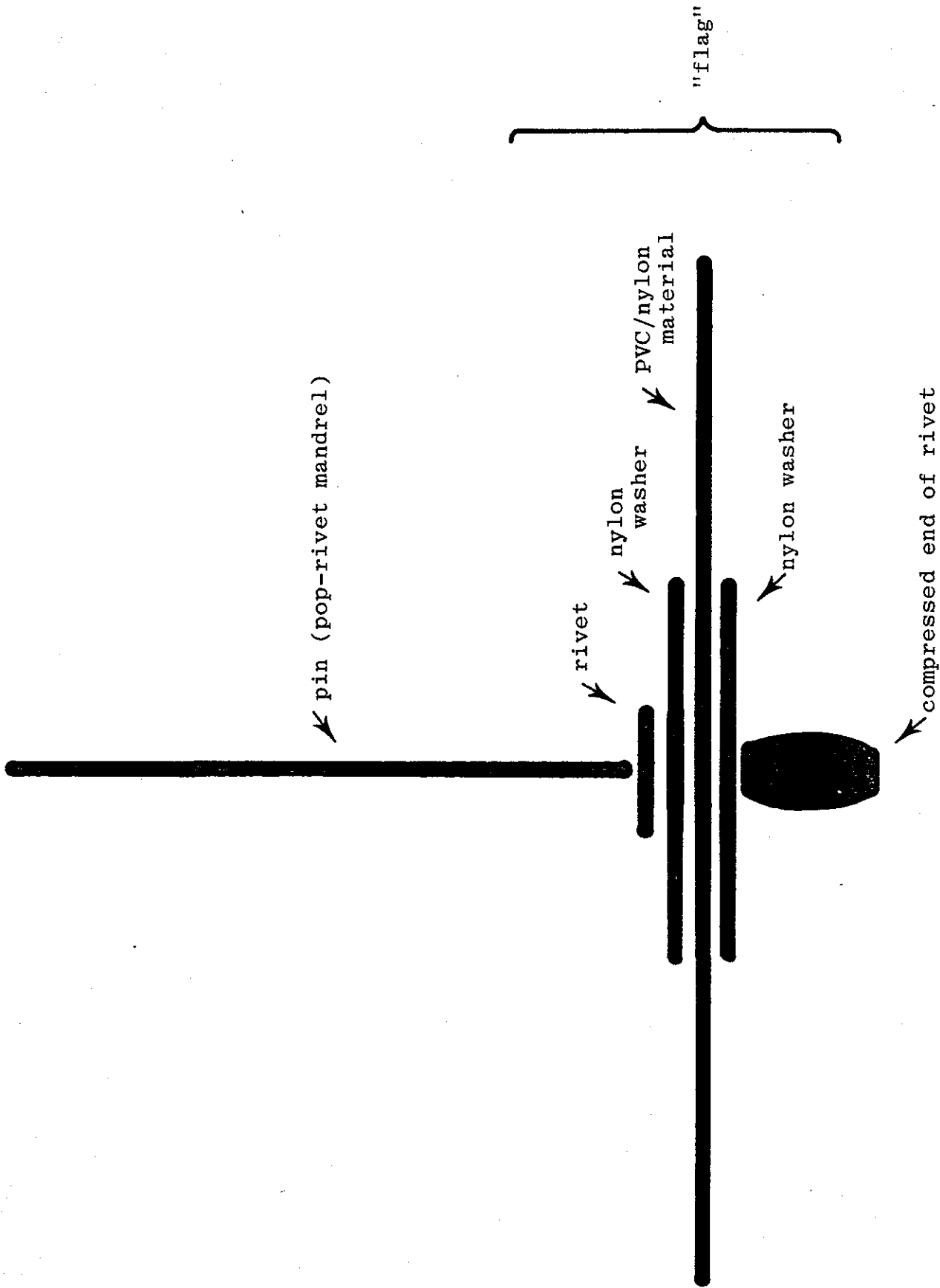


FIGURE 2. Lateral view of 'threader' used for assembling wing-tag.

underlying steel and nylon washers must be lifted up towards the tip, to ensure that the wing has the full available space between tag and lower nylon washer. A pair of oblique-cutting nippers, capable of cutting the rivet, is necessary for removing a tag improperly attached to the wing.

APPENDIX 1. Component materials and example dimensions of the complete wing-tag for use on the Magpie, together with suppliers of the materials in Great Britain.

Rivet - 'pop rivet': aluminium alloy (2.3 mm diameter x 8.5 mm long). Made by Tucker Fasteners, Ltd., Walsall Road, Birmingham, B42 1BP.

Nylon washers: nylon 66 (both 11.0 mm diameter x 0.8 mm thick with a 2.4 mm hole). Made by Weston Manufacturing Co., Cooks Cross, South Molton, Devon, EX36 4AW.

Steel washer - 'punched washer': stainless steel (size 8BA, with 2.4 mm hole). Available from various sources.

Tag: 2 1/2 oz. PVC/nylon sheet, semi-matt finish, white, but other colours are available (55 x 35 mm; the leading tag corners are cut off obliquely, using scissors, and the hole is burnt out using a hot wire). Material supplied by H. Huntriss & Son Ltd., Monarch Works, 91 Bermuda road, Moreton, Wirral, Merseyside, L46 6BD.

Tag marks (letters and numerals - two per tag - 20 mm high x 15 mm wide; 4 mm thick; painted with a slender artist's paint brush on the lower half of the rough side of the tag) put on with black etching ink (Rotring Drawing Ink).

Using two characters per tag, approximately 1200 individual tags can be created.