

Standard Operating Procedures

#AU 0024: Bird Euthanasia

Materials:

Bird holding bags
Small box for holding
Blankets
Heat packs (i.e. hand warmers)
Band removal equipment
Plastic bags
Markers

Canadian Wildlife Banding Permit is required for capture and banding of wild birds.

Birds are captured following procedures in SOP#002. They are first processed (see SOP #003) then banded following SOP#004. Blood samples will be taken following SOP#001. When banding wild birds, under rare circumstances, a bird may become unusually stressed or injured and may show no signs of recovery (see SOP AU#0026: Monitoring stress and injury in wild birds). Additionally, birds that are already sick or injured may be captured during netting. This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) describes the acceptable method for euthanasia of birds in the field. This procedure ensures a consistent method is used for euthanasia of birds under field conditions and is applicable whenever a bird is injured or found injured to the extent that euthanasia represents the most appropriate and humane course of action as determined by SOP AU#0026: Monitoring stress and injury in wild birds. If a bird is suffering and in pain and does not appear likely to respond to rehabilitation, then it should be euthanized. Cervical dislocation is a method approved by the Canadian Council on Animal Care for birds up to 2kg (i.e. birds of the size one would catch using mist nets or Potter's traps). In cervical dislocation, the neck is quickly stretched causing the cervical vertebrae to separate. It is a humane technique for euthanasia of small birds when performed by individuals with technical proficiency.

Procedure

Euthanasia will only be performed by the PI or bander in charge. Euthanasia will be performed away from the public eye and from other birds and/or animals. The bird must be handled gently and carefully to minimize distress to the animal as well as the bander in charge. The base of the skull is held in one hand and the body is held at the base of the neck with the other hand. The head is then pulled forcefully and quickly away from the body to dislocate the neck vertebrae from the cranium to damage the lower brain region. This leads to rapid unconsciousness. This is achieved most humanely by using a rapid stretching motion to cause severance of the brain from the spinal cord and carotid arteries. Death must then be verified and confirmed by observations of the absence of movement, the absence of respiratory and heartbeat activity for at least three minutes and by checking eye and toe pinch reflexes.

A dead bird should be preserved for study skin preparation. Birds should be stored in a Ziploc bag labelled with location, date, species and any other information. Birds should be stored in the Biology Department in the freezer in CC408.

A record of euthanasia will be kept and maintained. This report will include the date, species, band number, net or location found, name of personnel involved, bird status, probable cause, action taken, outcome and any other pertinent information. Following an event in which euthanasia is used, the banding operation should be reassessed by the PI (bander in charge) and actions that will minimize the chance of a repeat event shall be instituted. A record of all stressed, injured or dead birds will be kept as part of all bird banding activities. The PI will notify the veterinarian to discuss the event.

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Adapted from Vancouver Island University Protocol