

Permanent Identification of Birds



This fact sheet gives information on permanently identify your birds using a microchip.

Protecting and identifying your pet or breeding stock from loss and/or theft is a major consideration when purchasing any birds.

Several means to identify birds are available to the bird-keeping hobby. These range from Closed Rings, Split Rings, Microchips and Tattoos. (Tattooing is not a popular method to identify birds within the UK – and is more often used for pet dogs and cats).

Closed ringing birds is very popular within our hobby, mainly due to the low cost of rings – but unfortunately these rings are usually made from a metal that can be removed from the leg – either using a pair of ring scissors or simply a pair of wire cutters - this would obviously apply to split rings as well. Thieves have also been known to remove rings using jewellery cutters.

Permanent protection for your bird(s) is best achieved using a tiny piece of computer technology, usually referred to as a "microchip". The microchip, as the name infers, is a specially designed silicone computer chip, mounted onto an antenna and then hermetically sealed into a container, approximately the size of a "grain of rice". This technology is pre-programmed with a unique identification number and is capable of emitting a radio frequency of the number when a scanner/reader is passed over it. No power supply is present on the microchip.

Obviously when making the decision to microchip a bird, the size and the replacement cost of the bird must be taken into consideration. To microchip a stud of zebra finches for example, may technically be possible but it is not going to be economical. Whereas to microchip a large parrot is relatively simple and cost effective.

The sterile microchip can be inserted into the correct area of the bird's body (by a qualified person ONLY) using a special hypodermic needle; it is quite safe and relatively painless. Performed by an expert, the procedure will take only a few seconds to complete and the bird should not experience any pain or discomfort. Once inserted the microchip is not visible to the naked eye. It can last for many decades and cannot be easily removed. It is designed to remain in place under the skin, and will not travel around in the blood stream or be excreted by the bird.

Please note – This is NOT a procedure that can be carried out by the average bird keeper. At all stages of the procedure a qualified vet should be consulted - training is required to insert the chip in the correct position within the body.

When the microchip is inserted into the bird's body, the identification number is logged onto a countrywide recovery database. So if the bird is lost or stolen it can be easily re-united with its owner. Major nationwide groups, such as the Police (Wildlife Liaison Officers), RSPCA, Veterinary Surgeries, Dog Wardens, Trading Standard Officers etc., have scanners/readers and will be able to read the chip just by passing the scanner/reader over the bird's body.

The information held on the nationwide database can easily be updated if the owner changes address or the bird is sold. Although, a small fee may be charged to cover the cost for the information change.

Costs vary from area to area. Avian vets should be able to insert the chip quickly and easily. The one off payment also includes the registration fee. You may be able to negotiate a better fee should you be having more than one bird micro chipped at the same time.

Micro chipping birds has been used for many years by zoos and other breeding programs, many CITES 1 birds are chipped and their details recorded onto DEFRA paperwork returned to the owner. This method has been adopted to deter smugglers and the illegal bird trade as well as thieves.

In the past there has been no worldwide standard for the microchip and scanner production. This meant that manufacturers just selected the best code suitable for their production (rather like the arguments in the past over VHS or BETAMAX video recorders). But, with the recently introduced worldwide ISO Standard, this means that all new scanners and new microchips are compatible with one another. Obviously this is NOT retrospective – chips produced prior to 2000 will not necessarily be able to be read by every scanner. Always ensure that you ask for an ISO standard chip to be inserted in your pet!

Micro chipping is not just for the Parrot owner; it is generally available for any one who would like to identify their birds electronically. If the owner or breeder requires a visual means of identifying their stock a spilt metal or coloured ring should also be applied to the bird(s).

This fact sheet has been produced for:
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