

DEATH BY MISADVENTURE  
By Constance Katholi

In November I received a telephone call from a new neighbor, a young Norwegian woman, who said that she had found two dead banded birds. Because of the bands, she had felt an obligation to report their deaths to the proper authorities. The Department of Natural Resources of West Virginia which she contacted referred her to me. It was, consequently, only because of my banding activities that I learned of the following strange story.

The birds were wearing my bands--one, an adult chickadee, had been originally banded a year ago in November, 1963; and the second, a titmouse, had been banded as an immature in August of this year, 1964. In our telephone conversation I had difficulty understanding the cause of the tragedy, so was considerably surprised and dismayed to discover that the birds had met death in the interior of a child's backyard swing or gymnasium set! Their bodies had been found when the equipment was moved for winter storage and indications were that the birds had been dead varying lengths of time.

This particular outfit which has numerous adaptations for swings, rings, and a slide is not a home-made affair but a standard product. The apparatus consists of four open-ended steel tubes, each  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches in diameter, forming a pair of "A" frames, which support a sealed horizontal member to which the swings, etc., are attached. (See accompanying diagram.) The holes at the top of the "A" frames invite curious, shelter-seeking birds to enter--those birds which would use nesting holes anyway--and on proceeding down the diagonals, whether by intent or accident, are unable to retrace their path.

I was told that a third bird of unknown species had also been fatally trapped, but being unbanded, it had not been saved for my examination. A fourth bird had been trapped in the same manner last summer. Luckily, this bird was still alive when found by children playing in the yard, who heard it fluttering in the pipe. The bird was rescued by tilting off the ground the supporting leg in which it was imprisoned.

Unfortunately, the holes at the top of the frame were not immediately plugged with rags or paper--as they are now. This is a simple home remedy to be sure, but one which should not be necessary if the outfit had been properly designed in the first place. How many of these swings are currently in backyards and playgrounds all over the country?

A little publicity on this subject, coupled with an appeal to manufacturers to cap the hollow tubes in the factory, could save many birds in the future.

Footnote: In talking to a retailer of these products, I learned that the manufacturer of another brand of different construction which

has open ends on its horizontal member supplies plastic caps to cover them. I am told, however, that these are not very satisfactory, as they tend to deteriorate or are misplaced. The designer in this case would seem to have recognized the possible hazard. Furthermore, the retailer mentioned that locally this past summer another serious problem had developed with the open pipes, as they proved a haven for yellow jackets.

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