

Feather Imping

By Betty O'Leary

What is Imping?

- Imping is the process of replacing broken feathers on one bird with new ones from another bird. This is done by using an internal splint inside of the hollow shaft of the feather.

Why Imp?

- Broken feathers can hinder or even prevent a bird from being able to fly well enough to survive in the wild. Therefore it is important that birds have good feather condition before being released back into the wild.
- Depending on the time of year, and species, it can take from one month to two years for a bird to molt out the broken feathers and replace them with new ones.
- Imping allows you to release the bird now instead of holding the bird for the amount of time it takes for it to molt in new feathers.

Tools needed for Imping

- Scissors
- Drill bits
- 5 minute epoxy
- Pieces of paper to put between feathers
- Bamboo skewers or feather shafts
- Feathers to be used for imping. It must be the exact same feather that is broken on the bird that is being impeded. (Example: Right primary #8 must be impeded with a right primary #8) and from the same species and approximately the same sized bird.



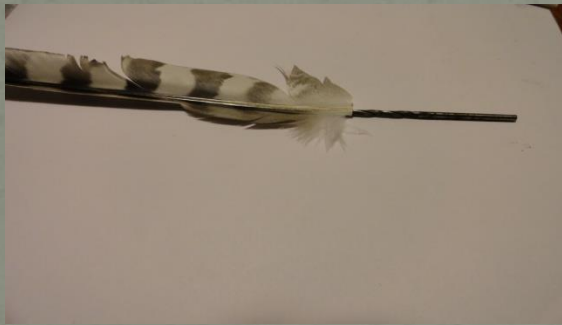
How to Imp

- Examine the bird ahead of time to see which feathers need imping. This prevents the bird from being stressed by being held longer than needed while the feathers are being prepared for imping.
- Remove feathers needed from a cadaver or saved wings by cutting them around one half inch from the follicle. The feather can be cut shorter later if needed. Make sure that you keep track of which feather is which. You can do this by numbering them. (Example: R9, R4, L8)



How to imp continued...

- If using loose molted feathers or from a cadaver, rip off the barbs from the shaft. They do not have to be from the same species that is being impeded, although same species works best, but they should be the same type of feather (Ex: outer primary, inner primary, secondary) and from a similar species of bird.



- Use a drill bit to ream out the inside of the feather shaft on the feather that is being impeded.



How to imp continued...

- Cut the top off of the debarbed shaft until it fits snug into the hollow shaft of the feather being impeded. If using bamboo skewers widdle down if needed to make a snug fit.

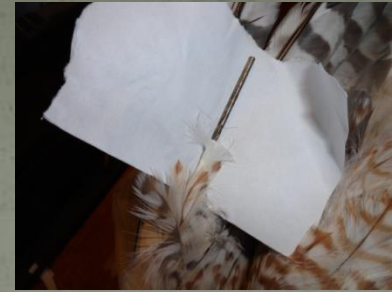


- Once all of the feathers are prepared, get the bird that is being impeded.
- Slide a piece of paper under the feather being impeded.
- Cut the broken feather on the bird at the appropriate location, so the feather is the correct length once impeded.



How to imp continued...

- Ream out the shaft on the bird with the drill bit.
- Cut the bottom end of the debarbed shaft, or the bamboo skewer, that is being used as the splint to the correct length so it fits snug inside of the shaft on the bird.



- Once splint is cut to fit correctly, remove it from both shafts and apply glue to the top half and place into feather shaft. Then apply glue to the bottom half and place into shaft in the bird.



How to imp continued...

- Make sure that the feather is pushed in all the way and the two ends meet flush. It is also very important to make sure that the feather is rotated the correct direction.
- Once glue is dry, remove the paper and arrange the feathers back into place.



Your Turn!