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## Banding Banter

You know what they say – once you’ve done something three times, it becomes a habit! Herewith then, the third *BirDBanD* to circulate amongst the Banding Community, hopefully triggering much banding banter. Here’s to many more!

If you have a story to share, or would like to know more about a particular banding project, please contact the [Banding Office](#). Also, feel free to forward *BirDBanD* to your friends and colleagues.

## Banding Database update

Marking of individual animals in a population is regarded as one of the most essential research tools for biologists – acknowledging the value of bird banding for conservation, management and research highlights the need for careful management of bird banding data.

The first bird banding record in New Zealand is from 1911, but coordinated banding only commenced in 1947. This was carried out variously under the auspices of the Ornithological Society, the Dominion Museum, and the Wildlife Service of the Department of Internal Affairs, until the inception of the New Zealand National Bird Banding Scheme under the Department of Conservation in 1967.

The banding dataset has over 1.5 million records of banded birds and over 400,000 subsequent recoveries of these birds, representing millions of dollars in past research investment. Some 20 000 to 25 000 birds are banded each year.

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As part of DOC’s quest to improve several aspects of the Banding Office, we are investigating options for a replacement of our current bird banding database.

The new database will allow registered banders to upload their banding schedules and recovery spreadsheets directly on-line, and members of the public will be able to report sightings of banded birds through the same interface, receiving immediate feedback. Reports of banding and recovery data per species, region or project will be available subject to login privileges and data sharing agreements or moratoria.

Of course, this system will only work if the database holds all the relevant records, and if it performs according to the expectations of the users.

## Packing and stacking

The Banding Office finally moved back into Conservation House in February, but the process of consolidating, moving and re-packing all the boxes and bands and Darvic strips took somewhat longer. Twelve more boxes went to Archives, eleven crates of bands need sorting, three cabinets are stocked, and thirty blue crates and several rolls of Darvic strips are neatly labelled with the rest of what makes up the Banding Office “stuff”.



## Dark, medium, light, pale or faded?

So, the bird you saw had a green band, a blue band and a white-ish band. Would that be dark green or lime green, medium blue or pale blue, white, cream or faded yellow? What did you see? "Butt..." you say, exasperated!

What if we had a record of which species were banded with which colours? And an indication of which colours fade over time, or differ depending on whether seen in shade or sunlight? What if there were a standardised way of recording and reporting colour bands, and a database that could be queried based on colour records? Surely it must be possible! Watch this space...

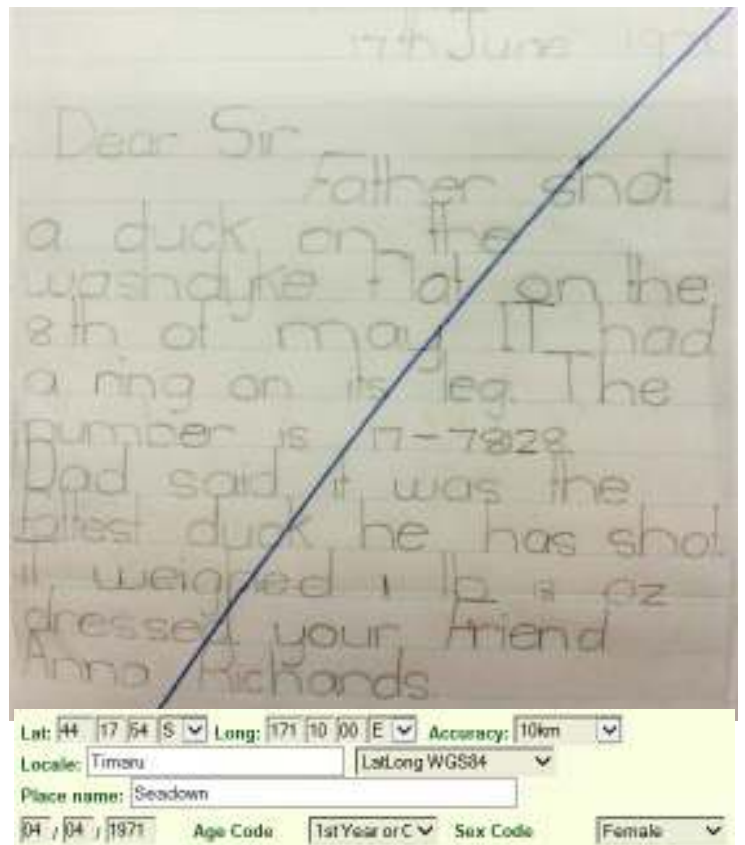


Darvic/Cellulose butt band colours

## From the archives: Cape Pigeon



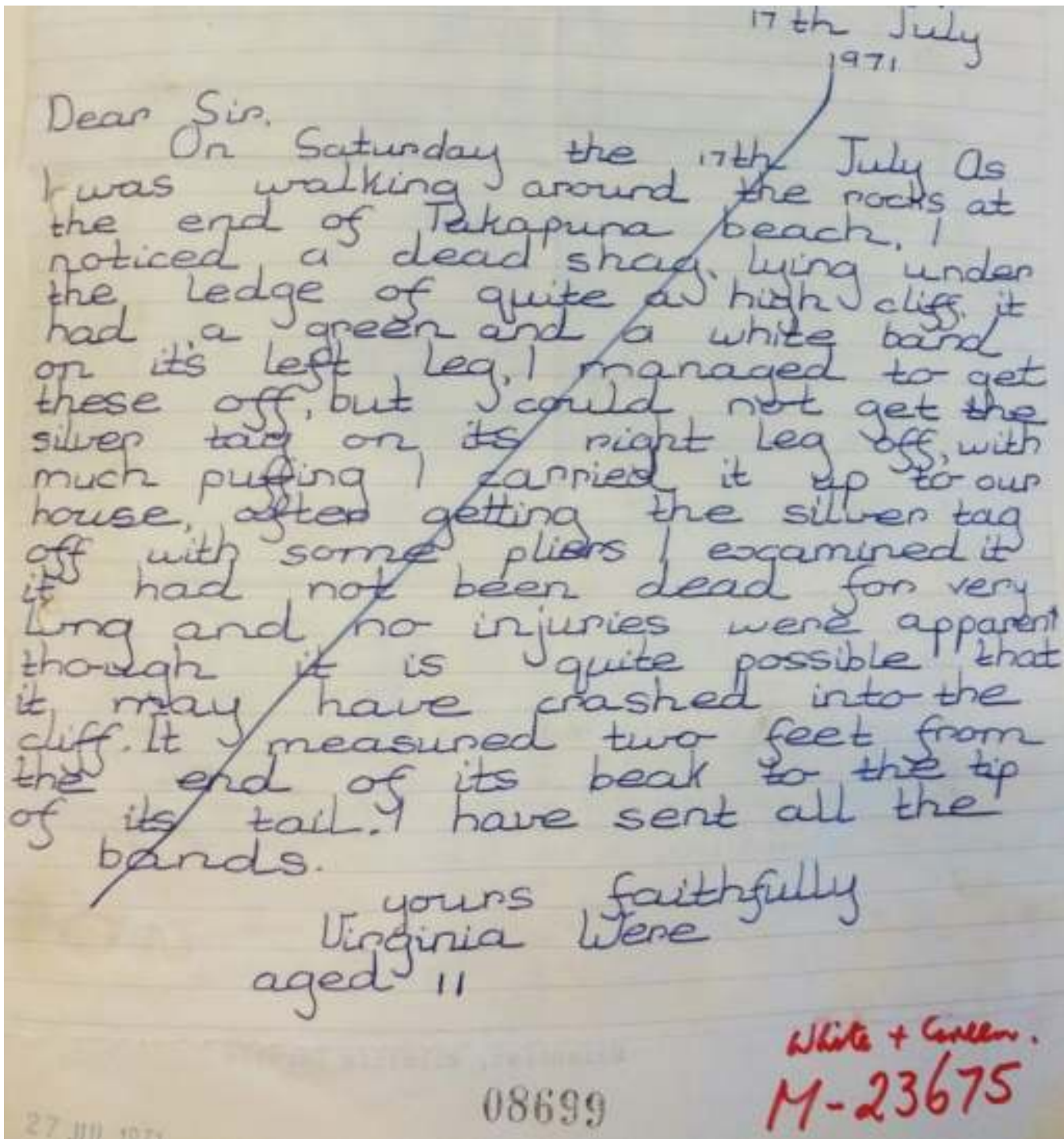
## "The fattest duck" - Anna Richards



Acetate butt band colours



**“With much puffing”** - Virginia Were



This female pied shag was banded as a juvenile the previous year by CJR Robertson at Lake Pupuke.

Lat:    S  Long:    E  Accuracy:

Locale:   LatLong WGS84

Place name:

/  /  Age Code   Sex Code

## White-capped albatrosses – Graham Parker and Kalinka Rexer-Huber

White-capped albatrosses *Thalassarche cauta* are endemic to New Zealand, where an estimated 95% of the population breed on Disappointment Island, in the Auckland Islands group, about 450 km south of Bluff. The breeding population on Disappointment Island has been counted by interpretation of aerial photographs taken annually over the past nine years. These counts suggest some 75,000 to 117,000 pairs breed on Disappointment annually. However, the species mostly breeds biennially, so the breeding population is significantly larger.



White-capped albatrosses are the most commonly caught albatross species in New Zealand trawl fisheries, both by warp strike and capture in nets. The species is also occasionally caught in NZ long-line fisheries. Unfortunately, white-capped albatrosses are also killed in large numbers as incidental fisheries bycatch in South Africa and Namibia. Having robust demographic information for the species is thus critical to informing conservation management. While the breeding population estimates from aerial counts on Disappointment Island do not suggest declines, adult survival is a key unknown for this species. To address this, we have made short visits to Disappointment Island annually for the past three



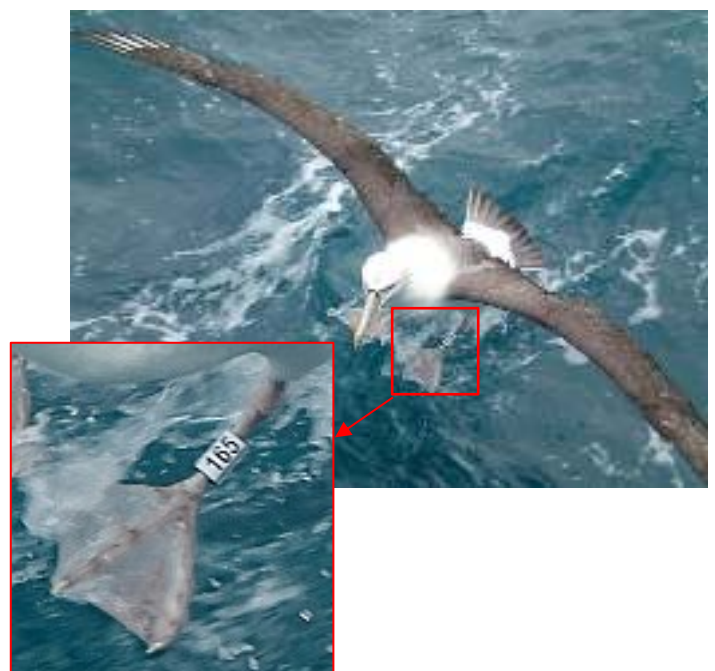
years to band breeding birds with metal bands, along with large white numeric darvic bands to identify individuals from a distance. David Thompson from NIWA established the project and continues to contribute.

The first year we visited the island we were accompanied by Paul Sagar, and the past two we have returned as a party of two. In the second year we deployed GLS tracking devices on 40 birds to gain insight into their year-round movements for a period of at least two years.

Without having recovered any of the tracking devices yet, at sea observations of marked birds have provided interesting insight into movements. Last year a white-capped albatross with stock-marker on its head was spotted off the coast of Karitane, about 50 km north of Dunedin, eight days after we banded it on Disappointment Island. After banding a bird we put a wee spot of stock-marker on its head so we don't disturb it further. A photograph of the bird made it into the local Dunedin newspaper and generated good discussion.

(see <https://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/mystery-marked-albatross-solved>)

This year an MPI Fisheries Observer on a ling bottom (demersal) long-lining vessel fishing west of Greymouth identified two birds that 7 to 20 days earlier had both been brooding chicks on Disappointment Island. While we look forward to getting tracking data from birds on Disappointment next year, it is great to get interesting records from observant people noticing banded birds!





## **Have you found a Golden Duck Band?** - John Dyer

Experienced duck banders at Parakai got quite a surprise this year to find a duck with a golden band – as gold coloured as any wedding band. Was this a reward band of some kind and how was the money going to be split?! However, it wasn't a case of someone banding ducks with next season's colourful bling. DOC's Banding Office hadn't issued anything like it. As Parakai locals correctly guessed, the answer was more likely geothermal. Parakai hot springs are not far off and ducks love to swim in the outlet drain. The pool temperatures inside the complex range from 32-40°C (the bore is 65°C) and there's a whole variety of dissolved minerals including silica, sulphate, etc. In fact, if you're visiting the baths, you might notice that, despite regular cleaning, the stainless steel pool fittings (the same material used for duck bands) are also stained yellow there where the geothermal water contacts it. A second duck band recovered that day was also yellow stained, but less so. What this means, of course, is that if you're extra lucky, that band on your duck-call lanyard may be the latest in exclusive fashion. Be sure to let us know on 0800 BIRD BAND the usual details of who/when/where/how. Duck band recoveries can also be reported via the [Banding Office](#) and [Fish and Game](#) websites.

## **Kaiaua Black-billed gull** - Melody and John Anderson

We have noticed a fair amount of 'gull prejudice' amongst New Zealanders. Even within our own circle, who have become much more bird aware since we launched our [Love our Birds Facebook page](#), there are those who still hold disdain for what they see as common scavengers. Gulls can be very fine looking birds, but it doesn't matter how beautiful an image may be, without exception, every time we have posted a photo of a gull on Facebook, our page has been 'unliked' by someone.

Undeterred, we were keen to feature the black billed gull's story and when we noticed several among a gathering of mostly red billed gulls vying for fish and chips at Kaiaua recently, out came the camera.

We'd been caught out misidentifying gulls before due to the similarities between juvenile red billed gulls and the black billed variety. We regarded the bands on these birds as confirmation, but remained unaware of the importance of reporting our sighting. It was only when we reached out to Colin Miskelly of Te Papa, seeking information about an individual

bird, that we realised our query was being regarded as such.

Fortunately, we had taken enough photographs of the same individual that the number on its leg band could be pieced together and confirmed to be a bird that had been banded for the first time as a chick on the Waihou river on the Firth of Thames way back in 2001, despite some of its original bands having been lost in its travels. Tony Habraken had banded the bird again the following year but there had been no sightings of the gull since 2008, so he was most appreciative to receive our report and photos and to know that the bird was still alive and doing well.



We only wish we had comprehended at the time how valuable this information is. There had been other banded black billed gulls present, some of whose leg band numbers could be read in our photographs - but there was only one whose complete number could be confirmed thanks to multiple images taken from different vantage points. We could have taken many more shots that would have enabled the positive identification of additional birds. We'll certainly do so if we find ourselves in that position again.

It's estimated that 1.3 trillion photographs will be snapped this year across a range of devices – a staggering number. It's likely that a vast proportion of those trillions of images will serve no real purpose beyond the short-term gratification of a typical selfie. Many will be seen once or twice and never looked at again. There is, however, a positive side to ubiquitous photography and sometimes our photo archives can yield valuable information.

As photographers, we have good equipment, but the resolution in most phone cameras these days is still high enough to zoom in on and read the number on a leg band. Having the presence of mind to take a range of photos may make all the difference...

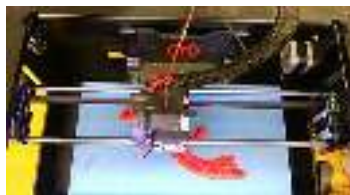


## Bird puppets for bander training

Trainee banders often practice attaching bands to twigs or spaghetti sticks. While this does teach some valuable banding skills, it lacks the “bird” aspect, as these are not always representative of the diameter or shape of actual bird legs, and should have claws on one end and a bird on the other!

In order to remedy this, and to facilitate (and hopefully trigger) bander training, the Banding Office is in the process of creating a “Training Flock” of bird puppets. Resin-cast or 3-D scanned and printed bird legs will be attached to puppets of realistic weight and dimensions.

Of course, certain species do not make it onto the shelves as stuffed toys, so these must be made by hand – watch this space as the flock grows!



## Summary of duck banding in Auckland/Waikato, Eastern and Hawkes Bay Fish & Game regions, 1997-2017 - John Dyer

Wildlife managers have been banding dabbling ducks by the thousands since at least 1948 in NZ. Banding provides managers with a wealth of information about the species and is an integral part of harvest management. Over the last 20 years (1997-2017), Eastern and Auckland/Waikato Fish & Game have banded 75,726 mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*), and 4959 grey ducks (*Anas superciliosa*). The latter are separated from mallards by the phenotypic characteristics. Banding sites are chosen where good numbers of these waterfowl are present in places that are largely free from public disturbance.

Banding is timed for January/February when males and females, adults and juveniles can all be reliably separated using the universally accepted technique of waterfowl cloacal examination. The banded bird is then released back into the wild where they comprise part of the harvested population come May. Data from band recoveries by hunters and recaptures in subsequent trap years allows managers to analyse cohort specific survival and harvest rates. Handling large numbers of birds gives us an idea of the condition of the birds. Band and harvest data combined with reporting rate estimates (the percentage of recovered bands that are reported) also provides a basis for determining an index of population size. While age and sex information gives a rough idea of how successful the breeding season was.

Fish & Game (F&G) staff oversee these sites, providing and erecting transportable flat-packing cage traps and distributing tonnes of kibbled maize to bait them. But we rely to a very large extent on keen gamebird hunters providing their time to daily feed these sites for 4-6 weeks beforehand each year, year after year. We also need helpers on banding days, as many as can be mustered. This provides an opportunity for wildlife workers wanting to better their banding skills to be mentored by very experienced banders (i.e. F&G staff) on site.

The gamebird hunting season results in many of these bands being recovered. Each band has an address to send it to, though we also have a 0800 BIRD BAND phone number. We only need the band number and information about where and when the bird was harvested, not necessarily the band, which



some hunters are reluctant to part with. Many hunters regard their band as a trophy that they can either put on a taxidermist mounted bird or to show off on their duck-call lanyard.



The biggest issue that the banding programme faces is non-reporting of bands. We calculate reporting rate by asking 120 hunters every year, on the last randomised hunter-phone survey of the year, did they get any banded ducks and, if so, did they report it/them? What often seems to happen is that, because they hunted in a group, they entrusted someone in that group to report all the bands, who may have then forgotten to. However in Eastern the non-reporting rate seems to have been stable throughout the program. We use every opportunity, for instance, at promotional “duck nights” in sports-shops and also in our national Fish & Game magazine and regional F&G newsletters to licensed gamebird hunters, to reinforce the message to report every band. One problem encountered when people send in their bands, rather than just report them, is that the still-round band often gets squeezed out of the envelope by the mail sorting process. So all that turns up at DOC’s Wellington banding office is an envelope with a hole in one corner. Likewise NZ Post sometimes find loose bands on the floor. Neither are much help if they can no longer be married up. Flattening and taping bands certainly helps, but provided hunters are very careful to read the exact numbers on their band, the 0800 BIRD BAND number (which connects to F&G 24/7) works best of all. They can do this from their mobile in their maimai, for instance. If they are slow to report their band and get another banded bird, the danger is that they can mix the two bands up and we get erroneous data.

It is rare for bands to be sent in from birds killed in any other way than hunting, for instance, as road kills or from predated birds. However, F&G staff who diligently check for such things, have certainly found more than a few this way. Banding also tells us the distances that birds travel. We have had banded mallards turn up in New Caledonia and Lord Howe Island, for instance. However, as interesting as these long-range recoveries are, by far the majority of mallard/grey ducks are much more stay-at-home and it is actually their survival rate and population estimates that gamebird managers are most interested in. Speculation before we started banding that many birds would leave a region in drought years has proven largely unfounded. More often their response has been from the dried-up farm ponds to larger rivers of estuaries. Perversely, some ducks have arrived from other wetter regions in drought years. Only they know why! Recovery location helps managers assess management boundaries. A lot of work has gone into trying to manage subpopulations based on climatic and ecological zones as we know that climate has a large influence on breeding and survival.

Band returns are part of the large information dataset collected to set gamebird hunting regulations such as bag limits and season length. Other data collected includes random phone calls to large numbers of hunters every few weeks of the gamebird season to monitor their success. More recently, radio transmitter work (as part of a PhD study) has tracked the fate of individual female ducks and their nests and broods, whilst aerial transects are also being conducted nationally as another method of measuring relative abundance from year to year. The information we collect is used to implement management initiatives which ensure that the populations of our key game birds are being managed in a sustainable fashion, whilst maximising recreational hunting opportunity. Banding is likely to remain at the heart of our monitoring programmes for the foreseeable future and we welcome any interested banders to [contact us](#) if they would like to get involved.

[fishandgame.org.nz](http://fishandgame.org.nz)

### *Did you know?*

“Scientific ringing of birds started in 1899. Then, the Danish senior master Hans Christian Cornelius Mortensen conducted his successful ringing experiment by marking hundreds of Starlings with aluminium rings, and by getting afterwards recovery reports of them, even from abroad.” [Luomus.fi](http://Luomus.fi)

## Reports from yesteryear

(Reprinted from "Notornis," Vol. 6, No. 1, July, 1954.)

### DUCK (Mallard-Grey Cross) (*Anas superciliosa* x *A. platyrhynchos*).

A duck reared by Mr. Cunningham in Masterton and liberated with a home-made ring at Mt. Bruce on 16/8/44 was shot on the Awatere River on 18/5/51.

### BLACK SWAN (*Cygnus atratus*).

A very interesting set of records of black swan recoveries has been received from the North Canterbury Acclimatisation Society. This society began ringing black swans at Lake Ellesmere in 1935 and may thus claim to be among the pioneers of bird ringing in this country. With a few breaks, the ringing was continued until 1952, a different colour being used each year. Unfortunately, the rings were not numbered and it is not known how many birds were ringed each year.

## "So Bold and Beautiful" -Vashti Leeke

15-1-1995  
To whom it May Concern  
On the morning of the 13/1/95  
I found the Harrier Hawk(?) with  
the leg-band L-13681 killed  
by a passing vehicle 3km south  
of Rimakiaki at Waikareo Creek  
on State Highway 6, South Island  
I had seen it alive 20 min's  
earlier on my way to drop a  
friend at work. It was perched  
on a dead pukako - hardly  
flinched as my vehicle passed  
closely by. So bold and beautiful.

On my return home I was  
extremely dissapointed to see  
it dead on the road. I stopped  
and of course saw the band  
on it's leg.  
My friend thinks it had a  
mate in the area as we've often  
seen two of them in that vicinity.  
We would be interested in any  
information concerning this bird.  
Yours helpfully, Vashti Leeke  
V.C. Leeke

Lat	50	01	03	S	Long	174	02	01	E	Accuracy	100m
Locality	Kopik Island		Lat/Long WGS84								
Place name	Pockakaki Landtop Farm QE Park										
Year	1995	Age Code		1st Year or CV		Sex Code		Female			

## Quote me

"There are also banding/ringing schemes using colour bands to make it possible to identify different individuals in the field. This has been used to show, for example, that, contrary to what you may believe, you are not getting the same 4 blue-tits at your garden feeders but, over just a few days it may be 70 different individuals!" – [Fatbirder.com](http://Fatbirder.com)





# WANTED

~ DEAD or ALIVE ~



REPORTS OF:

**BIRD BANDS** or **BANDED BIRDS**

DO NOT capture or handle a bird unless you have a permit to do so



Photo: Lance Kevey











Photo: Oscar Thomas

New Zealand  
National Bird  
Banding Scheme  
(NZNBBS)

**We need your help:**  
*Please report all sightings of  
bird bands and banded birds!*



Record the following

-  Band prefix and number, text (if any)
-  Date of recovery
-  Locality description, coordinates if possible
-  Colour bands (if any)
-  Species (if known)
-  Photograph (if possible)
-  Condition of the bird (alive, dead)
-  Your contact details



SEND

Email [bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz](mailto:bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz)  
 Web [www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/bird-banding/reporting-a-bird-band/](http://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/bird-banding/reporting-a-bird-band/)  
 Phone 04 471 3248  
 Post PO Box 108, Wellington, 6140

Banding Office  
Department of Conservation

