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Banding Banter

Wow, our 16th *BirDBanD* newsletter! First introduced in [October 2016](#), these newsletters have been sent out roughly on a quarterly basis to banders, reporters of banded birds and other interested folks. The Banding Office staff hope that you have found the banding banter, updates, and anecdotes interesting and worth reading and sharing. We welcome your feedback on content and encourage anyone to submit articles and photographs for inclusion.

Previous newsletters can be downloaded from <https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/bird-banding/>

Fun FALCON fact

Dabchick!

There is one lonely record of a banded New Zealand dabchick (Weweaia) in the [FALCON Bird Banding Database](#).

NZ dabchicks alter their buoyancy under water by adjusting the angle of waterproof feathers to the body. After hatching the dabchick chicks will ride on their parents’ backs for up to four weeks, at which point the chick is too big and must swim under its own power.



@mieke_masterpieces

Are you aware of a project where New Zealand dabchick have been marked? Please be in contact! bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz

Feeling batty – Mark Roper

As an ecologist working in the New Zealand forest industry ([@skogs.mark](#)) I have long been curious as to how many species (both native and introduced) utilise this habitat type. During the last few years in particular, my interest and focus has turned towards bats. This has been due in part I'm sure to some of the cool gadgetry available to and used by bat researchers and enthusiasts alike nowadays – including thermal imaging cameras and automatic bat monitors.

With the help of this type of equipment I have been able to establish the presence of long tailed bats within production forests throughout the North Island and key in on areas most likely to include maternity roost sites. Protecting maternity roost sites where females congregate to raise their young (as opposed to sites where individual bats might roost) is thought to provide greatest benefit to a given population.

Having done all that there was one thing that really bugged me about all of my effort to date – I was yet to actually see a bat. As is often the case in New Zealand, I knew a guy who knew a guy, and before long I had the opportunity to volunteer my time / heavy lifting ability for two long term mark and recapture projects.

The first few nights spent in the bush I got a crash course on where and how to set up [harp traps](#) to capture pregnant females. Once a suitable female was captured a [tracking device](#) was fitted to allow us to track her back to a maternal roost the next day. This goes on night after night and day after day during the survey season between around December – January.

Once a transmitter fitted bat is located in a particular tree a thermal device can be used to survey the roost entrance(s) and help get the placement of the harp trap just right to ensure most if not all bats emerging from the roost were captured for banding. I will never forget my first experience of seeing [bats exiting a roost](#) - all 99 of them (that's a lot) through a thermal camera. A-MAZ-ING.

Captured bats are measured (on a number of metrics), banded, and of course released. It is the repeated collection of data that enables researchers to gain insights as to how populations are doing over time and whether or not management intervention is required.

I feel immensely privileged to have been given the opportunity to be taught how to handle, age, sex and band these extraordinary creatures by people doing their very best to help conserve them. My heartfelt thanks go out to Sarah and Dave ([@docgovtnz](#) Murupara Office), Kaye and Craig ([The Conservation Company](#)), as well as the many other experts and enthusiasts who helped turn my itch in to an addiction and welcomed me in to bat sub-culture.



Image credit: Mark Roper

The Batty Banding Office

The Banding Scheme has also gone "batty":

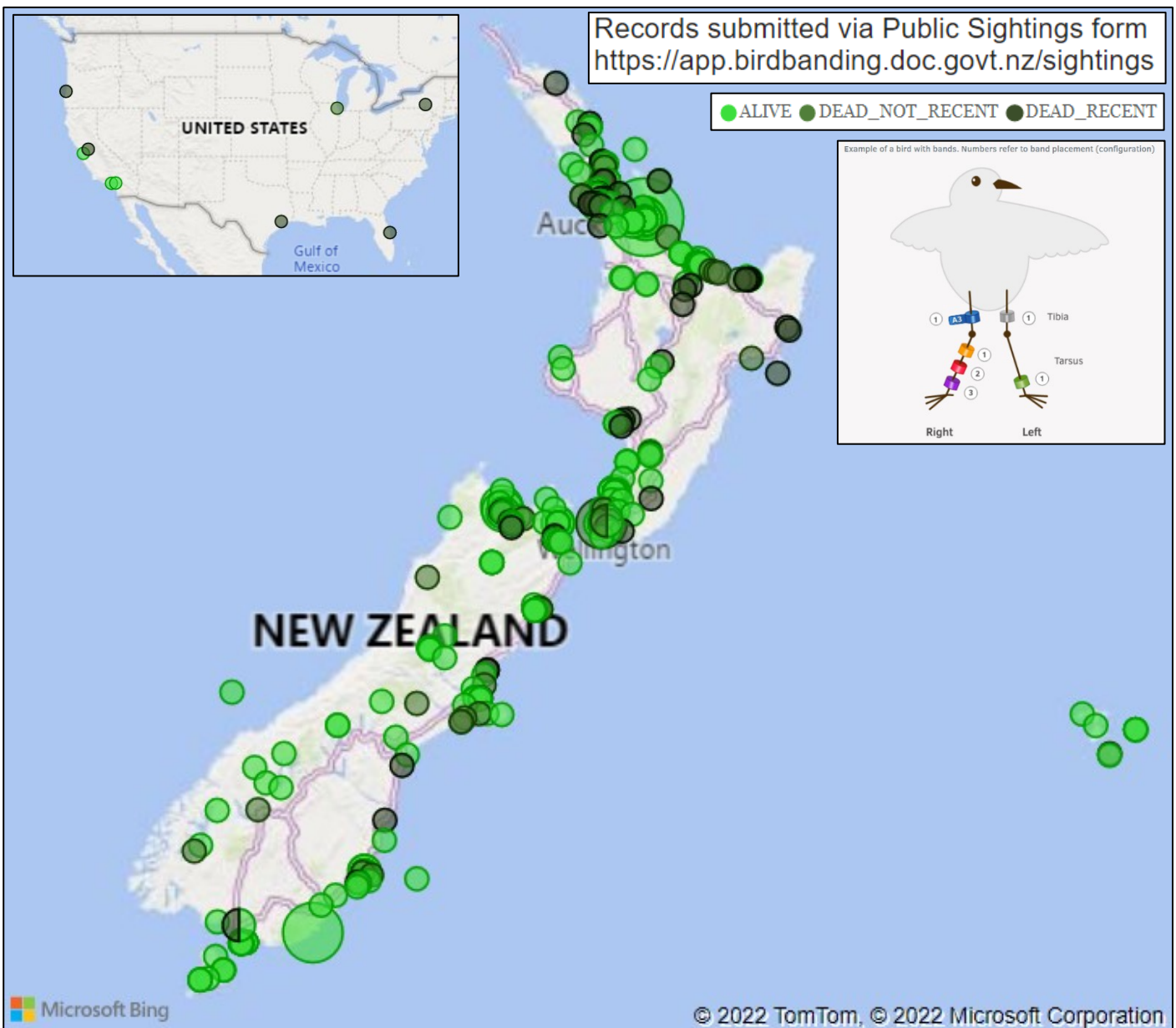
- 🦇 we have incorporated bat operators into our [Certification Process](#)
- 🦇 we sell bat bands and mist-nets
- 🦇 and we have taught our FALCON Bird Banding System to handle bat marking data!

Banded birds reported from far and wide!

So far, we have received 463 reports of banded birds via the FALCON Public Sightings Form <https://app.birdbanding.doc.govt.nz/sightings>. (Total re-sightings reported to the Banding Office for January 2021-February 2022 is 941 – this does not include re-sightings directly uploaded to FALCON by project managers). These are from the length and breadth of the country, showing the extent of engagement by members of the public. These reports are incredibly valuable to the Banding Scheme and contribute to the value of our dataset – even dead birds. It is only once a banded bird is re-sighted or recaptured that we can build a picture of how long they live and how far they travel, which then feeds into broader conservation decision-making.

Of course, this only works if we can link the re-sighting record to the original banding data, and if we don't have the banding data, then that makes the job so much harder... But we're delighted with the engagement in terms of sighting reports, as it is one of the main metrics that we are using to measure the success of the FALCON System.

Interestingly, it seems that people in the USA that find banded birds (mainly pigeons) also stumble across our Sightings Form and duly fill it in!



Tern-ing heads across the country

This summer season has proven to be a bumper year for [rare bird sightings](#), in fact there have been several species added to the 'First recorded sighting in New Zealand' list.

Of the 21 known species of tern to have been seen in New Zealand – 17 of them have already been seen this year by avid birders. Three of these species sighted represent first recorded sighting in New Zealand – (Black Tern, Black-napped Tern, and a living Bridled Tern).

The Wellington region has been host to “tern central”, in addition to the usual White-fronted terns and Caspian terns, there have been the Black Tern, Sooty Tern, Common Tern, and Juvenile Black-fronted Tern observed.



Three of the Tern species recently seen in the Wellington region. From L to R: Common tern (Annemieke Hendriks), Sooty Tern (Lance Kevey), a banded Caspian Tern (Lance Kevey).

The importance of Banding: would you wear a cable-tie?

Recently we have received several reports of “banded” birds wearing cable/zip ties. Apart from captive birds where such marks can be continually monitored, in the wild this is not an acceptable welfare option of marking since cable ties can tighten and have resulted in birds with injured (or eventually amputated) legs.

If you wouldn't wear it on your own finger, don't use it to band a bird!

If you have seen any birds with cable ties on their legs, or if you are interested in banding birds with the correct bands and banding equipment, please be in touch:

bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz



Image credit to Bruce McKinlay

From fledgling to fully-grown – Sue Moore

Following the article in the [last newsletter](#) of Kahurangi (the kōkako from Pūkaha Mount Bruce), we received the following email:

“I was really surprised to hear that Kahurangi wasn't in the banding database. Here is a photo of her as a chick. We removed her from the Hunua Ranges as she had a much bigger sibling that would fledge shortly, and we'd already lost one small chick when its bigger sibling fledged that season. The banding date is probably around the same time the photo was taken, January 2005.



Image credit to Sue Moore



Image credit to Annemieke Hendriks

The life of Paradise for Daisy the Duck (13-43305) - Maria Grace

One of our kids' teachers lives on a farm. One day a little duckling started following her husband around the farm and wouldn't leave. Her husband couldn't see any parent ducks and thought if he left the duckling alone cats would eat it. So the teacher brought the duckling to our kids' school and asked if anyone would be up for taking care of it. My husband agreed and brought it home.

It has lived with us since. My husband built a coop so we could keep it safe when we're not home. The first 6 weeks we fed it chick starter (mostly wheat) and it also ate grass and bugs in our garden (we turn over bricks for it and it snaps up the woodlice that appear). Now we feed it something called waterfowl mix, which I understand is wheat with a mixture of blood/bone etc in it. And it eats grass, strawberry leaves - pokes around the garden, basically.



Daisy shortly after being banded. Image credit to Maria Grace

It's been a bit of a learning curve for us, but we've grown to really like this bird. It's not the smartest of creatures :) (why does it keep forgetting how to get in/out of the coop? Ha.) but it's very charming and really, quite sociable. It's been fascinating to watch how the feathers have developed as it moulted from kiddie "fluff" to real feathers. It is used to being handled, so we quite often sit with it on the sofa.

After some consultation with Peter, our local bird bander, we decided that the best place to release the duck was at a rural waterbody called Big Lagoon. It's on private land, away from roads. With the duck being used to people and dogs, we felt that although we CANNOT check on the duck at Big Lagoon - being on private land - it actually gave it the best chance for survival.

So, the day after Boxing Day, we dropped it off. There were no other ducks there yet (Peter said other paradise ducks will probably arrive late January or early February for their moult), but the duck went in the water and started "zooming" around, flapping its wings. We watched it for a few minutes and then slipped away quietly, hoping it would not follow us.

And since then, we don't know how it's doing. However, as Daisy is banded, there is a chance that one day we will find out where it's gone. It was well fed when we released it, and being a spot where ducks gather for a moult, if it was able to hang out at the lagoon on its own for a month, chances are it would find the company of other ducks in February. (Fingers crossed!) Though it is possible that it's gone to some local farmhouses instead and started trying to hang out with people again and got mauled by dogs... (Hope that's not the case though!)

Big Lagoon is a local duck shooting spot in early May, so I am thinking we may hear about it then... Not sure. But like Peter said: even if it only lives for a couple of months, we gave it a chance that it wouldn't have had otherwise. And we learned lots by taking care of it. The kids will always remember Daisy the Duck.



Maria enjoys couch cuddles with Daisy and Mocha (the Labrador), Big Lagoon release, and Daisy enjoying the water at Big Lagoon. Image credit to Maria Grace

Bird banding on display at Mangawhai museum

If you go down to the Mangawhai museum you're in for a great surprise. On display you will see a few pieces of banding equipment, including metal band C- 75808.

The purpose of the exhibition is to highlight the important mahi and monitoring being done with New Zealand species in the area, especially for Tara-iti (Fairy Tern).

If you know of any bands on a taxidermy bird or just on their own in unusual places, such as a museum, airport, school, or office, please contact the Banding Office and let us know!



Native bird whakatauki

“Mā te huruhuru, ka rere te manu”

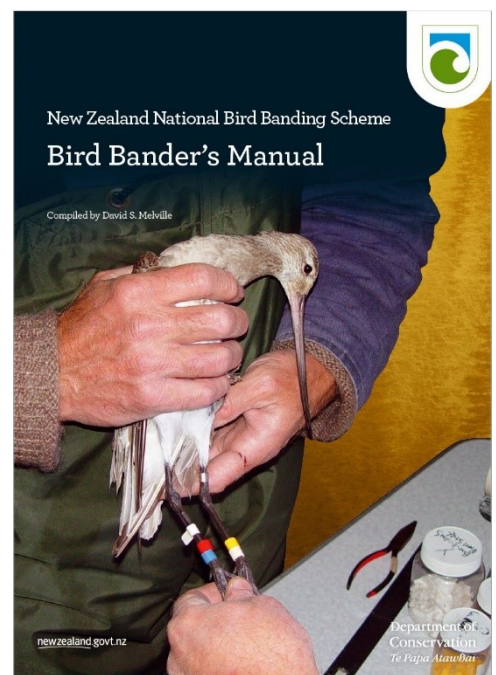
The direct translation of this Te Reo whakatauki (proverb) means “With feather the bird will fly or adorn the bird with feather so it can fly”. This proverb centralises the idea that (flying) birds cannot fly without their feathers. In order to thrive each person (or project) requires certain elements for success.

Bird Bander's Manual no longer in print

The NZNBBS Bird Bander's Manual 2011 edition is being revised and updated. We are no longer selling printed copies; instead, logged-in users on the FALCON System can download an electronic copy from the Dashboard. Banders that would like to refer to a physical copy are encouraged to borrow their Level 3 trainer's copy.

Please note that the permitting, band size, certification and data submission information in this manual are *no longer up to date*; refer to updated information at the [DOC Bird Banding webpages](#) and in the [Bander's Data BOX](#).

Future editions and revisions of the Best Practice Guidelines will be in the form of a living document, thus enabling timely updates as and when required. As such, the revised Manual will be made available to download in sections from the FALCON dashboard.



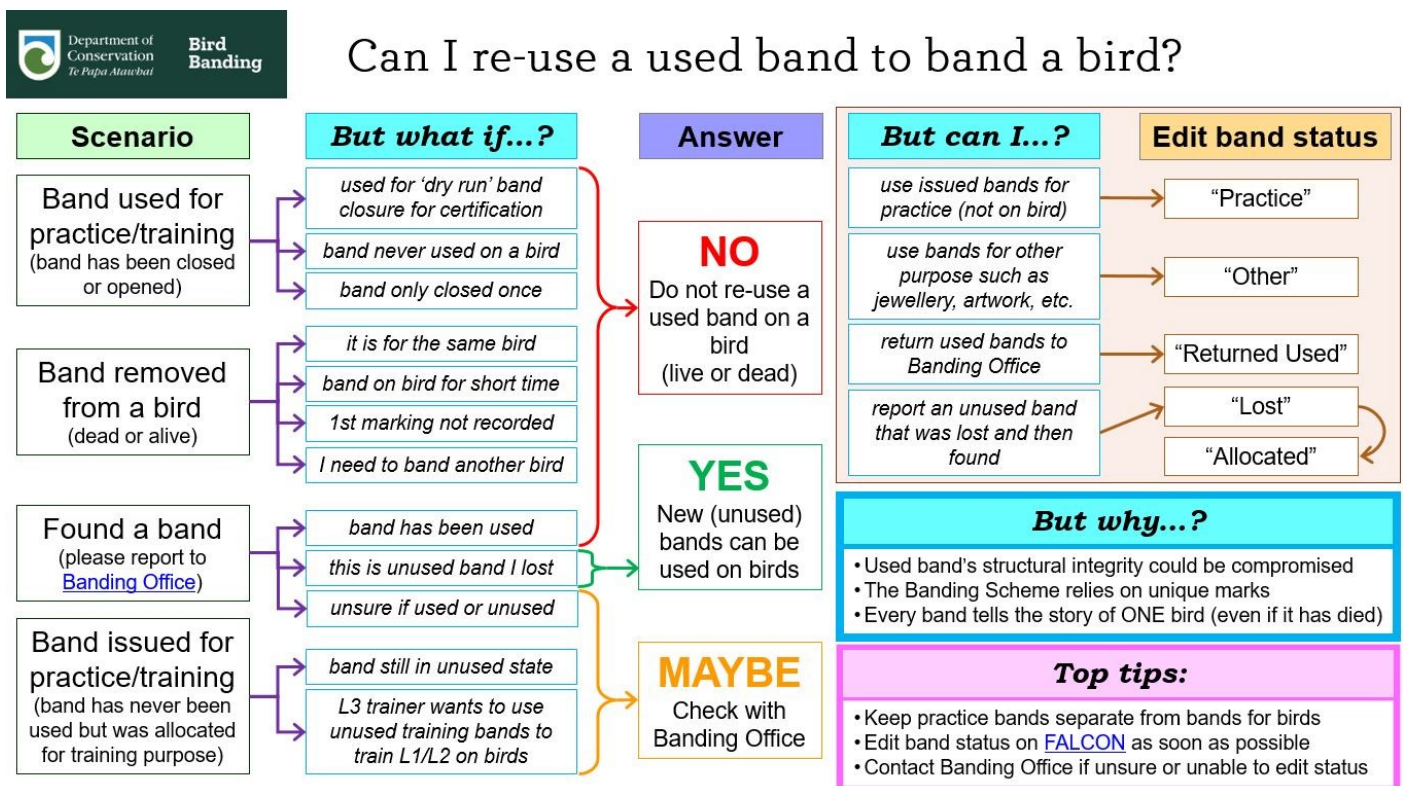
Can I re-use a used band for banding?

Every band tells a story. That story relates to ONE bird (even if it has since died). That band should never be repurposed for another bird (not even a taxidermy specimen).

Training bands (bands used for practice or issued for training) and bands that have been removed from birds (whether alive or dead, even if it was only on a bird for a short period) should *never* be re-used for banding (whether on the same or a different bird). This is both because the structural integrity of the band can be compromised from being closed, opened and re-closed and because the Banding Scheme relies on *unique* marks being used for different birds.

The Bander's Manual (p. 44) as well as Wildlife Act Authority conditions specify that **bands that have been removed from a bird for whatever reason should NEVER be re-used.**

For this reason, we recommend that all bands that have been used should be *kept separate from banding materials* or posted back to the Banding Office. Furthermore, bands that have been issued for training purposes (even if not yet used for this purpose) should not be used on birds without the permission of the Banding Office.



Data delights

The Banding Officer is delighted whenever a bander submits data to the [FALCON Bird Banding System](#). The Re-sightings Officer is delighted when a marked bird is reported... *and* we have the first marking record!

"Every band tells a story", and this story starts when that band is used to mark a bird and gets *waay* more interesting when that bird is re-sighted and reported.

So in order to help our banders navigate the complexities of uploading data using the [Data BOX Excel template](#) or the online [Add Record form](#), the recording of a recent "Tips & Tricks" webinar has now been made available [online](#).

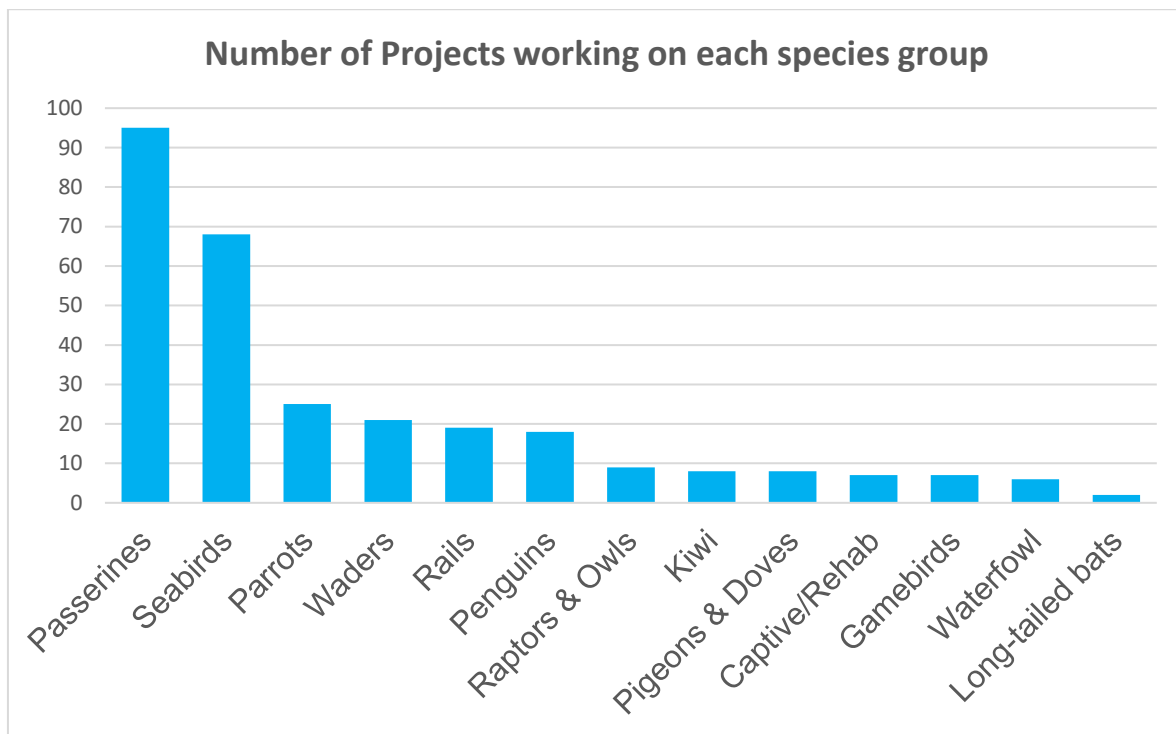


Project registration on the FALCON System

There have been thirteen marking projects registered in the past three months, bringing the total so far to 263. For each project, we record the purpose, time frame (the first project started in 1936!), species, locality, marks used, as well as permit details. The Project Manager can add or remove Team Members, and this determines who can view, download, upload and edit data within that project. The highest number of team members registered (16) is for the DOC Rangiora Bander Training Program, followed by the DOC/WMIL Kahu Banding Project (15) and Bird Banding Studies Canterbury (14).

Out of 141 projects that use colour bands, 18 projects make use of engraved (alphanumeric) colour bands, and a further 11 wader projects use flags (either plain or engraved) to identify individual birds. Transponders (microchips) are used by 28 projects, while other marks such as satellite tags, radio transmitters, geolocators, dive loggers, etc., are used by a further 46 projects. Two-thirds of all projects utilise more than one marking method.

Most projects focus on passerines (32%) and seabirds (23%), and there are 16 projects that work with more than one species group.



If you have taken part in a banding project that is not listed on the FALCON System (no matter how many decades ago), please ask the Project Manager to complete this [Project Registration Form](#) and forward it to the [FALCON admin team](#).

Corrections

“Greater long tail bat”

A slight error in the previous newsletter (No. 15 – Dec 2021), while there was a Greater short-tailed bat (presumed extinct), it is just the New Zealand long-tailed bat and Lesser Short-tailed bat still alive today. Of course, it’s easy to accidentally call the long-tailed bat “greater” since it won bird of the year 2021 and was clearly the “greatest”

Bonus Q #12.

Kākāpō have Zygodactyl feet (not Heterodactyl) - Apologies for any offense or contested scores caused.

Updated Price List and Order Form

We acknowledge that the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are being felt in many ways, and it is with a sense of inevitability that we have to inform you of yet another price increase in the banding equipment sold by the Banding Office. This is due to price changes overseas, exchange rates, increased courier costs and customs import charges.

Ordering bands/equipment

- [Price list \(PDF, 1181K\)](#)
- [Order form \(Word, 134K\)](#)

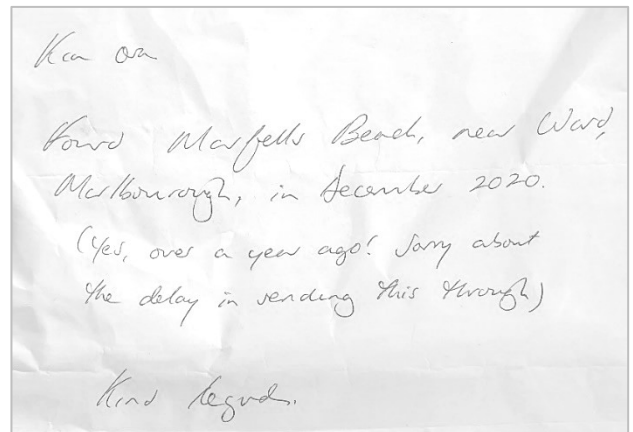
Metal bands: no change.
Equipment prices: ~5% increase

Please note, however, that we are NOT at this stage increasing the price of metal bird bands, which the banding community have no choice but to purchase through the Banding Office. We have only adjusted the prices of colour bands and banding equipment (average 5%), in order to ensure that we do not operate at a loss. Banders are not constrained to purchasing these items through the Banding Office, but may find that our prices are still quite reasonable – for a comparison, see the [price list](#) of the [Australian Bird Study Association Inc.](#) (note that their prices do not include freight nor import taxes).

Furthermore, if we can maintain sufficient stock, then the local banding community will to some extent be buffered by the international supply chain issues and receive equipment within reasonable timeframes. Nevertheless, we recommend that you order bands and equipment well in advance of needing to use these in the field – if you can give us a year's advance warning so that we can ensure we stock up, that would be even better!

It is never too late ...

There is no expiry date on receiving band re-sightings. The Banding Office recently received this anonymous note through the mail along with a metal band. It is a pity this person chose to be nameless as we like to acknowledge and give credit to band finders. There is no shame, punishment or penalty attributed to people who report band re-sightings from the past. With the FALCON database now up and running we encourage people to go back through their files, notebooks, and photos and submit their sightings. All are happily and gratefully received.



To whom it may concern (on the other side of the world)

The Banding Office receives a lot of band re-sightings and not just from New Zealand. Our email address and FALCON reporting form is often found and used by overseas people keen to pass on a band sighting. Here is a recent example:

*To whom it may concern,
I have a dead banded hawk in my yard. I think it is either a Sharp-skinned Hawk or a Cooper's Hawk but don't know for sure. I've called about 6 different numbers to find out what I should do. I spoke to a helpful woman at the Humans Society who thought WA State Wildlife and Fisheries would come pick it up. I think it might have hit my house yesterday afternoon. It is really beautiful! I put a box over it to protect it from predators. Please advise me on what to do.
Thanks!
From Sue (Seattle, Washington, USA)*



“Famous Marks” – where are they now?

Rediscovering Kākāpō R-44261 (Rangi) – Chris Birmingham

Something we like to say at the Banding Office is “every band tells a story”. If not for the mark, then we would never know for certainty the story of an individual. “Famous marks” will tell the stories of famous birds, and where the mark is now.

Waitangi Day, 2009 – a day I should probably never forget, the day I found a ‘lost’ kākāpō. I was doing my daily rounds of kākāpō triangulations on Whenua Hou/Codfish Island as a kākāpō ranger. By that time of the year every step of every track is well known, every root, every step of boardwalk, every puddle of mud. It’s an endless but enjoyable traipse through the bush doing a job many envy and few get to do. You start to tune out to your surroundings sometimes though, switch to autopilot. Sometimes you ran between stops to speed it up or went barefoot (not in the safety plan!). I had taken to listening to music while I wandered. I used earbuds on my TR4 to block out external noise when listening to transmitter signals, and in between plugged in my iPod – a cardinal sin to some nature lovers perhaps, but when it is your every day for 28 days in a row, you take a few liberties.

But this day, it was raining lightly as I came to the end of my trip through the forest. I stopped randomly and for no good reason other than to put my electronics away from the weather. As I stood on the track, I heard different music, light, rhythmic booming. It was unmistakable as a male kākāpō when you have been fortunate enough to be hearing it all summer long. It’s a funny noise, you can never quite gauge the distance or direction of the maker. I’m confused, and my curiosity is piqued simultaneously. The last few months of wandering around this island primes you for knowing the location of most kākāpō by heart, this seems like a very odd place for a male to be booming, and during the day too.

We are almost at sea level in a pretty nondescript part of the island, almost at the beach, the antithesis of a good booming spot. Who is this mystery boomer? I cycle through the known males on my TR4, no signal is forthcoming. The booming continues. I think on the move, a failed transmitter perhaps? Worthy of further investigation, knowing from personal experience how much work can go into finding a bird with one. I pick a point in the bush and move slowly toward where I think the booming is coming from, 50m off track, still booming, moving through the crown fern, trying to not sound like a herd of elephants! Closer, another 20 metres, then 10 metres in front of me on a fallen log, sits a large green bird.

For what seems like an eternity we stare at each other, a Mexican standoff, then he bolts, and I bolt, dropping my TR4 and aerial (I will come back and find those two days later), crashing through the fern after him, watching the ferns move as he scurries away, then...nothing. I’ve lost him. The magnitude of my loss has sunk in. You don’t know what you don’t know, right? Then, a few metres in front of me, he takes off again, but I am closer and I can see him now and I am reaching out and falling and grabbing and I have him by the leg! Lying there, tangled up in ferns and my pack and a kākāpō squawking and growling away, most unhappy with his predicament.

It is only now I realise the scale of my discovery, as I sit up and hold the bird I realise he has a metal band on, R-44261. My heart races even more. As kākāpō rangers we had always talked about the four birds released on the island at the end of the 1980s from Rakiura. None had transmitters applied but all were the last ones to have metal leg bands. Had they all died out, or were they still there? There had always been ideas and hunches about where they might exist, and now I was holding one! But now what???

I had a bird in the hand and nowhere to put him. With one hand firmly round my new friend’s legs I emptied my pack and placed him unceremoniously into it. Now, to share this news! I jumped on the radio to try and call Daryl Eason or Ron Moorhouse, our kākāpō scientists who I knew were out and about on the island with our Spanish AI expert. Nothing.



Chris Birmingham with Rangi 2009. Image credit to DOC.

I managed to raise a volunteer at the hut and they were able to relay a message saying simply “Chris has a bird with a metal band”. They would have known instantly the significance. I walked carefully to meet them, with my precious cargo tucked safely in my pack despite his best attempts to escape! Once we met up, we all stood around admiring the bird and wondering just what in heck he had been up to for 21 years!

At this stage we didn't know who he was out of the unknown birds. Was he Pierre, Gunther, Rangi, or Tramp? We wouldn't know until we could check the database. I was given the privilege of applying his first transmitter and allowed the prize of keeping his metal band (don't tell the Banding Office*) which we carefully removed and I still have to this day. He was given the final ignominy of a sperm extraction (great swimmers, apparently!) and then I trundled him back down the hill to release him back into his territory. It is not every day you get to increase the known kākāpō population by one!

Turns out the bird in question was Rangi, a notorious runner while on Rakiura. He must have been out of practice the day I encountered him! Since then, he has again become a runner! So, what about the other three?

Rangi was originally found by kākāpō catcher Arab and the dog Mandy on Stewart Island in October 1981. In 1987 he was transferred to Whenua Hou without a transmitter and disappeared until Chris came across him in 2009. After capture, and after DNA analysis Rangi was found to be the father to Zephyr, and the other founder birds: Wendy, Sarah and Adler.

Band R-44261 was originally intended to be worn as a ring by Chris, however it was found to be too small. The band continues to be in Chris' care.



Left: band R-44261 on Rangi, Right Rangi receives his transmitter by Chris, while Darryl and Alison excitedly aid. Image credit to Deidre Mussen.

**It is fine to keep bird bands – but please advise Banding Office so that we can update our records. If we have good confidence on where bands are, then we can better advise sighters of the band (and bird) they saw if it was only a partial band sighting.*

“He aha tēnei?” – “what is this?” Real life puzzles from behind the scenes: AA/AE bands

The mysteries continue. Why is it that AE is interchangeable for AA bands? Why did the bands swap to AE? Bonus points: which species can this band be used on?

Answer to: “He aha tēnei?” - KA bands

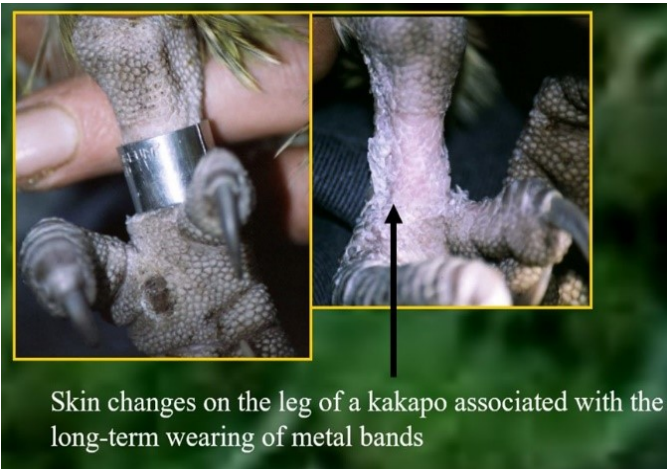


Image credit to DOC -exact photographer unknown.

KA metal bands: the KA is for kākāpō! The original birds on Stewart Island were banded with stainless steel bands of the following sizes: M and O bands for females, O, R and KA bands for males. However, there were issues with the bands rubbing on the legs, and they had the potential to get stuck in vegetation, so it was deemed too risky for bird welfare. Transponders/transmitters replaced bands as the primary mark on kākāpō in 2001. It was around this time that the majority of birds were fitted with transmitters, but there were a few birds wearing bands that have never been located on Stewart Island, Codfish, Maud and Little Barrier Islands, so it's possible that someone may come across a kākāpō band, or banded kākāpō in one of these locations in the future. It happened in 2009 with Rangil!

Puzzled: Egg-stinct - Whose egg is that?

The following images are open sourced (CC BY 4.0) from Te Papa's online collection. See if you recognise and can match which bird each egg comes from and what each extinct species is:

