

## ALBATROSS BANDING AT BELLAMBI - 1963

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The season just completed at Bellambi was not an outstanding one for the numbers of Wandering Albatross (Diomedea exulans) handled, rather to the contrary, only 39 birds falling to the net in the course of operations. The reasons for this disappointing total are threefold. Firstly, our arch enemy the weather has served up a series of rough and windy weekends (with frustratingly balmy periods midweek). Secondly, operations were suspended for the month of July during the writer's absence, and thirdly, the albatrosses simply were not there to be caught. Discounting one investigatory and completely abortive cruise at the end of June, the five effective trips in August and September yielded totals of 23, 6, 8, 1 and 1 and in each case virtually all of the Wanderers present in our 20 square mile hunting area were caught. We cannot offer an explanation for this fall-off, nor even a reasonable conjecture. Food (cuttlefish) was in good supply, sea water temperatures were normal.

However, small though the numbers were, some were quite interesting and they all added to the mounting data on plumage development etc. Fifteen were retraps from previous years (38%, or better than 1 in 3) which was a figure predictable from the results of the last four years. Two of these were also wearing U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bands, having received these at South Georgia after being originally banded by us at Bellambi. One of these, for instance, has the following record: 140-02800, banded at Bellambi August, 1959; retrapped at South Georgia February, 1962; retrapped at Bellambi August, 1962; ditto, August, 1963 and rebanded with monel band 140-25033.

U.S.A.R.P. ornithologists are at present engaged in a lengthy field programme on exulans at South Georgia and we can undoubtedly expect a spate of N.S.W. Wanderers to be reported when they return to sophisticated society in the near future.

Size 14 bands of monel metal have at last become available for use on the Wandering Albatross. Aluminium bands have worn thin and softened over a comparatively few years and they could at best be expected to last only a fraction of the Wanderer's potential life. In fact, there is evidence from Malabar of one being lost since 1960 (when the surviving blue colour ring was attached). The monels are soft enough to be closed without the aid of pliers, should harden with age, be extremely long wearing and entirely corrosion resistant. On retraps we added the monel bands above the aluminium

on the left tarsus, considering it immaterial whether the old ring was removed or not. However, on retrapping a bird thus treated three weeks later the upper edge of the aluminium band was found to have been pounded flat and spread out into a rather sharp edge on each side through contact with the harder monel above. Also, electrolytic corrosion had already commenced to attack the edges of the aluminium. This was an unexpected and disturbing discovery though I believe that the ample clearance and free movement on the tarsus together with the soft nature of the metal would make leg damage extremely unlikely. Obviously, however, the old bands should be removed. Incidentally, no such sharp edges develop when two aluminium bands are used together on exulans.

Breeding island recoveries to date have largely established one of the principal objects of the programme - where does the N.S.W. winter population come from. Returns from South Georgia, Marion Island and Kerguelen together with the wide variation in physical size, indicate that breeding populations from all the albatross islands are probably represented. Answers yet to come include longevity records, routes travelled, degree of dependence on west wind drift and a host of others. Banders should also make the most of their opportunities to record facets of individual behaviour, interspecific relationships and family associations to name but a few.

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Postscript to Malabar, 1963. An account of the albatross banding season at Malabar for 1963, to the end of August, has already appeared in our September issue.

The final outing for the season at Malabar on 14.9.63 yielded a further 15 Wandering Albatrosses banded and two retrapped. One of these 140-02103, had been banded at Bellambi in 1958, and the other, 140-26215, at Malabar four weeks earlier (9.8.63).

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#### A USEFUL HOLDING BAG

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Numerous types of holding bags or cages have been used for banding purposes. Many of these are suitable for their original purpose but are not necessarily the best answer for mobile mist-netting operations.

The following detail is intended to assist banders to construct a useful holding "bag" (Fig.1). The design is not