

Longevity Records and Banding Data on Short-tailed Shearwaters

D. L. SERVENTY

Dr Robert Carrick, when recently addressing Western Australian members of the RAOU on his magpie investigations, thought that one of his marked magpies at Canberra, banded in 1953, might perhaps be a candidate for the title of the longest known surviving banded bird in Australia. He then gazed at me reflectively and conceded that some of my early-banded mutton-birds (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) would have the edge on his birds. This is so, and I think that my banded mutton-birds must for many years to come retain the Australian record for being the "oldest".

Of course this is not of any particular credit to me personally, but is due to two facts: (1) I happened to be one of the first banders in the field, and (2) mutton-birds happen to be extremely long-lived. Furthermore I have the advantage over contenders to the title in that my age records can be proved fairly easily. At the annual census of breeding birds on Fisher Island,

(Bass Strait, Tas.), where the burrows are numbered and mapped, and their occupants recorded in a card index, I have merely to go to a burrow and pull out any particular age claimant—if he or she has survived!

The monel metal bands now being used date back to 1950, but I first began banding mutton-birds in the Flinders Island area in November 1947. Ronald Lockley's pioneering work at Skokholm Bird Observatory (U.K.) showed that aluminium bands were not long-lasting on shearwaters, so I thought I would try bands made of copper. The mutton-bird work then was under the aegis of the CSIRO Fisheries Division and an order was placed in Melbourne, for a supply of inscribed bands. A metal trades strike almost wrecked the project that year. However, the bands arrived in time to start work at Fisher Island and adjoining islands in 1947.

The wearing properties of the copper bands proved even worse than the aluminium ones and the breeding birds had to be continually rebanded. No fledgling marked with one of these copper bands was recovered because the birds lost them in the intervening three years before they made a landfall on their natal islands. In 1950 we introduced monel metal bands which were an outstanding success and henceforth we had a continuous stream of recoveries of young birds and birds of known age.

Seventy of the breeding birds on Fisher Island from the 1947 season which still retained their copper rings were re-marked subsequently with new, monel bands. Of these, two males and three females were still part of the Fisher Island

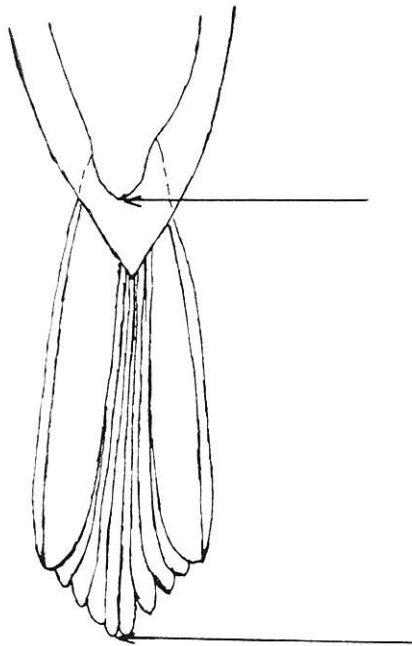


Fig. 4

breeding population in the 1969-70 season. Thus after 22 years, 7 per cent of the 1947 breeding birds were still surviving. The exact age of these birds is not known, but as they were adult when originally marked, and hence at the very least 5 or 6 years old (the average period of adolescence), they must be at least approaching 30 years of age and are probably older.

We now have a "pool" of birds of known age breeding on Fisher Island as they were banded there as fledglings. Two of the oldest are No. 10706, a female, and No. 10708, a male, both hatched on the Island in January 1950, and hence now 20 years of age. The female started egg-laying in November 1956, at 6 years of age, and the male first bred in November 1957, at 7 years of age.

There is a considerable number of other Fisher Island fledglings now breeding on the Island, and these birds of known age comprise 38 per cent of the breeding population. Other marked birds from Fisher Island, both fledglings and adults of unknown age, also nest on an adjoining part of Little Green Island; this is another of our study areas and a third nestling from January 1950 (from Flinders Island), No. 12008, was caught there in February 1970.

The extent to which Fisher Island birds become established on the adjoining islands, Little Green Island and Great Dog Island, is now being investigated. The study could be considerably advanced if volunteers could come forward to help us search the islands for marked birds. Nocturnal inspections of surface birds in the rookeries during the months of January and February are the most profitable. Readers who may be interested in assisting are asked to get in touch with me.

A summary of some of the results of the mutton-bird work on Fisher Island is given in my paper, "Aspects of the population ecology of the Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris*", *Proceedings of the XIV International Ornithological Congress*, 1967, pp. 165-190. Summaries of the work also appear in the "Handbook of North American Birds", vol. 1, edited by Ralph S. Palmer, and published by the Yale University Press, 1962, pp. 179-186. A further account of the biology of the bird will appear in the "Handbook of Australian Seabirds", by D. L. Serventy, V. N. Serventy and John Warham, now in course of publication by A. H. and A. W. Reed, Sydney.

D. L. Serventy,
27 Everett Street,
Nedlands, W.A.

Follow the Band!

BLACK-BACKED MAGPIE 090-00002 The Grand Old Lady of the Banding-Scheme

ROBERT CARRICK

The life-history of a 17-year-old Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*), one of the first birds banded when the Australian Bird-banding Scheme commenced operations in 1953, is described from 148 colour-band observations, mostly made by Chriss Carrick and Wim Vestjens during 1955-1966.

Black-backed Magpie 090-00002 was one of three nestlings banded by Dr George Dunnet on 16 October 1953 in a gum tree beside the lane north of Gungahlin, Canberra. It became a useful member of the Magpie population study that started two years later, and its history illustrates several aspects of the ecology and social organisation of the species.

1. During the two years to August 1955 that it remained in its natal territory 5, 090-00002 was seen there 25 times and was never seen outside this 15-acre permanent territory. On 25 July 1955 it was trapped and colour-banded WHITE LIGHT BLUE/LIGHT BLUE on the left leg, to become 229 in the series of individually identifiable birds.