

## Longevity Records — A Need for Caution

The longevity record for a 36-year-old Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) (Pettingill 1967, *Auk* 84: 123) was commendably retracted by G. M. Jonkel, Chief of the Bird Banding Laboratory in the U.S.A., and O. S. Pettingill the bander (Jonkel and Pettingill 1974, *Auk* 91:432)\* when it was found that the laboratory had supplied Pettingill with the wrong banding information. The library had advised Pettingill that the Herring Gull, which was found dead on 20 June 1966, had been banded by him on 29 June 1930. It had in fact been banded by him on 8 July 1948. The Herring Gull was thus only 18 years old.

This has prompted me to place on record an event which occurred in Australia in 1965.

On 27 December 1965, while visiting a nesting colony of Crested Terns *Sterna bergii* on Rottneest Island, Western Australia, a person, who was not a bander, came across a freshly dead adult tern wearing band 070-01047. He removed the band from the dead tern and placed it on a nearby Crested Tern chick. Soon after this he reported his actions to an officer of the Division of Wildlife Research, CSIRO, who in turn notified the Banding Office.

Examination of the records showed that the bird from which the person had removed the band was a Crested Tern which had been banded as a chick on Rottneest Island on 26 October 1955—just over ten years previously.

Had the person not reported his action, then in the event of the second bird to wear the band ever being recovered, the records available would show the bird was just over ten years older than it really was. For example, if it were to be recovered 15 years after it was banded (there

is good evidence to show that Crested Terns can live that long) then the records would indicate, incorrectly, that it was over 25 years old.

This episode is worth reporting as it shows another reason why exceptional longevity records, particularly if they are isolated incidents in the species concerned, should be questioned.

The re-use of bands by people who find them may occur more frequently than we realise in species which can be easily caught, particularly colonial nesting species such as terns and gulls. In the nesting colonies of these species dead banded birds may be found together with large numbers of live chicks. As a chick can be easily captured this may encourage some people to band one with a band from a dead bird.

D. Purchase, Secretary,  
Australian Bird-banding Scheme,  
Division of Wildlife Research,  
CSIRO, P.O. Box 84, Lyneham, A.C.T.

\* See also *Aust. Bird Bander* 13:20 (March 1975).