Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Banding Newsletter 25

November 2025

BirdBand

New Zealand National Bird Banding Scheme NZNBBS

Wildlife Marking Team: Michelle Bradshaw, Sandy Taylor, Annemieke Hamilton, Jamie Cooper

Banding Office re-branding to Wildlife Marking Office

The Banding Office administers and coordinates the banding of birds nationally through the New Zealand National Bird Banding Scheme (NZNBBS, inaugurated in 1950). This includes:

a) National oversight of projects that capture and mark birds (currently >500 projects)
b) Management of unique marks (bands) and provision of marking equipment
c) SOPs / Best Practice documents; Ethics and guidelines, training standards
d) Operator competency assessment and certification decision-making (currently >1600 operators)
e) Data curation through a central accessible mark-recapture database (FALCON: 1.69m records)
f) Technical Advice on wildlife marking; Chairing Marking Advisory Committee
g) Stakeholder engagement
h) Finances and general administration

The Banding Office has already expanded its scope to include bats as well as microchips (transponders) and VHF Radio transmitters and will soon also oversee marking of sealions. We will therefore be re-branding and expanding our scope to the **Wildlife Marking Office**, using the same approach (a through h above) to provide national oversight of **all marking methods on wildlife** in line with the Department of Conservation's statutory responsibility. The NZNBBS will continue to be administered under this broader umbrella.

Shop closure over Dec/Jan

We will be closing the shop from 12 December to 12 January.
Please ensure that you place any urgent orders in the first week of December; orders received after mid-December will likely only be shipped after mid-January.
Links: Price list ; Order form

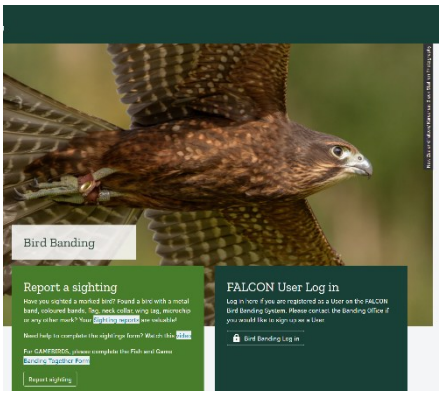
Bird of the year: Falcon!

Kārearea | New Zealand falcon was crowned Bird of the Year 2025.

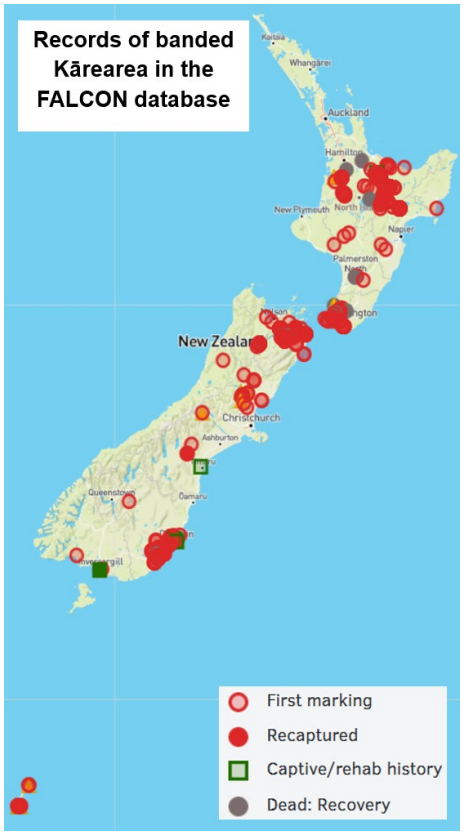
A threatened native species, the falcon has a wide distribution, being found on both the North and South Islands and several offshore islands, including Stewart Island and the Subantarctic Auckland Islands, and previously on the Chatham Islands. It is rare for a falcon to have adaptations that enable efficient hunting both in dense forests and open habitats as the Kārearea can. It is one of only four forest falcons out of a total of 38 species of falcons worldwide. They are also fiercely territorial, especially when nesting. Falcons are also the only birds with a "tooth" —called a tomial tooth—which is a protrusion on either side of the upper mandible used for killing prey. Our Kārearea is truly special and unique, having adapted to fulfil the roles that several species usually fill overseas.

The FALCON Bird Banding System, is named not only after the Kārearea, but for the components of the mark-recapture database:

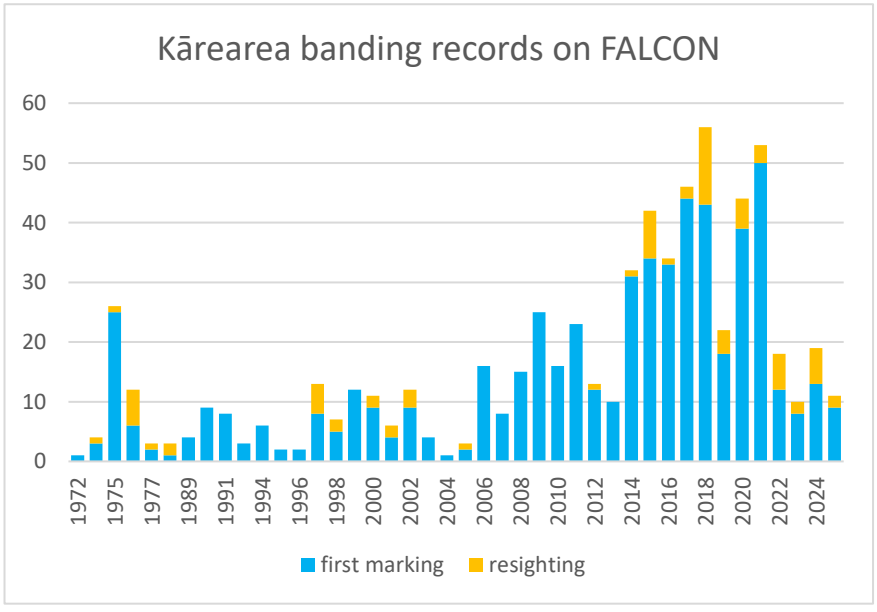
- **F**ile Upload
- **A**ccessibility
- **L**ocality (mapping)
- **C**ertification
- **O**pen-Source (GitHub)
- **N**otification (communication)



FALCON has been designed with "adaptations" that enable it to be applicable to a broad range of Wildlife Marking projects, while also fulfilling requirements of managing projects, certified operators and uniquely numbered stock. The database also has the flexibility of incorporating other marking methods such as transponders, transmitters and colour bands – and other species such as bats and sealions. As with our Kārearea, this is a unique and specialised New Zealand product!



There are 665 records of banded Kārearea in the FALCON database from as early as 1972, under 12 projects and by more than 40 operators. If you are aware of any records that aren't in our database, please get in touch.



From Rescue to Rooftop

On 4 November 2025, Damian Broadley from Wānaka shared an unexpected encounter: “This wee fella was on my roof for about an hour last night, just hanging out.”

Damian Broadley

He was pretty dazed, so I just picked him up and put him in a box with a towel on the base. After three hours he was looking perky, so we banded him and intended to release him, but he got a bit droopy in the neck again, so I put him back in the box.

Graham Parker was able to shed some light on the bird’s story:

“This record is very welcome news of a bird we recently banded opportunistically. On October 2, a few days after Kārearea won Bird of the Year, I had just arrived in Wānaka and got a report of a window-struck bird in a suburb of town. I went over and an adult male was sitting on cold concrete with one eye shut. It was a cold day, so not the best. The owners said that he'd hit the window really hard, and it was loud. It's amazing the little bloke was alive.

Graham Parker

Graham Parker

By then we were going to have to keep him for the night rather than release him late, so I put water and finely cut raw fallow-deer back steaks (our dinner) in his box and left him for the night. A hard frost later and he looked good, so I gave him more meat and released him an hour and a half later. He boomed out of the box. And we haven't seen or heard about him since. It is excellent to know that he made it.”

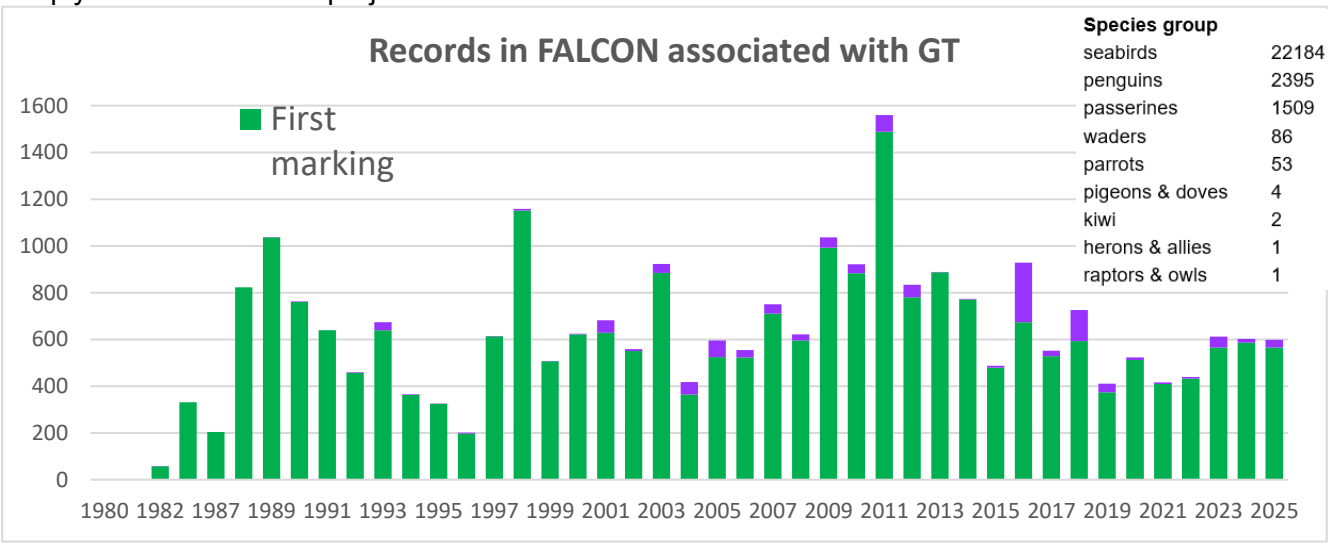
Thanks to Damian for sharing his sighting and to Graham for giving us the backstory.

Graeme Taylor resigns from BAC but not yet hanging up banding pliers
– Michelle Bradshaw

I first met Graeme in 2002 when I was helping Nigel Adams with some sampling of Grey-faced Petrels out at Te Henga/Bethell's Beach. The first thing Graeme taught me was how to tie a Prusik knot, to clamber up onto Ihumoana Island. While spinning blood samples using a hand-held centrifuge, I marvelled at Graeme's dexterity in extracting chicks from deep burrows, all the while providing a fascinating narrative of facts and stories in response to my varied questions. He knew the history of every banded bird as though they were personal friends and his wealth of seabird knowledge made a lasting impression on this fledgling seabird biologist and budding bander.

Fourteen years later, when I was appointed to the role of Banding Officer, Graeme turned from inspiration to mentor: in his role on the **Banding Advisory Committee (BAC)** I could not only lean on his immense seabird knowledge, but as previous Banding Officer (January 2005 to June 2012) he knows all the ins and out of the Banding Scheme. His legacy through what he put in place to ensure good data curation, competency assessment, Best Practice and permitting processes will long endure; I still regularly hear people refer to the time "*when GT was Banding Officer*…".

Moreover, Graeme is one of the most prolific banders, with over 26,000 records associated with his name in FALCON—an average of 600 per year since 1980! And those are just the records that specifically listed him by name (or one of his 28 aliases); there are likely thousands more historic records that were simply recorded under a project or institution.



The reason we can produce graphs such as this is because FALCON was built squarely on what Graeme achieved through overseeing the digitisation of bird banding records using Terrestrial and Freshwater Biodiversity Information Systems (TFBIS) funding. Between 2005 and 2007 over one and half million paper records were manually entered onto spreadsheets and in 2008 migrated into a database called BioWeb—this was the source data for launching FALCON. The first step of this digitisation process was to design a standardised Excel template for data entry; this became the first of many iterations that culminated in the current Bander's Data BOX template used in FALCON.

Graeme's significant and long-term contributions to ornithology and seabird conservation in Aotearoa New Zealand was acknowledged by Birds NZ in awarding him the Robert Falla Memorial Award: 2022-Falla-Award-Article-Graeme-Taylor.pdf

In formally stepping down from the Banding Advisory Committee, Graeme is certainly not disappearing off the banding scene, nor off my radar—he will no doubt continue his bird banding, data submissions and *ad hoc* provision of sage advice and good knots!

Fairy Prions at St Clair Cliffs – Graeme Loh

The discovery of the only mainland colony of fairy prions in 1994 on a rat free ledge on sheer sandstone cliffs has led to a very special hobby/citizen science/adventure project. Initially to determine the demographics of the prions at this colony and how they cope with ENSO and other environmental changes. It is a very finite site with only a few hundred birds.

The first visit at nighttime with Lyndon Perriman revealed that there were many more birds than there were burrow spaces. The soil is so shallow and the burrowing so vigorous that the birds eroded their habitat.

We thought maybe providing nest boxes would be interesting. They proved successful immediately. So we built more and more until checking them became more than a hobby. The birds appeared to be quite tolerant of our disturbance so permission to band was sought.

Two of the 23 chicks banded in January 2000 and two of the adults banded in Spring 2000 are still active at the colony. Since 2005 there has been a stable eighty-five study boxes monitored for marked bird attendance, their partners and box number, egg and chick production. Each year about 100 chicks are banded in the study boxes and boxes on satellite ledges, with over 2700 birds banded thus far. In January there is daily chick weighing till fledging at the end of the month. This data shows that fairy prions are very reliable producers of chicks. Their production shows no obvious variability through *el Nino* seasons, *la Nina* season and even during the substantial 2018 marine heatwave. So far. Quite unlike many other seabirds in Otago.

This effort has a cast of 265, some as young as twelve and as mature as sixty-nine. It is great being in a university town, but that does entail turnover with 'prion people' now being well dispersed around the globe. An even balance of sexes, but some women have made a very large number of visits. Last year 33 people contributed to 88 data collecting visits. Yes, there is a huge body of data begging formal writing up.

It is a beautiful coastal setting with towering sheer cream sandstone cliffs and a great spot for aurora appreciation as it faces the Magnetic South Pole.

Trematode anklets

The first fairy prion that Graeme banded in January 2000, D-149901, was recently recaptured while incubating an egg in box L6. This bird had some strange material attached to its leg, which Graeme photographed and then carefully removed.

It turns out this is a fish parasite! This trematode, Copiatestes, has a complex life cycle involving snails, krill and fish… and isn't supposed to include birds. Dr. Jerusha Bennett is a parasitologist at the University of Otago, and she has produced a very informative video on the trematode life cycle and why it ends up impacting birds (see some screenshots below).

Every band tells a story – here's the story of the bands!

Since its founding in 1949 in Bankeryd, Sweden, **IÖ Mekaniska** has transformed from a small workshop into a global leader in bird banding solutions. What began as a passion for bird conservation and precision engineering now supports research organisations worldwide with millions of high-quality bands each year.

The company's story started with Carl-Gustaf Öhman and Per-Erik Isaksson, who initially planned to produce sheet metal parts. When their first customer went bankrupt, they pivoted—and in 1954, Carl-Gustaf's love of ornithology inspired the creation of durable, reliable bird bands. His understanding of birds ensured the bands met practical needs in the field. While Per-Erik moved on, Carl-Gustaf and his family continued the business. Eric joined his father in 1962, and Lennart Öman came aboard in 1976. After Carl-Gustaf's passing in 1981, Eric and Lennart continued to grow the business until Lennart's retirement in 2008 and Eric's death in 2010. In 2012, Andreas Bylund became a partner, ushering in a new era of expansion.

Today, IÖ Mekaniska operates from a facility at Fabriksvägen 6, producing around four million bands annually. Each band—crafted from aluminium or stainless steel—is precision-formed, stamped with a unique identification number and address, and attached to a plastic hose.

From its humble start in a Swedish barn to becoming a trusted name in bird banding worldwide, IÖ Mekaniska has stayed true to its roots—quality, reliability, and care for bird conservation. Today, their bands help researchers everywhere track and monitor bird populations, proving that a simple idea, backed by dedication, can make a big difference for wildlife.

Did you know?

Since 1959, the Banding Office has sourced metal bird bands from IÖ Mekaniska, ordering more than 1.8 million uniquely stamped bands to date. They supply us with the full range of band sizes—from the smallest (AA prefix, 2 mm internal diameter) to the largest (RA prefix, 22 mm internal diameter)—as well as specialty bands such as oval-shaped (X, Z), flipper (J, P), and clipped bands (RC). Most bands are stainless steel, but AA, A, and B sizes are also produced in aluminium for lightweight species that cannot carry the weight of stainless steel. They also manufacture all gamebird bands, identified by a numbered prefix (e.g., 13, 19, 27).

Over the years there have been several addresses stamped on the bands, and any version can turn up in someone's stash, office drawer, found in dirt/sand, back of a couch or on a bird. Do not assume that an old address stamp means the bird is old; some banders still use older bands for recent banding work. Quality never goes out of style!

What are auxiliary marks?

Jamie Cooper is on Mangere Island, doing “cool Robin work” (his words) and sent this photo of a bird showing off its auxiliary marks.


Jamie Cooper

As part of becoming the **Wildlife Marking Office** and **tasked with overseeing marking of wildlife**, we need to collate information on existing as well as planned use of **Auxiliary marks** for all projects. These are any permanent or temporary mark other than the Primary Mark (a numbered metal band or microchip or tag). Colour marking (and use of alphanumerics) is a sub-set of this, and we will be working with project managers to better coordinate this not only across projects in New Zealand, but also in the Pacific as well as across the East Asian Australasian Flyway.

This follows the International Ornithologists’ Union Working Group on Bird Marking's Standards Manual:

Managing auxiliary markers

Most programs require ringers to source and purchase their own auxiliary markers. Efficient coordination of visual markers and codes (e.g., colour rings, wing tags, neck collars) within species or similar looking species is required to avoid duplication of markers which can jeopardize all projects. For studies of resident birds, local coordination may be sufficient while for long-distance migrants, international coordination is required.

FALCON can cater for all kinds of auxiliary marks. We will start by requesting Project Managers that have not yet done so, to provide details of auxiliary marks that they use or plan to use.

List of Auxiliary marks:

- butt/wraparound band
- flag/jess
- neck collar
- nasal saddles
- patagial/wing/web/flipper tag
- twink/paint/dye
- tattoo/branding
- toe-clipping or other mutilation
- VHF Radio transmitter
- GPS / Satellite transmitter
- Time Depth Recorder
- GLS Geolocator
- any other logger/tracker/device
- any other mark attached/affixed/applied

Citizen Science in action: reporting of banded birds

Westland Petrel found in Chile

A banded Westland Petrel (L-47181) was recovered dead on 6 November 2025 after colliding with a small boat near Chiloé Island, Chile. The band number was reported to the Wildlife Marking Office by Chile's *Ministerio de Agricultura*. This bird was originally banded as a chick on 2 November 2020 at Scotsman Creek, Punakaiki.

While Westland Petrels are known to visit the Chilean coast, it's encouraging to see overseas fishers and officials reporting New Zealand-banded birds. Every report adds to our understanding of these remarkable seabirds' movements.

Every band tells a story: why reporting matters, even for the smallest sparrow

Recently, two House Sparrows were found stuck together beneath a rhododendron. The finder managed to separate them, but only one survived—the banded bird did not. The cause wasn't predation or disease, but sticky resin combined with the plant's toxicity.

Natural resin or honeydew from insect infestations can pose risks for small birds, but this case highlights another hazard: all parts of rhododendrons (leaves, stems, flowers, nectar) are poisonous to birds and other animals, including dogs and cats.

The bird (BP-23127) was banded on 23 July 2022 at Pukehangi, Rotorua, as part of a long-term monitoring project tracking species changes in the area. Public reports like this help us:

- Record accurate survival and cause-of-death data
- Identify hidden risks in urban habitats
- Improve dataset reliability by flagging unusual cases
- Raise awareness about toxic plants and their impact on wildlife
- For more information, refer to The Dangers of Rhododendrons for Birds

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Campbell Black-browed Albatross

A Campbell Black-browed Albatross (band M-48779) was found dead at Whale Bay, Raglan, on 3 November 2025. The finder described the bird as "old, maggoty and stinky, with no sign of fishhooks," suggesting it had been dead for some time.

This individual was originally banded as a chick on Campbell Island on 24 March 1992. Although the death was not recent, reports like this remain valuable. Each sighting helps us better understand survival rates and dispersal patterns—and supports DOC's ongoing conservation efforts.

Reporting trends

As of 20 November 2025, the Wildlife Marking Office has received and processed **946 bird band resightings** from the public thus far this year. Last year's total was 1,007, so we're on track to maintain a strong trend in reporting. Every resighting matters—helping us to:

- research bird movements
- better understand longevity of species
- inform our conservation management practice
- foster conservation collaboration globally
- build our public engagement and …tell the story of conservation!

Oldest Ruru on Record: the remarkable Maroon Pullover

Angelina Martelli

This is the heartwarming story of Maroon Pullover, a very special ruru (Morepork) who made an incredible comeback. Earlier this year, he faced a life-threatening ordeal—severe eye ulcers and a head injury, likely from a vehicle strike (sadly a common hazard for this nocturnal species). This resilient bird was treated at the Dunedin Wildlife Hospital and successfully released back into the wild at Te Anau.

Interestingly, Maroon Pullover (E-216477) isn't just any ruru—he's a record-breaker. According to banding records provided by Moira Pryde, this bird was first captured as an adult male in October 2011 in Fiordland's Eglinton Valley and now, at over 13 years old, he may be the oldest wild ruru ever documented.

His longevity is remarkable—wild ruru typically don't reach this age with an average lifespan of six years. While there are anecdotal claims of a 40-year-old ruru at Nga Manu Reserve, Maroon Pullover holds the title for the oldest verified wild individual.

Special thanks to Thomas Robinson (DOC Ranger) for transporting the injured bird and to the dedicated team at Dunedin Wildlife Hospital for their care.

And the name 'Maroon Pullover'? …. For fun the DOC Ruru Monitoring team decided to give all their banded ruru names starting with the initials **MP** (for **M**ore**P**ork). Coincidentally, those initials also match the project leader's name: **M**oira **P**ryde.

Skua surprise: the back-story – Paul Sagar

Your August 2025 *BirDBanD* article about the banded Antarctic Skuas on display at the Antarctic Centre in Christchurch is of particular interest to me because Chris Paulin and I banded L-10435 on 16 Dec 1974. I'd been at Cape Bird since late Oct 1974, completing fieldwork for my MSc thesis on a shallow-water marine amphipod.

In my "spare" time I banded and made resightings of Antarctic Skuas on behalf of Dr Euan Young. 16 December 1974 was a momentous day because it was then that Joy plus Grant and Jo Knight arrived at Cape Bird (Joy to continue fieldwork for her MSc thesis on a freshwater rotifer). My diary states that after dinner the whole party went out to band Antarctic Skuas, but only 3 were caught. One of which was L-10435.

Chris Paulin (R) and Paul Sagar (L) banding an Antarctic skua at Cape Bird in 1974. Photo by Joy Sagar

A World Traveler Returns

On 21 November 2025, keen spotter and photographer Lloyd Blakie reported the return of Ruddy Turnstone (White 27; F135234) to Howells Point, Riverton—see "Flag-spotting" article in May 2022 *BirDBanD* newsletter.

This small shorebird was first banded at Chongming Dao, near Shanghai, China, on 17 April 2018. Since then, it has crossed thousands of kilometres on its epic migrations—and Lloyd has been lucky enough to spot it several times over the years.

Repeat sightings like this are a reminder of the incredible endurance and navigational skills these birds possess and the value of dedicated observers in uncovering their stories.

We have created an online form that you can use to provide feedback on the various aspects of the Banding/Wildlife Marking Office: Submit your anonymous feedback here