

SHORT NOTE

Recapture of bellbird likely 8+ years old

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We recaptured a male bellbird (*Anthornis melanura*) that was at least 8 years old on 1 Nov 2004 in Cass Peak Reserve, Port Hills, Christchurch (43°38'20" S, 172°37'00" E, altitude 465 m). It had a red plastic band above a metal band on its right leg, and the metal band was read as C-56007. However, the numbers were faint and it is likely to have been C-58007 because band C-56007 was put on a lesser knot (*Calidris canutus*) (R. Cossee, DOC, pers. comm.). Band C-58007 and a red plastic band were put on the right leg of an adult male bellbird captured on 15 Jun 1997 in Townsends Orchard, Lansdowne Valley, Port Hills (43°36'30" S, 172°35'00" E, altitude ca. 15 m). It seems certain that this was the bird that we recaptured in Cass Peak Reserve 7 years later. A yellow plastic band was added to its left leg before release to distinguish it from other bellbirds banded on the Port Hills.

Our recapture of this bellbird raises 2 interesting speculations. First, when captured in winter 1997 the bird was in an apple orchard in a valley bottom, but when recaptured in late spring 2004 it was on a ridge in a hardwood forest in an adjacent valley. The 2 locations are separated by 4 km in distance and 450 m in altitude, suggesting seasonal dispersal and/or altitudinal movement between winter feeding and spring breeding areas. Second, assuming the bird hatched in late 1996, this would make it at least 8 years old when recaptured. It was seen several times after recapture, and was last seen at the end of our study on 20 Dec 2004. This makes it similar in age to the oldest bellbird previously reported (8+ years; Heather & Robertson 1996).

There are only 4 previous recoveries of bellbirds at least 8 years old (G. Taylor, DOC, pers. comm.): an adult female banded by P.M. Sagar on 31 May 1980 in Pleasant Valley, Geraldine, and seen alive by a

member of the public 8 years 3 months later; an adult male banded by A.C. Blanshard on 20 Mar 1968 on Little Barrier Island, and seen alive by a member of the public 8 years 2 months later; an adult male banded by S.L. Lobb on 25 Jan 1978 on Big Island, off southern Stewart Island, and recovered alive by NZ Wildlife Service staff 8 years 1 month later; and an adult female banded by R.J. Nilsson on 22 Feb 1974 on Big Island, and recaptured alive by NZ Wildlife Service staff 8 years 1 month later. If the survival of bellbirds on the Port Hills is similar to that on the Poor Knights Islands (Sagar & Scofield 2006), then males would be expected to survive an average of 4.8 years. However, in the presence of introduced mammalian predators, survival and average age likely would be lower than this on the Port Hills and our record of a bellbird at least 8 years old may be a rare exception.

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LITERATURE CITED

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