

## SHORT NOTE

# First record of a New Zealand banded red-billed gull (*Larus novaehollandiae scopulinus*) recovered from mainland Australia

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On 8 September 2017, an individually colour-banded red-billed gull (*Larus novaehollandiae scopulinus*) (L.L. blue/metal, R.L. red/yellow/white) that was banded at the Kaikoura Peninsula colony (42°26'S, 173°42'E) was found washed up freshly dead on a beach near Woolgoolga, New South Wales (30°07'S, 153°12'E), 459 kilometres north-east of Sydney, Australia, by Graham Jupp. Ten days later Gay Bell reported seeing the same dead bird on the beach. The gull, E203088, was found on the high tide mark and was estimated to have been there less than two weeks.

The red-billed gull breeding colony at Kaikoura is the largest in New Zealand (Frost & Taylor 2018; Mills *et al.* 2018). The species is highly philopatric; during the breeding season adults and their adult offspring return annually to Kaikoura to breed or as non-breeders (Mills 1989; Mills *et al.* 2008)

They are attracted to the Kaikoura region because of the abundance of the euphausiid, *Nyctiphanes australis*, which inhabit the continental shelf area off the Kaikoura Coast (Mills *et al.* 2008). Outside of the breeding season, some gulls remain in the environs of Kaikoura but others disperse, with the majority spending the autumn and winter within 300 kilometres of Kaikoura. The population at Kaikoura has been banded annually for 59 years and studied for 54 years. Between 1958 and 2017, 76,878 chicks and 5,972 adults have been banded. Of these, 5,077 have been individually colour-banded, and a further 7,914 have had a single colour band. The bird recovered in Australia is the first known banded individual to be sighted, or recovered, outside of the mainland of New Zealand.

Red-billed gulls have been reported as rare stragglers to Lord Howe Island and the Kermadec Islands (Gill *et al.* 2010). In the past, red-billed gulls from mainland New Zealand have reached and established small breeding colonies on the outlying

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Chatham and Snares Islands and the Subantarctic Campbell and Auckland Islands. A genetic study of individuals from the small Subantarctic Campbell population, located 600 kilometres south of New Zealand, demonstrated that the population has become differentiated from the New Zealand mainland population (Given 2004), indicating that there has been limited or no recent gene inflow. The Campbell population have slightly shorter but stouter bills (Falla *et al.* 1966). Over the past several decades researchers visiting the Chatham, Snares, Auckland, and Campbell Islands have been asked to look for banded or colour-banded red-billed gulls, but none has been found.

#### LIFE HISTORY OF E203088

The gull found dead in Australia was 9 years and 10 months old. It was banded as an 8-day old nestling at the Kaikoura Peninsula on 19 November 2007, when a single white band was added. It was the second chick hatched from a clutch of two eggs laid by E202173, a five-year-old female, and a male of unknown age.

The bird was subsequently captured as a 2-year-old, non-breeder in 2009, sexed as a female by standard measurements (Mills 1971) and individually colour-banded. The bird remained as a non-breeder for the next two breeding seasons, and first bred in 2012 as a 5-year-old. Its partner was another female. Female-female pairings make up approximately 6% of the breeding pairs at Kaikoura (Mills *et al.* 1996). This arises because there is an excess of females in the population and many females have difficulty in obtaining male partners (Mills *et al.* 1996). The pair did not breed in 2013, but resumed breeding together in the 2014, 2015, and 2016 breeding seasons.

Outside of the breeding season, the gull was seen at the Waitangi Park Beach near Oriental Bay, Wellington on 18 August 2014 by Dr Hugh Robertson. It is possible that the gull returned annually to Wellington Harbour during the autumn and winter, as it is common for individuals to spend the non-breeding period in the same locality in subsequent years (JAM *unpubl. data*).

It is likely that the bird was blown off the New Zealand coast during a storm. It would be surprising that a bird that has regularly returned to Kaikoura and had an established breeding pattern would voluntarily travel to Australia.

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