

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher, Jim Butler

Contact Jim at: beautifulbirds@y7mail.com



AGES OF WILD BIRDS?

There was an internationally reported birth recently! It took place on the island of Midway near Hawaii. It was noteworthy because the mother was the world's oldest-known wild bird – a 62-year-old Laysan albatross. She was first banded in 1956 when she was believed to be 5 years old. Since being banded it is estimated that she has flown more than 3 million kilometres (equivalent to four return flights to the moon!) and reared 35 chicks. What a traveller, what a Mother!

This story illustrates the method that gives us the most accurate information about the longevity of wild birds. Records keep track of the time between banding and recapturing of individuals, often many times. However, this method does not give us their exact age. Two factors lead to ambiguity: banding birds of unknown age and not being able to retrieve the bands at death.

In Australia we have systematic

wild bird banding projects from which are derived the following maximum recorded times from banding to recapturing for some of the local bird species: Spotted Pardalote 4 years; Striated Pardalote 6 years; Silvereye 18 years; Eastern Yellow Robin 14 years; and Grey Fantail 9 years.

For most birds the risk of dying is quite high throughout their life. They are at great risk from predators whilst in the nest and for the period immediately after they fledge when they are not fully aware of the dangers. For adults, the probability of death each year is lower but still significant and remains roughly constant. As a result of these factors very few wild birds die of 'old age'. Life expectancy in birds is closely correlated with size -- the larger the species, the longer it is likely to live.

Happy Birding!

– Jim

Image: Grey Fantail by Mike Ford ©