



Australian Government

Department of the Environment

Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme

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BANDING OF REHABILITATED BIRDS AND BATS

Introduction

The Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme (ABBBS) aims to assist in the conservation and understanding of Australia's native birds and bats through studies involving banding. It achieves its aims by:

- coordinating wild bird and bat studies which use bands or colour-marking as an essential tool for research;
- providing bands and equipment to approved researchers to band birds and bats;
- maintaining a database for the efficient management of data collected under the schemes and;
- providing technical advice, data and analytical assistance to Government, non-government organisations and researchers to contribute to the conservation and knowledge of Australia's bird and bat fauna, particularly where data are relevant to Australia's obligations under international treaties and government funded conservation programs.

As the primary aim of the ABBBS is to support bona fide research on healthy, wild animals, the banding of rehabilitated birds and bats is not encouraged. In recent years, only a limited number of rehabilitation projects have been supported.

Contribution

Historically, the main purpose for banding rehabilitated birds and bats has been to collect information on the effectiveness of rehabilitation techniques. Since 1984, 344 species of birds and bats have been banded following rehabilitation and in many cases there is now over 10 years worth of data available. This should provide a sufficient basis for the evaluation of many rehabilitation techniques. The most popular species that have been rehabilitated and banded before release are:

- ◇ Rainbow Lorikeets;
- ◇ Australian Magpies; and
- ◇ Laughing Kookaburras.

To date, only a handful of projects have been analysed with a view to quantifying the effectiveness of rehabilitation and publishing the results. There has been a noticeable reluctance on the part of rehabilitation groups to publish results, particularly when compared to the volume of published material resulting from banding studies of wild animals.

Discussions with groups involved in rehabilitation work have indicated that most rehabilitators only want to band animals to learn about their fate on release.

In most cases, banding is not the best way of getting this information. Unlike the situation in Europe where a high number of bands are returned by the public, the population size of Australia in relation to the size of the continent means that very few banded animals are ever recovered by the general public. For example, the current public recovery rate of banded animals within Australia is less than 1%. It is therefore necessary to band a great number of animals in order to receive any useful information when relying solely on banding as a marking or tracking technique.

Much of the recovery information collected on banded birds and bats in Australia is gathered by the researchers themselves. The ABBBS rarely approves projects on wild birds or bats if the researcher is relying solely on public recoveries to generate the bulk of the data for their project.

Radio tracking has been shown to be a much more effective technique to collect relevant information in a very short period of time. For example, the Ku-ring-gai Bat Conservation Society completed a radio tracking study on rehabilitated flying foxes in conjunction with the University of New South Wales. Hand reared flying foxes were radio tracked to determine their fate following release. Radio tracking over three years produced results that caused the Ku-ring-gai Bat Conservation Society to initiate changes in their rearing and release procedures. The information derived from radio tracking that facilitated these changes would not have been possible if the Society had relied on the general public recovering and reporting banded individuals. The cost of using radio tracking is no longer prohibitive to many care groups, particularly if studies are undertaken in cooperation with universities or other organisations with access to equipment.

It is also necessary to consider what, if any, contribution the banding of rehabilitated birds or bats make to studies on birds or bats throughout Australia. A recovery of a rehabilitated animal is unlikely to be used in a biological study of wildlife as there is no way of knowing whether the animal recovered is exhibiting typical wild behaviour. The results of banding studies on rehabilitated animals would usually be excluded from any data analysis examining migration or survival in wild populations.

Another issue to be taken into consideration when considering the banding of rehabilitated animals is that of public perception. Many members of the public are now opposed to the banding of animals and ethics committees are only likely to support bona fide research that has tangible conservation benefits. The jury is still out on whether rehabilitation of injured and orphaned wildlife makes such a contribution to conservation.

The Future

Further work on evaluating rehabilitation techniques for birds that have been commonly banded in the past will generally not be supported until prior work has been evaluated and disseminated. This is especially so for those species commonly banded in the past following rehabilitation. There is no need to replicate previous banding practices solely to examine the effectiveness of rehabilitation techniques used.

The ABBBS will consider supporting projects involving limited rehabilitation banding of selected species if it can be demonstrated that:

- * there is no current information about the efficacy of rehabilitation for the species concerned;
- * the project is supported by the relevant State/Territory government;
- * the project contains clear, concise objectives that will lead to a practical outcome;
- * consideration has been given to sound experimental design practices;
- * a systematic approach to data collection and analysis is included;
- * the results of the study will be written up and widely disseminated; and
- * adequate resources are made available to support the project.

If it cannot be demonstrated that these criteria have been considered and addressed, then it is unlikely that the project will gain support from the ABBBS.