

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER BANDING IN LASKEEK BAY, 1992-2006

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SUMMARY

Re-sighting information from marked populations can provide valuable insights into the life history of species. Laskeek Bay Conservation Society has been banding Black Oystercatchers since 1992. To date 218 chicks and eight adults have been banded, resulting in 90 reports of re-sighted birds. This long-term study has shown that birds are pairing up and occupying territories as early as three years old, age at first breeding is between four and five years and the oldest known age breeders are twelve years old. By continuing to band and re-sight Black Oystercatchers during the field season, LBCS will help to build a better understanding of the life history characteristics of this bird.

INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

Laskeek Bay Conservation Society (LBCS) has monitored Black Oystercatchers (*Haematopus bachmani*) in Laskeek Bay since 1992. Each year breeding pairs are located, reproductive success is determined and chicks that weigh more than 100 g are banded. In addition to standard metal bands, all chicks receive two colour bands: one on the left leg indicating the general location banded and one on the right leg indicating year banded. During all territory surveys it

is determined whether or not adults are banded and if so, the colour band combinations are recorded. In 2004 the survey area was expanded to include breeding territories in the north eastern section of Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site (Gwaii Haanas). This report outlines some of the results of banding efforts from 1992-2006.

RESULTS

Since 1992 the LBCS crew has banded 218 Black Oystercatcher chicks. A total of 154 of these chicks were banded in Laskeek Bay, averaging (SD) 10.3 ± 6.5 birds banded per year (Figure 1). From 2004 to 2006, 64 chicks were banded in the extended survey area in Gwaii Haanas averaging (SD) 28.7 ± 1.5 birds banded per year. In addition to chicks, eight adults have been banded in Laskeek Bay (2000: 7 adults, 2001: 1 adult) as part of a study conducted by grad student S. Hazlitt from Simon Fraser University.

The first reports of re-sighted banded birds (re-sights) occurred in 1994, two years after the banding programme started. Since then, a total of 90 re-sights have been reported averaging (SD) 5.5 ± 5.4 reports per year. After 2000 the number of re-sights per year increased (Figure 1) averaging (SD) 11.5 ± 2.1 from 2001 to 2006.

Based on re-sight data we have determined that the youngest known age birds to pair up and occupy a breeding territory are three years old and the youngest known age

breeders in Laskeek Bay are between four and five years old. To date the oldest known age birds that we have observed breeding

were each twelve years old, banded as chicks in 1994, breeding at South Low Island and Skedans Islands in 2006.

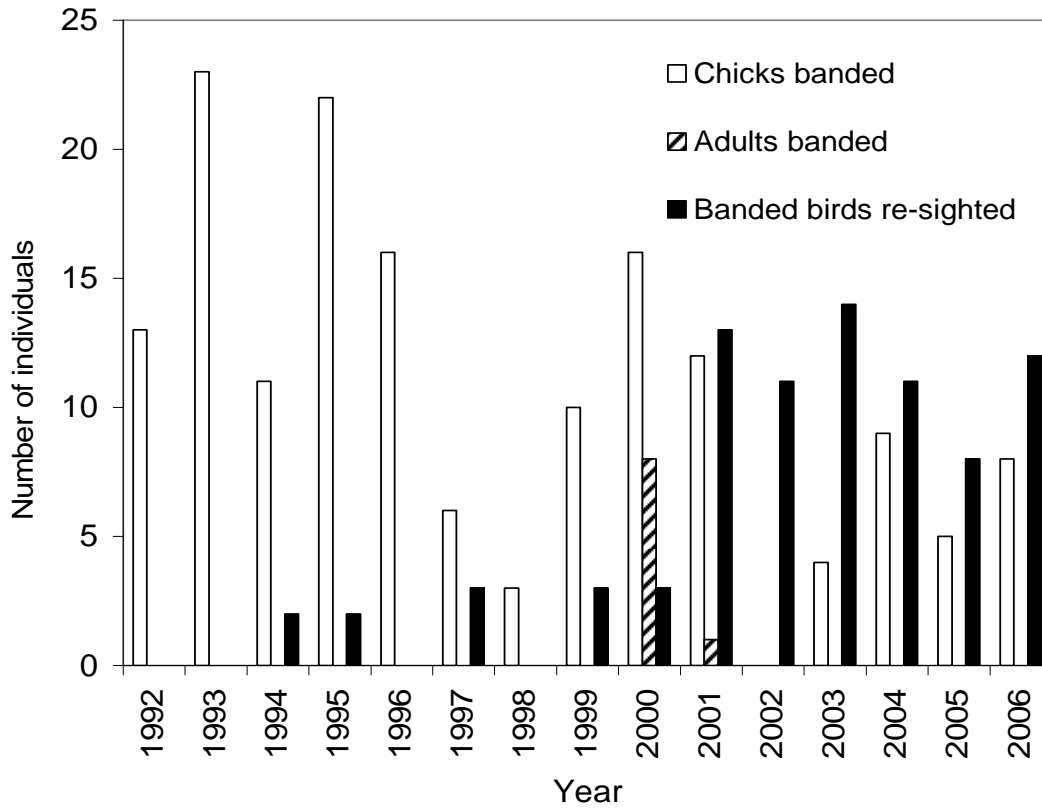


Fig. 2
Number of Black Oystercatchers banded and re-sighted from 1992 to 2006

DISCUSSION

Natural mortality rates for juvenile birds are suspected to be high (Hazlitt and Gaston 2002) meaning that only a small percentage of birds banded as chicks survive to be re-sighted and this would explain why more birds are not re-sighted each year (given that 218 chicks have been banded).

banding efforts in that year. Black Oystercatchers demonstrate philopatry (tendency of an individual to return to, or stay in, an area) to breeding sites (Andres and Falxa 1995, Hazlitt and Butler 2001) so marked breeders would be expected return to occupy the same territories year after year and be re-sighted.

The increase in the number of re-sights following 2000 can be attributed to adult

Information on juvenile dispersal is lacking although this long-term study has shown that Black Oystercatchers exhibit a certain degree of natal philopatry (5% of chicks; Hazlitt and Gaston 2002). During the three years of monitoring in Gwaii Haanas no re-sights were reported. The lack of re-sights of birds banded as chicks in this region (with unique colour combinations for Gwaii Haanas) leads us to the question: where do the sub-adults go? Follow up surveys in

years to come may provide information on the dispersal of these young birds

Overall, the Black Oystercatcher banding programme at LBCS has been very successful and the results presented here highlight how marking and re-sighting birds can help contribute to our understanding of Black Oystercatcher life history and population demographics.

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