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New Zealand dotterel: pp 151-153.



NEW ZEALAND DOTTEREL

Family Charadriidae

Species *Charadrius obscurus*

Common names New Zealand Dotterel, Red-breasted Dotterel.

Status Endemic

Abundance Uncommon

Size 250 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Banded Dotterel 250mm)

Habitat A bird of sandy coastlines, estuaries and river-mouths.

New Zealand range Widely spread around the North Island coast northwards

from Aotea Harbour on the west coast and the Bay of Plenty on the east coast. A small population of birds exists on Stewart Island. It is occasionally encountered on the west coast beaches north of Wellington.

Discussion The New Zealand Dotterel is closely related to the Large Sand Dotterel (*C. leschenaulti*) and the Mongolian Dotterel (*C. mongolus*), which have mountain nesting and coastal wintering habits. These two species nest in the highlands of Asia and winter on the sandflats of Africa, through Asia, New Guinea and Australia. The Stewart Island population of the New Zealand Dotterel also nests in the mountains and winters on the coast. North Island birds, though, are coastal nesters.

Dotterel names In New Zealand most of the plovers are called dotterels. For example, the Greater Sand Plover and the Lesser Sand Plover go by the names of Large Sand Dotterel and Mongolian Dotterel respectively.

Description

Head Brown with a white forehead and eye-stripe. **Upperparts** Brown.

Underparts White. **Bill** Black and robust. **Legs** Grey.

Description – breeding plumage birds

Breast Male bird attains a red breast and abdomen in July. Female birds attain lesser amounts of red colouring.

Conspicuous features

- A large bird compared with the more common Banded Dotterel.
- White eye-stripe.
- Has a dark eye and bill.
- The red breast in the breeding season.

Conspicuous characteristics

- A bird which is confiding and can be approached.
- It has the plover habit of running quickly and pausing when feeding.
- Has a rounded and hunched appearance when standing.
- A strong flier which moves from high-tide roost to high-tide roost when not in breeding territories.
- Blends in well with the high-tide roost and breeding territories.

Call Utters a “kreek kreek” call when in flight.

Nest A scrape in the sand with minimal nest lining. Up to 3 buff-brown, blotched with dark brown eggs are laid. In the North Island, nests are usually found behind the beach in locations which get 360 degree views. Very often, mated pairs occupy territories at the opposite ends of beaches. On Stewart Island birds nest high on the island in prominent positions with good visibility although there are records of sand-dune nests from Mason Bay.

Territorial behaviour Birds are strongly territorial during the breeding season and keep their neighbours at bay.

Longevity of New Zealand Dotterels A bird banded on 20.12.50 and known as Wimble, was again sighted in 1987 – at least 37 years old.

Where to find – North Island

Northland – Bay of Islands at Te Ngairi Bay north of Kerikeri. P. 281.

North Auckland – Wenderholm Regional Park. P. 291.

North Auckland – Weiti (Wade) River across from the wharf. P. 294.

North Auckland – Whangaparaoa in Shakespear Park. P. 294..

South Auckland – Kawakawa Bay. P. 302.

South Auckland – Miranda at “The Limeworks”. P. 302.

Coromandel – Opoutere on the sandspit at the entrance to Wharekawa Harbour. P. 307.

Bay of Plenty – Matata at the Tarawera River-mouth. P. 320.

Bay of Plenty – Ohiwa Harbour on the Ohope spit. P. 322.

Where to find – South Island

Southland – Riverton Beach. P. 366.

Where to find – Stewart Island

Stewart Island – Ocean Beach and The Neck on the south side of Paterson Inlet. P. 367.