

CHAMBERS, S. 2009.
Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.
Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.
Wrybill: pp 160-161.



WRYBILL.

Family Charadriidae

Species *Anarhynchus frontalis*

Common name Wrybill

Status Endemic

Abundance Common in selected areas

Size 200 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Banded Dotterel 200 mm)

Habitat Outside of the breeding season a bird of muddy estuaries and inlets. During the breeding season a bird of the wide riverbeds of the South Island.

New Zealand range Outside of breeding season birds are spread around the North Island coast in Northland, Coromandel, Bay of Plenty, southern Taranaki and Hawkes Bay. Main concentrations are around the Kaipara Harbour, Manukau Harbour, the Firth of Thames and Tauranga Harbour.

Discussion The Wrybill is a unique New Zealand plover, thought to have a closer

relationship with the Red-capped Dotterel (*C. alexandrinus*) than with other members of the plover family (Fleming 1982). Its uniqueness is associated with its peculiar bill which has its end segment distinctly curved to the right. It is the only bird in the world with such a bill. A study of this bird (Pierce 1979) concluded that “the bill appears to be pre-adapted for obtaining mayfly and caddisfly from their inactive diurnal positions on the undersurface of submerged stones, where they are not normally visible to Wrybills.”

Description

Forehead White with white eyebrow to behind eye. **Upperparts** Grey. **Throat** A black band crosses the throat when in breeding plumage. **Underparts** White.

Bill Black. **Legs** Grey-green.

Differences between sexes

- Male birds can be distinguished from female birds by the presence of a black spot between the white frontal stripe and the grey of crown.
- Male birds have a broader breast-band than females.

Conspicuous features

- Black breast band but indistinct on wintering birds.
- Bill curved to the right.

Conspicuous characteristics

- When feeding has the run and pause habit common to plovers.
- Has a habit of running and suddenly changing direction while feeding.
- Runs in a hunched position with head pulled back into shoulders.
- A confiding species which can be approached.
- Birds flock during winter at high-tide roosts and are known for their aerial flying displays especially just after the tide has turned. Light patterns on the wings and the sound of wing-rustle are part of it. The collective noun for this behaviour is “A Flung Scarf of Wrybill” (A H Hooper 1964).

Call A shrill “weet weet”.

Nest A scrape among the pebbles of the South Island rivers. Up to 2 pale grey blotched with dark brown eggs are laid.

Breeding grounds During the breeding season of late July to December birds are concentrated on the wide riverbeds of the mid-Canterbury area. Nests are placed up to 200 metres apart and territories are vigorously defended. Birds return to their wintering grounds of the North Island from the end of January onwards. The combined total of wintering birds in the Firth of Thames and the Manukau Harbour is about 5000 birds.

Migrants attracted to high-tide Wrybill roosts The following species will sometimes roost with Wrybills – Mongolian Dotterel, Large Sand Dotterel, Siberian Tattler, Terek Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper and Red-necked Stint.

Where to find – North Island

North Auckland – Kaipara Harbour at Manukapua Island. P. 287.

Auckland – Puketutu Island causeway Mangere Sewage Plant. P. 298.

South Auckland – Miranda at high tide at various places along the coast. These places include Pukorokoro, The Hide, the Stilt Ponds, and Taramaire North. At low tide they can be seen north of Miranda. P. 302.

South Auckland – Manukau Harbour occasionally at Clarks Beach. P. 301.

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

Where to find – South Island

Canterbury Any of the large rivers, such as the Waitaki, Rakaia, Ahuriri, or Cass which flows into Lake Tekapo, will have Wrybill over the breeding season. Remember that Wrybills will be on scattered breeding territories and not in the huge flocks of the north.

Canterbury – Cass River Bridge. P. 354.