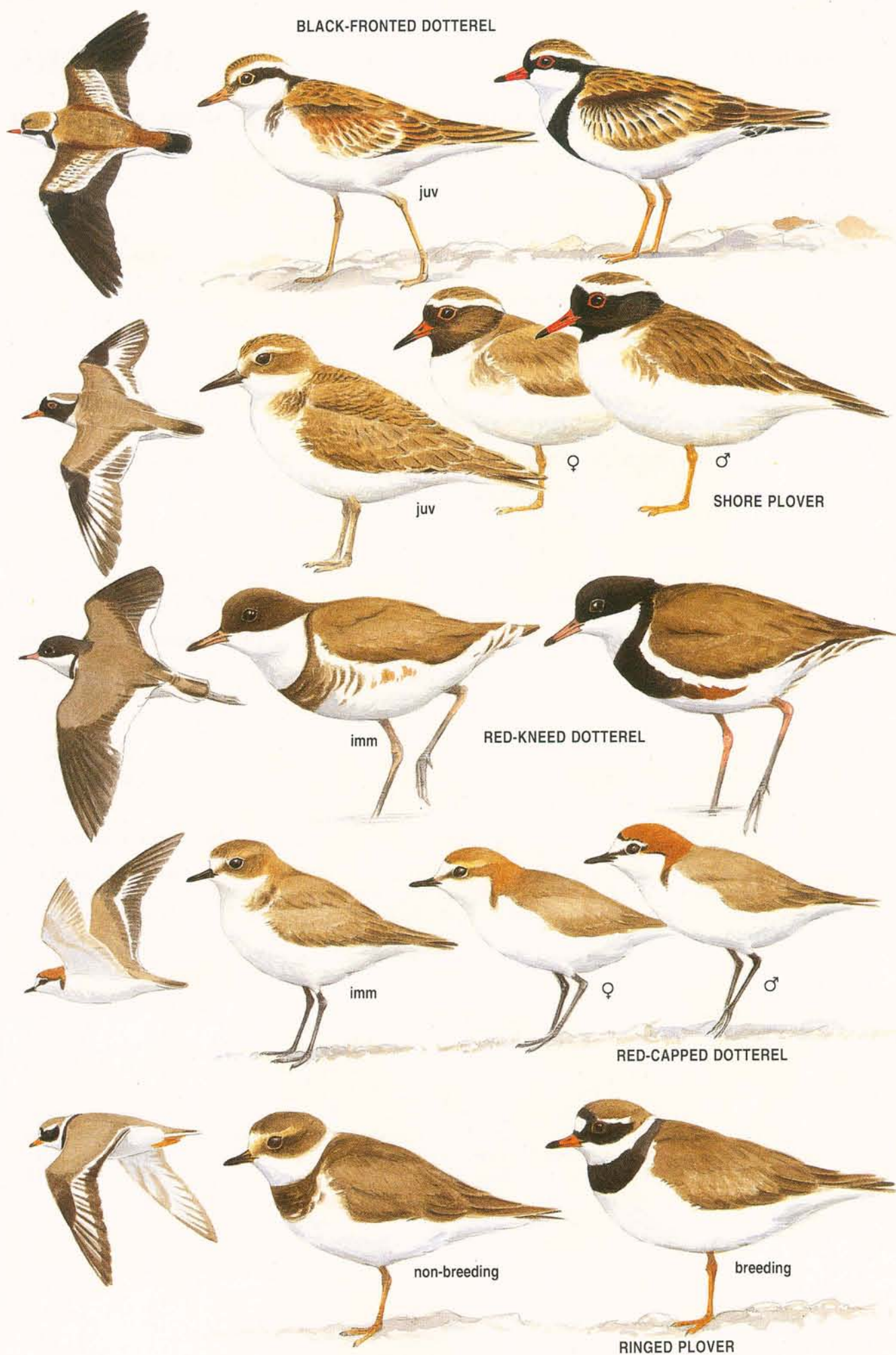


A large diverse group of birds of estuaries, coasts, riverbeds and farmland. Most are long-legged and feed in or near shallow water. Bill shape is varied; short and stubby in those (e.g. dotterels) that peck from the surface, but longer in those that feed in shallow water (e.g. stilts), or probe deeply (e.g. godwits). Flight strong and direct. Often form flocks while roosting or flying, but disperse to feed. Many species seen in NZ breed in the Arctic and arrive in September, with remnants of breeding plumage, and depart in March, often in breeding plumage. Most subadults and a few adults spend the southern winter here.

RED-CAPPED DOTTEREL *Charadrius ruficapillus* Rare Australian vagrant

15 cm, 38 g. Small active pale greyish-brown dotterel with bright white underparts and black legs, rufous head and nape, black bill and thin white wingbar. Male has white forehead edged black above, black line through eye edging rufous neck. Bill and legs black. Female has much less extensive rufous and lacks black markings. Juvenile duller and mottled above. **Habitat:** Formerly bred on shingle riverbeds of South I; now a rare vagrant. [Sp 177]



PLOVERS, DOTTERELS and LAPWINGS

Charadriidae

About 65 species, most of which are migratory. There are about 29 plovers and dotterels, of which 5 (formerly 6) breed in New Zealand and 8 visit as migrants from the Northern Hemisphere; 26 lapwings, 1 of which breeds in New Zealand. Some authorities place the Red-kneed Dotterel with the lapwings rather than the plovers.

In New Zealand, the terms plover and dotterel mean the same thing; there is no clear distinction. All are plumpish with a thick, short neck, short tail, small, rounded head

with a high forehead and bill shorter than the head, pointed and slightly swollen at the tip. The plumage is a blend of black, white, brown and grey, sometimes more colourful in breeding plumage. They often have a bold pattern in flight. They have a characteristic 'walk and stop' way of feeding.

Lapwings tend to be inland on pasture and around coastal wetlands. They have wattles on the face and spurs on the bend of the wing, and are noisy on the ground and in flight, by night as well as by day.

177. RED-CAPPED DOTTEREL

Charadrius ruficapillus Plate 41

Other name: Red-capped Plover

Size: 15 cm, 38 g

Distribution: Breed only in Australia, mainly in the southeast and in Tasmania. They have apparently failed in a recent attempt to colonise New Zealand; the first record was an adult male collected near Waikanae in 1878, the next was a female mated to a Banded Dotterel in 1947–50 on the Ashley River, Canterbury, raising hybrid young. In the 1960s and 1970s, several pairs of Red-capped Dotterels bred on the Ashley, Leader and Waipara Rivers of northern Canterbury, and

raised chicks. Between 1955 and 1975, there were several records of birds at the Ashley and Waipara River mouths, Lake Tuakitoto, Manukau Harbour and the Firth of Thames. The last sighting was in 1981 at Lake Ellesmere. Birds were not found in an intensive search of former breeding grounds in 1986–87.

Behaviour: Gregarious and often join flocks of Banded Dotterels in New Zealand. General behaviour and feeding methods are similar to those of the Banded Dotterel.

Reading: Hughey, K.F.D. 1989. *Notornis* 36: 24–26.