

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.

**GREY PLOVER** *Pluvialis squatarola*

Uncommon Arctic migrant

28 cm, 250 g. Much larger heavier-billed and greyer than Pacific Golden Plover. Has spangled appearance, and black face, throat and underparts in breeding plumage. Non-breeding is very pale, speckled grey and white head, upperparts and breast; white underparts. In flight, white underwings have diagnostic black armpits, thin white wingbar, white rump, and barred tail. Sexes alike. Juvenile grey-brown above with white and a few yellow spots. Large black eye, stout black bill and long ash-grey legs. Flight call a 3-note 'hee-oo-ee'. **Habitat:** Breeds high Arctic. In NZ, at estuaries, especially Parengarenga, Firth of Thames and Farewell Spit. [Sp 188]



**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.

**188. GREY PLOVER** *Pluvialis squatarola*

Plate 42

**Other name:** Black-bellied Plover

**Size:** 29 cm, 250 g

**Distribution:** Breed throughout the arctic tundra and are almost circumpolar, except for Greenland, Iceland and Scandinavia. They migrate to the coasts of North and South America, Africa, southern Asia and Australasia. In New Zealand, they are a rare but annual visitor between mid-August and mid-April, but a few birds have overwintered. Since they were first recorded in the 1940s, there have been over 70 sightings, from Parengarenga Harbour to the Southland coast, and from the Kermadecs and the Chatham Islands. Most records are from Northland, the Firth of Thames and at Farewell Spit. The

largest group seen together was 12 at Farewell Spit in 1994.

**Population:** Usually fewer than 5 visit New Zealand each summer, the maximum being c. 15 in 1994; whereas c. 12,000 visit Australia.

**Behaviour:** In New Zealand, they usually roost on the coast on sandbanks or shellbanks rather than in ploughed fields or on short pasture, as Pacific Golden Plover do. Their call in flight is a loud, far-carrying, three-syllable, slurred whistle: 'tle-oo-ee', the second syllable lower in pitch.

**Feeding:** Grey Plovers are birds of tidal estuaries, feeding in wet, muddy conditions, close to and often wading in the tideline.