

# New Zealand dotterel

## *tuturiwhatu pukunui (charadrius obscurus)*

The northern New Zealand dotterel is an endangered species found only in New Zealand. It was once widespread and common but there are only about 1700 birds left. Around 300 of these live on the Coromandel Peninsula. Subdivision development destroying habitat, introduced predators, and disturbance during breeding season, are all factors in the decline of NZ dotterel.

### New Zealand dotterel - a description

NZ dotterel are wading shorebirds, largely pale grey-brown on their head and back, with off-white under parts that flush rusty-orange before and during the breeding season. Their prominent head, large dark eyes, strong black beak, and habit of running quickly and pausing to feed make them easy to identify. Their camouflage colours make them difficult to see when standing still, and their chip-chip call is often heard before they are seen.

### What is the NZ dotterel home range?

Home for the northern population of NZ dotterel is the North Island coastline north of Awakino in the west and Mahia Peninsula in the east. There are also breeding populations on Matakana Island (at the entrance to Tauranga Harbour), Moutohora-Whale Island and Great Barrier Island.

They can also be found at many beaches on the Coromandel Peninsula.

### Where are they found ?

Their favoured habitat consists of sandspits with sparse driftwood cover near estuaries and river mouths. They also nest on sand and gravel beaches, dunes, shell banks and bare areas near estuaries and river mouths. If nesting in dunes, they prefer natural spinifex and pingao cover.

Birds have nested inland on the waste rock embankment at Newmont Waihi Gold's Martha Mine at Waihi, in the Sulphur Point Wharf Complex at Tauranga and at the Lakes Resort Golf Course near Pauanui.

### Threats to NZ dotterel

NZ dotterel eggs and chicks are very susceptible to predation and their nests are easily destroyed by storms, careless feet and off-road vehicles.

Cats, stoats, hedgehogs and rats are the most common predators of eggs and chicks. Dogs are known to kill chicks and in some areas black-

backed gulls can be a threat. Cats and stoats also kill some adult birds, especially during the breeding season.



## Breeding and Behaviour

The NZ dotterel breeding season runs from August to March each year. Birds return to the same locality year after year from flock sites around the peninsula.

They nest near the high tide line, giving them a clear 360-degree view to watch for predators. Pairs defend their nests aggressively, but this doesn't make their nests easier to see, as the nest is just a scrape in the sand and the eggs are the colour of wet sand. This camouflage makes them vulnerable to crushing by people, horses and vehicles.

There are usually three eggs laid per nest and if the eggs are destroyed a pair can lay up to four times in a season.

Eggs are incubated for 28 days and the newly hatched chicks are the size of large bumble bees, but with very long legs. The chicks are active and independent, and feed themselves with the parents acting as bodyguards.

When disturbed, the chicks will hide in the nearest cover and 'freeze'.

Chicks normally fledge six to seven weeks after hatching. If continually disturbed by people and animals on the beach, however, their growth is slowed so they are longer at risk from predators.

## You can help!

Sharing the beaches with care will provide the NZ dotterel with their best chance of recovery.

People, together with their pets and vehicles, pose a major threat to NZ dotterel. This threat can be reduced by knowing what to do in breeding areas.

- Stay outside of fenced areas
- Watch out for 'Birds Nesting' signs
- Please keep dogs, vehicles and boats off beaches and sandspits that NZ dotterel are nesting on, especially during the September to March breeding season.

## For more information

**If you would like to volunteer please call:**

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NZ dotterel during breeding season



A typical NZ dotterel nest



NZ dotterel nesting area

