

05 June 2025

Tēnā koe

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation (DOC), received on 7 May 2025, in which you asked for *the full report on the dotterel count and dotterel work for this year*.

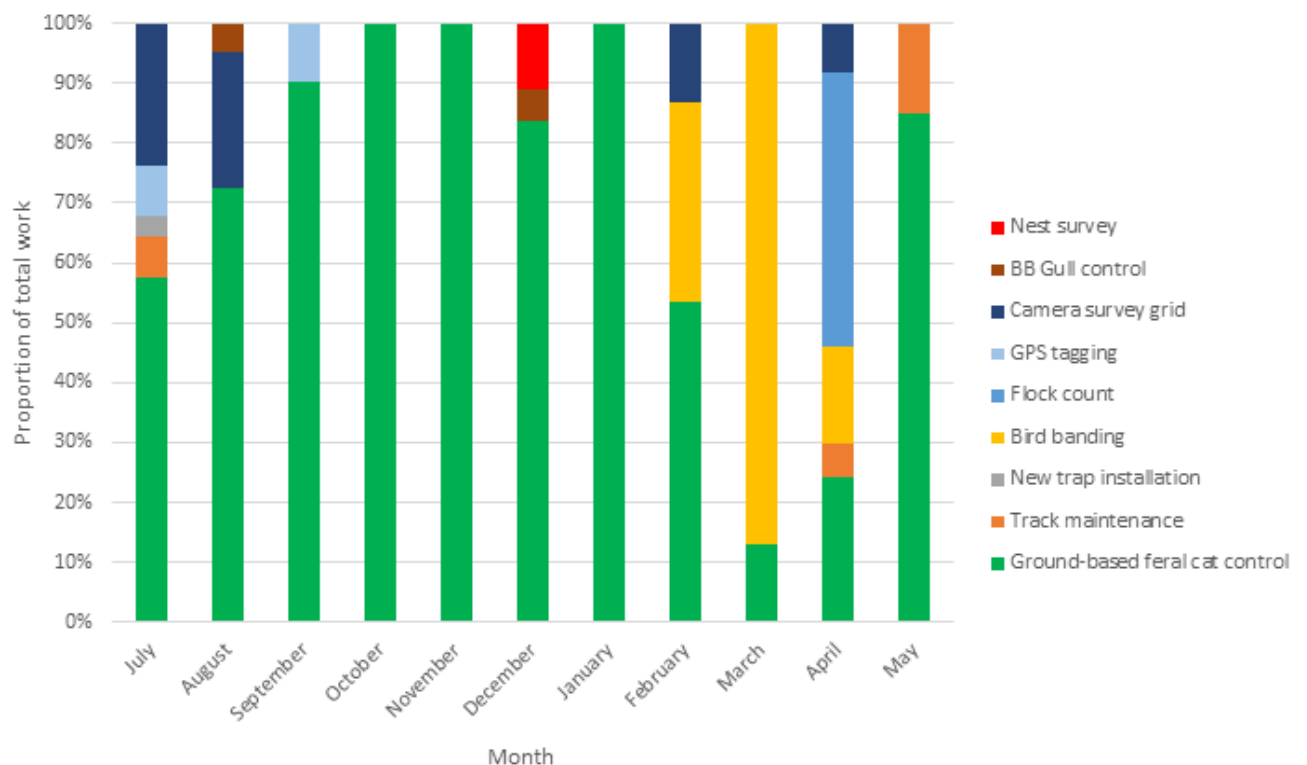
We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA).

Our responses are listed below:

Full report on dotterel work 24/25

Southern New Zealand dotterel / Pukunui is a subspecies of New Zealand dotterel which is listed as *Nationally Critical* on the New Zealand Threat Classification System. Pukunui are only known to breed on Stewart Island / Rakiura and almost exclusively on the open alpine tops of the island's mountain ranges. In this often-extreme environment, they nest from September and raise their chicks to fledging in January and February before they head to their winter flocking sites on the beaches of Rakiura and Awarua Bay near Bluff.

During the 2024-25 Pukunui breeding season, the work of the Pukunui Recovery Programme field team was mainly focussed on ground-based feral cat control. A total of 64 feral cats were removed from the management area. Additional effort focussed on controlling southern black-backed gulls, spur-winged plover, white-tailed deer and Australian harriers. Other key tasks included contributing to research (camera survey grid, GPS tagging), pukunui monitoring and management (pukunui banding, nest surveys, flock count), and infrastructure maintenance and upgrades (track maintenance and installation of new traps). The below graph shows these key tasks by proportion of staff days across the 2024-25 field season.



Despite the increased effort being put into servicing the trapping network, an estimated 20 adult pukunui were lost this season, most likely due to feral cat predation at nest sites. Approximately 24 pukunui chicks survived to fledge and joined the adult population at the flocking sites in autumn, resulting in a slight population increase overall.

Full report on dotterel count (April 2025)

The pukunui flock counts take place each year in April or May, once the pukunui have finished breeding and migrated to their winter flocking sites. This season the flock count took place from 8-10 April 2025. Field teams simultaneously counted flocks at flocking sites at Awarua Bay, Masons Bay, and the Freshwater mudflats. Individual pukunui are identified by their unique colour band combinations. We are now confident that the majority of the pukunui population is banded, so total population counts have a high degree of accuracy.

33 birds were observed at Awarua. 54 were seen at Mason Bay/Freshwater (this flock is counted at both sites, they rest at Mason Bay and feed at the Freshwater mudflats), and 13 were counted at Cook Arm in Port Pegasus. This season the total count was 105 birds. Note that we assume that 5% of birds are not observed during flock counts. We add this percentage (5%) to the estimated population count number annually to maintain consistency with the 36-year data set.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) may be published on DOC's website.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'ajohnstone'.

Alastair Johnstone
Acting Regional Operations Director, Southern South Island
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai