



You can help protect the New Zealand dotterel

- Walk and ride your horse below the high-tide mark on beaches where dotterels are breeding.
- Please stay outside the fenced-off areas with 'birds nesting' signs.
- If you see a dotterel pretending to be injured, or come across eggs or chicks, please leave them alone.
- Please do not take vehicles on beaches.
- Keep your dog on a leash at all times. Remember that some beaches are only open for dog-walking at certain times. Check first with your district council.

Step lightly on the beach Me ata haere he wāhi kōhanga

If you see a dotterel pretending to be injured, it has chicks or a nest nearby.

Please move away from the area and step lightly on the beach. Do not disturb nesting birds, their eggs or chicks.

To find out more or to join a local community group, contact your local DOC Office.

www.doc.govt.nz

Sand dunes at Port Waikato, home to some New Zealand dotterels.

To find out more or to join a local community group

Contact your local DOC Office
www.doc.govt.nz



Cover: New Zealand dotterel, Ōhope Beach. Photo: ©Neil Robert Hutton
Back: New Zealand dotterel with chick. Photo: Lew Truscott

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New Zealand Government

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0800 362 468

Report any safety hazards
or conservation emergencies
For Fire and Search and Rescue Call 111

New Zealand dotterels/ Tūturiwhatu pukunui



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Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

New Zealand dotterels/Tūturiwhatu pukunui (*Charadrius obscurus*)

The New Zealand dotterel is an endangered species found only in New Zealand. It was once widespread and common, but there are now only about 2,500 birds left, making dotterels more at risk than some species of kiwi.

The impacts of coastal development on habitat, introduced predators and disturbance during breeding seasons are all factors in the drop in numbers.

What do they look like?

New Zealand dotterels are small shorebirds, found on sandy beaches and sandspits or feeding in tidal estuaries. They are largely pale grey-brown on their head and back, with off-white underparts that flush rusty orange before and during the breeding season (September to February).

Their camouflage colours make them difficult to see when standing still, but their habit of running quickly and pausing to feed makes them easy to identify. Their 'chip-chip' call is often heard before they are seen.

Where are they found?

The northern New Zealand dotterel subspecies is found on the beaches in the North Island, mainly along the east coast from North Cape to Cape Kidnappers as well as on the west coast from New Plymouth to Port Waikato. A second subspecies, the southern New Zealand dotterel, survives on Stewart Island / Rakiura.



Spot the dotterel



Spot the egg

Breeding

Nests are difficult to see as they are just a scrape in the sand, and the eggs are the colour of wet sand. Two to three eggs are laid and incubated for around 28 days. Typical breeding sites are:

- sandspits
- sandy beaches
- shell banks
- dunes
- tidal estuaries and river mouths.

Once the chicks hatch they run around on the beach and feed themselves. Their diet is aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates, such as sandhoppers, and they sometimes take small fish and crabs.

It takes 6 to 7 weeks before the chicks can fly. During winter, groups of New Zealand dotterels, both adults and young, gather together at flocking sites.

Main threats

Tides and storm surges:

Nests just above high-tide mark are easily lost to strong storms and very high spring tides.

Habitat destruction and degradation:

Breeding habitats have been lost to land development or subsequent erosion.

Predation:

Eggs and chicks can be easy prey for cats, dogs, mustelids (stoats, weasels and ferrets) and hedgehogs. Cats and mustelids also kill adult birds, especially when sitting on their nests. Black-backed gulls and harrier hawks can take a heavy toll on eggs and chicks.

Disturbance:

Nests are easily trampled or disturbed by dogs or vehicles.

New Zealand dotterels show amazing behaviour to protect their young. To draw a predator away, the parent pretends to be injured, leading the intruder further from the nest.

If you see a dotterel doing this, it has chicks or a nest nearby. Please move away from the area, being careful where you step, as the birds will not return to their nest until you are gone. If the nest is left unattended, the eggs get cold or overheat in the strong sun. In both cases the chick inside the egg will die.

Chicks also become exposed to attack by other birds if they are separated from their parents or forced to move out of their territory.



New Zealand dotterel chick. Photo: Lew Truscott



Banded dotterel egg. Photo: Mithuna Sothreson



New Zealand dotterel, Ōhope Beach. Photo: ©Neil Robert Hutton

