

Biodiversity

Northern New Zealand dotterel / Tūturiwhatu

DESCRIPTION

The Northern New Zealand dotterel / Tūturiwhatu is an At Risk – Recovering endemic species in New Zealand. They are shorebirds, found on sandy beaches or tidal estuaries. Dotterels are well camouflaged in their habitat. At 270mm tall they are largely grey with an off-white belly that becomes flushed with a rusty-orange colour in the breeding season.

DISTRIBUTION, BREEDING AND FEEDING

The Northern New Zealand dotterel is now only present in the North Island. Once widespread in Aotearoa, there is now an estimated population of ~2500 birds left. The breeding season typically occurs from August-January with three eggs per clutch. Nests are shallow scrapes in the sand above the high tide mark and are difficult to spot. The birds are strongly territorial and will attempt to distract an intruder, be it human, dog or other birds, if they come close to their nests. If the intruder is persistent the bird will fake an injured wing or leg and will try to lead them away.

Chicks are mobile soon after hatching but cannot fly for several weeks, leaving them vulnerable to predation and vehicles. They disperse widely to find food and usually feed on molluscs, small crustaceans, worms and insects present on the beach.



THREATS

- Nests above the high tide mark can be easily washed away, run over by vehicles or trodden on by people.
- Predation by hedgehogs, rats, cats, stoats and dogs is common. Native gulls and harriers can also eat eggs and chicks.
- Nesting dotterels are very easily disturbed. There has been a serious decline in suitable shorebird habitat as beaches where they traditionally nested are used for recreation.

NORTHERN NEW ZEALAND DOTTEREL IN TARANAKI

In Taranaki Northern New Zealand dotterel can occasionally be seen and heard on sandy beaches, usually above the high tide line among driftwood and stones.

As of 2025, approximately 50 birds can be found in the Taranaki region. There are 10 nest sites and 15 known breeding pairs.

The breeding season in Taranaki is slightly later than elsewhere in Aotearoa and runs from September – March.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP

- Drive vehicles below the high tide mark on beaches
- Walk your dog in areas where dotterel are not nesting
- Obey signs regarding dotterel nesting and stay outside fenced-off areas

CONSERVATION

The Northern New Zealand dotterel is a threatened species listed as 'At Risk – Recovering'.



See Wild for Taranaki Te Whānau Toroa for:

- Shorebird identification courses
- Northern NZ Dotterel Management Courses
- Community Groups – Dotterel minders

<https://wildfortaranaki.nz/te-whanau-toroa/>



TARANAKI REGIONAL COUNCIL

Biodiversity

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Working with people | caring for Taranaki