

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, up to around 270mm tall and 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. The breeding season typically occurs August-January with three eggs per clutch. Nests are shallow scrapes in the sand above the high tide mark and are difficult to spot. These 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 from their nesting site. 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.



NEW ZEALAND DOTTEREL IN TARANAKI

In Taranaki Northern New Zealand dotterel can occasionally be seen and heard on sandy beaches, usually around and above the high tide areas among driftwood and stones. Dotterel can be difficult to see in this habitat due to their ability to stand still and blend in.

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.

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 Section

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WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP

- Do not drive vehicles above the high tide mark on beaches
- Avoid walking your dog in areas where dotterel are known to nest
- Obey signs regarding dotterel nesting and do not go inside fenced-off areas

CONSERVATION

The Northern New Zealand dotterel is a threatened species listed as 'At Risk, Recovering'. Once widespread, there is now an estimated population of ~2500 birds left in the whole of New Zealand.

THREATS

- Nests above 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 hawks 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 become busier.

