

The Banded Dotterel



Male banded dotterel in breeding plumage.

This species of dotterel is approximately half the size of the NZ Dotterel, and is only present on our local beaches and harbour during the winter months. Up to 80 banded dotterels have been observed roosting at Whangamata in recent winters, usually alongside flocks of NZ dotterels. Sometimes they gather at the Beach Road wader roost site but often move around to other Whangamata beach and harbour sites.

In their winter plumage they can be easily confused with their larger NZ dotterel cousins, as apart from their significant size difference both species in their winter feathering look very similar. The two species will flock and comfortably roost closely together and have the same characteristic feeding and foraging behaviours. The distinctive black neck band and chestnut coloured breast band of the male banded dotterel is its summer breeding plumage. The females breeding plumage is similar but their coloured bands of breast feathers are not as broad, or as brightly coloured and well defined as the males. In their winter plumage these coloured breast bands almost completely disappear.

During the summer breeding season the population is widespread over many areas of mainland New Zealand and the Chatham Islands. Some live and breed around sandy coasts of both islands, often close to stream and river mouths. The bulk of their populations however are found on the braided gravel riverbeds of Hawkes Bay, Manawatu and Wairarapa in the North Island and Marlborough, Canterbury, Otago and Southland in the South Island. Banding studies undertaken during the years 1984-94 indicated the total population to be in the order of 50,000 birds. About 60% of the population (mainly birds from the South Island high country areas) migrate across the Tasman Sea to spend their winters on the coastal areas of Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria and NSW. This East - West migration pattern is most unusual as most migratory bird movements travel North-South to enjoy the warmer summer temperatures of both hemispheres. Those that live and breed in lowland South Island and central New Zealand rivers mostly move north to spend their



Banded dotterel in winter plumage.

winters in coastal estuaries, harbours and beaches of the North Island. A small number will 'winter' fairly close to their natal territories. Counts of wintering birds undertaken between the years 1984 and 2014 indicated a population decline of approximately 15%. Their current Conservation Status is Protected endemic, at risk, declining. A small population of a sub-species of banded dotterel (at least 730 individuals when last counted in 1989) is also located on the sub-Antarctic Auckland Island group.

Banded dotterel return to their natal breeding areas each year in July to establish their territories. They tend to favour open coastal sand dune and braided river sites but will be found nesting amongst sparsely vegetated sites in a wide variety of other localities, including rocky and pastoral sites. The pairs aggressively defend their territories from any intruding dotterels. Their nests are shallow scrapes in the ground, sometimes lined with small stones and shell fragments. Usually the clutch size is 3 eggs, hatching after 4 weeks incubation which is shared by both parents. The chicks leave the nest within 24 hours of hatching and feed independently, fledging about 5-6 weeks later. Their diet consists mainly of animal matter, primarily insects and other small invertebrates but also the berries of small native shrubs when available. Their predators include feral cats, mustelids (ferrets and stoats), hedgehogs, black-backed gulls and harrier hawks.

*- John Adams, Whangamata Harbour
Care, photos by Bevan Walker*