

## ORIENTAL DOTTEREL IN NORTHLAND

By A. T. EDGAR

An Oriental Dotterel was observed at Paua (Parengarenga Harbour) on 6/3/68 by A. T. Edgar, E. G. Turbott and G. R. Williams, and on 7/3/68 by the same observers plus A. H. Watt. On both days the bird was feeding on a flat paddock of short grass, heavily cropped by stock and dried up as the result of several weeks' drought, and occupied during the period of full tide by large numbers of feeding and resting waders of eleven species. Weather on 6/3/68 was fine with occasional showers and periods of bright sunshine, wind easterly; on 7/3/68 overcast with occasional heavy showers and fresh easterly wind. After a long dry period conditions underfoot were such that it was possible to observe the waders from a car, driven about the paddocks and stopped at intervals as convenient for counting and detailed observation.

When first spotted by E.G.T. the dotterel attracted immediate attention as it fed near scattered Turnstones, Golden Plover, Banded and New Zealand Dotterels, by reason of its erect carriage and most unusual colour pattern; at a range of about 100 yards the impression was that of a brown bird with buffy yellow head and neck, white belly and dark band on lower breast. By manoeuvring the car in a series of legs it was possible to shepherd the dotterel away from its companions and towards the fence line, and to obtain a number of good observations in bright sunlight, at ranges of from 50 to 15 yards, before it flew. On 7/3/68 the dotterel was even more accommodating; shortly after the car entered the paddock it was seen about 80 yards away, and of its own accord fed towards us until about 12 yards from the car; up to this point it showed no sign of alarm or even awareness of our presence. It then displayed some reaction, ran a few yards to one side, and continued to feed till we caused it to fly. This surprising absence of fear reaction gave opportunity for close observation, and our joint notes are summarised below.

Size, somewhere between a Turnstone and a New Zealand Dotterel, but a slimmer, neater bird than either. Large dark eye; bill fairly slender, not noticeably thickened, blackish. Legs long (longer in proportion than those of New Zealand Dotterel), yellow, with a suggestion of darker colour at the joints. Forehead eyebrow and lores white in strong sunlight but tinged buffy when seen at close range. A roughly circular brown patch on the crown; hind neck, sides of face and foreneck buffy, with a brownish patch behind the eye; throat white. Upper breast mingled buff and pinkish rufous, the rufous deepening until replaced on the lower breast by chestnut; below the chestnut a black band, which falls in line with the dark flight feathers of the wing when the bird is at rest. Abdomen and under tail coverts white. Upper surface a smooth brown with narrow paler edges to the feathers. Wings long, wing tips projecting just beyond the tail when at rest; quills blackish, showing as a dark line when the wing is folded; no wing bar was visible in flight. Under surface of the wing not closely observed but in flight appeared to be off-white or slightly greyish. When the bird flew away from us the centre line of the rump was seen to be brown, edges white;

tail brown, with narrow white tips and white outer webs on the outer tail feathers, seen when the bird momentarily fanned its tail when settling after a short flight.

From our notes we concluded that the bird must be an Oriental Dotterel (*C. veredus*) or a Caspian Dotterel (*C. asiaticus*). The possibility of Caspian Dotterel was eliminated because of size; that species is stated to be only about an inch longer than a Banded Dotterel, and our bird was much larger than the Banded Dotterels which ran alongside it. The Large Sand Plover (*C. leschenaulti*) in breeding plumage has no black band on the chest and has black lores. Our conclusion is that the bird we saw was an Oriental Dotterel coming into full breeding dress. The description we were able to assemble from our joint observations tallies closely with that given by Oliver (1955) for the summer dress of this species, except "foreneck and chest chestnut, extending down the sides of the upper breast" and "feet flesh colour." We consider that the buff and pinkish rufous of the upper breast, deepening to chestnut near the black band, indicates that the bird was changing from winter dress to something approaching full summer plumage. Falla, Sibson and Turbott (Field Guide to New Zealand Birds, 1967) describe the legs as dull yellow; Serventy and Whittell (Birds of Western Australia, 1962), brown or dull yellow; Condon and McGill (Field Guide to the Waders, 1965), dull yellow, "flesh," olive, pale brown or light greyish green (variable). The legs of our bird were a clear distinct yellow.

Various accounts describe the Oriental Dotterel as shy and wary, but fortunately our bird displayed no such characteristic. The erect carriage, head held high when not feeding, is a noticeable field character. When feeding, the bird appears to advance one foot, and tilt its body forward so that tail to bill makes a straight line. Our bird fed actively, with short quick runs, apparently on some form of animal food on the grass or on the ground; it was seen to toss aside pieces of dry cowdung, as did other dotterels. Perhaps because the bird was not unduly alarmed we saw only a limited amount of "bobbing," but noted that it bobbed more frequently when close to the car. Full flight was not observed; the bird made only short flights during the period of observation, and then only when we made it fly. The only note heard was a soft single "tsip," twice uttered, as the bird flew from the vicinity of the vehicle. The only aggressive behaviour noted was when the bird made a short run at a Banded Dotterel which approached too close; it took no notice of two New Zealand Dotterels feeding nearby.

Previous records of this species in the New Zealand region have been from Raoul Island, Kermadecs (Oliver, 1955); Ruakaka (possibly) (McKenzie, 1947; 1956); Firth of Thames (McKenzie, 1956), and Paea, Parengarenga Harbour (Sibson and Rutherford, 1956). It is not known whether the bird recorded by Oliver was in breeding or eclipse plumage. The others were birds in non-breeding dress.

#### REFERENCES

- OLIVER, W. R. B., 1955: 2nd edition, New Zealand Birds, Reed, Wellington.  
 MCKENZIE, H. R., 1947: Puzzling Dotterels at Ruakaka, N. Auckland. **New Zealand Bird Notes** 2: 75.  
 MCKENZIE, H. R., 1956: Probable Recent Occurrences of Oriental Dotterel in New Zealand. **Notornis** 7: 25-26.  
 SIBSON, R. B., and RUTHERFORD, V. M., 1956: **Notornis** 7: 26-27.