

BLACK-FRONTED DOTTERELS NESTING NEAR TIMARU

On 13 September 1970 I visited the mouth of the Opihi River, about eight miles north of Timaru. Three unusual dotterels were encountered on a small muddy backwash where they were feeding with Banded Dotterels *Charadrius bicinctus*. The former dotterels caught my attention by a contrasting black and white wing-pattern as they flew a few yards. No binoculars were used, but these birds allowed a close approach which enabled me to identify them as Black-fronted Dotterels *Charadrius melanops*.

Three weeks later, on 4/10/70, I returned to the river and found one adult Black-fronted Dotterel sharing the same backwash with a Banded Dotterel and Wrybill *Anarhynchus frontalis*. Nearby a pair of Black-fronted Dotterels (possibly not the same birds as seen on 13/9/70) were present on a large shingle island in the river. After several minutes a nest containing one egg and two newly-hatched chicks was located. The nest was a shallow depression formed of pebbles, small chips of wood and sheep dung. Both adults appeared unperturbed at the presence of scores of fishermen and whitebaiters along the riverside.

No young birds were seen on 26/10/70. On 20/12/70 a total of eight Black-fronted Dotterels, two of these being juveniles — most probably the chicks of 4 October, were observed on the lower four miles of the Opihi River.

On no occasion was this species seen on the tidal mudflats at the mouth of the river, but fed exclusively on the riverbed, especially in muddy pools of which there was no shortage. Should these dotterels remain on the riverbed there would seem to be adequate suitable habitat to accommodate them.

— RAY PIERCE

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GREY DUCK WITH LARGE BROODS AT SOUTH EAST ISLAND

During a recent trip to the Chatham Islands eight Grey Duck *Anas superciliosa* broods were noted on South East Island (540 acres). Six of these were counted accurately and contained 8, 11, 12, 12, 14 and 17 ducklings less than about one week old when first sighted. The other two broods each contained between 11-14 young of about the same age-group as the above. All were seen during the period 6th-14th November, 1970, during which time the number of ducklings in identifiable broods remained constant. The brood of 17 contained ducklings of a uniform size and was sighted on two occasions — 8th and 10th November.

The broods fed by day and night on wide, rocky, wave-platforms, as freshwater is limited to very small creeks which form brackish puddles on these platforms at low water. Insect life was plentiful in and about these puddles at the time of our visit.

Broods of 14 or more Grey Ducklings are rare on the New Zealand mainland; their more frequent occurrence — and apparently higher survival rate — on South East Island, may be explained by the complete absence of mammalian predators. The only birds of prey present are the Southern Skua *Catharacta lonnbergi* which feeds almost exclusively upon petrels; Black-backed Gull *Larus dominicanus* and 2-3 pairs of Harrier *Circus approximans*, none of which was seen to molest the ducklings.

— K. P. HORGAN