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A NEW BREEDING BIRD FOR NEW ZEALAND: BLACK-FRONTED DOTTERELS IN HAWKES BAY

By NORMAN B. MACKENZIE

This first reported breeding of the Black-fronted Dotterel (*Charadrius melanops*) in New Zealand is presented in brief outline to record its occurrence on at least two Hawkes Bay rivers during the present breeding season.

It is hoped to provide later a further report on the success or otherwise of this season's breeding activities in a newly established colony of these handsome little waders and to furnish further observations on breeding activities and habitat.

The first report of this species in New Zealand was by Brathwaite at the Ahuriri Lagoon, Napier, in 1954 (*Notornis* 6, 146). This was followed by a sighting at Longburn by Andrew (*Notornis* 6, 185), and in Canterbury (Scarlett, *Notornis* 7, 112). In the same year as the sighting and only two days later, a bird was again seen on the Ahuriri Lagoon. This of course points to the strong probability of at least two birds' being in the country at the same time.

There have been no further published reports of this species but in 1958 Mr. D. H. Brathwaite saw three birds at Lake Hurimoana, near Fernhill, about eight miles west of Hastings. Mr. Brathwaite and myself watched this flock throughout the winter months of 1958 by which time it increased to five. The colony then disappeared.

In August, 1961, Mr. Gunn, a farmer at Fernhill, about three miles from Hurimoana, reported some unusual birds on a small marshy area on his farm. I found them very elusive however, as it took several visits before I actually saw two adults on 23/9/61 and identified them as Black-fronted Dotterels. This marsh dried up within a week and the flock again disappeared.

Now that I realised the flock had survived I began a systematic search of the likely areas. While Fernhill evidently is a suitable habitat it is also a difficult area to search, as it abounds in small lakes and marshy areas not to mention the two nearby large river systems of the Ngaruroro and Tutaekuri.

It was not until 11/12/61, while searching the Tutaekuri riverbed that I found two birds, one of which was a juvenile. Further search in this area has disclosed at least six adults and nine juveniles, while on the 2/1/62 a nest containing one egg was discovered. This was found by Mr. K. W. Varney and myself on top of a slight ridge on an extensive open shinglebed, about twenty yards from water. It was lined with small stones about the size of a matchhead together with a few dried grass stems. The nest was discovered as a result of noticing this particular bird displaying in an unusual manner, namely, walking slowly away from us, then squatting down, drooping the wings and spreading the tail so that the white outer feathers were conspicuously showing. The bird was kept occupied by K.W.V. while I retired about

200 yards to set up the telescope and from this position we both watched the bird make its way through the stones, stop, apparently turn an egg with the beak and settle down. This egg was later found to be infertile and has been sent to the Dominion Museum. I am indebted to Dr. R. A. Falla for a description of the egg as follows:—"Ground colour buffy white, closely and fairly uniformly mottled with purplish grey speckles and fine irregular pencilling. Dimensions: 28.83 mm x 21.21."

Juveniles are readily recognizable, being duller in plumage than the adults, and either partially or totally lacking the broad black "Y" marking on the chest which is such a distinguishing feature of the adults.

Further searching in the Ngaruroro river has led to the discovery of seven birds, all adults, only two of which appear to be mated. No young have yet been seen in this area.

The nesting colony has been under constant observation since found, a factor which has only been made possible through the help and assistance of B. D. Hankins and K. W. Varney. We expect by the end of the season to have a much fuller knowledge of the activities of this interesting new resident, although we have learnt the necessity for caution as shown by the following incident.

At what we call the 'Willow' nesting area, short, twice daily observations for ten days, disclosed only the two adults with two fledglings. However, on the 9/1/62 both B. D. Hankins and myself were present for over three hours; and it was not until the last few minutes that we discovered that there were four young. This fact in itself is apparently unusual in that Hindwood and Hoskin (*Emu* 54, 232), Sharland (*Tasmanian Birds*, p. 39) and Serventy and Whittell (*Birds of Western Australia*, p. 149) state that three eggs form a normal clutch.

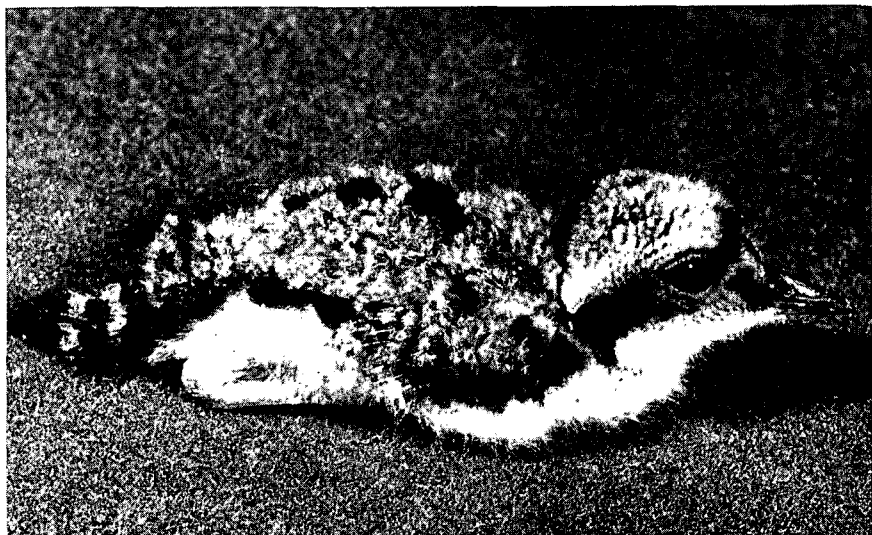
We have so far located 13 adults and 9 juveniles, the latter belonging to three family groups and consider that at least two pairs are nesting again. It seems most likely that more will eventually be found.

HISTORY OF THE NEW ZEALAND LAND BIRD FAUNA

By C. A. FLEMING

The unique avifauna of New Zealand has left few clues to its history in the form of fossils, except for the very young deposits with moa bones, most of which date from the human period, i.e. the last thousand or so years. Speculation on the history of the fauna is thus perforce guided by indirect evidence. Dr. R. A. Falla (1953, *Emu*, 53: 36-46) has given a comprehensive account of the geographic relationships of the New Zealand avifauna, in which the Australian element is dominant. This paper, on much less secure evidence, seeks to explore the time factors in the history of the avifauna.

During the past century some seven species have successfully colonized New Zealand from Australia (Spurwinged Plover, White-faced Heron, Coot, Royal Spoonbill, Grey Teal, Welcome Swallow, Silver-eye).



[Norman MacKenzie

IL (a) — Downy young about a week old and the "length of a cigarette" of Black-fronted Dotterel (*C. melanops*) photographed in Hawkes Bay, January, 1962 (v. page 269).



[James Prickett

(b) — Part of a flock of the now rare Brown Teal (*A. chlorotis*) on a secluded Northland river.