

SHORT NOTE

FOOT-PADDLING BY A NEW ZEALAND DOTTEREL

On 19 March 1984, at Te Matuku Bay, Waiheke Island, I was out on the tidal flats in an area covered by about 20 mm of sea water at low tide. The seasonal flock of New Zealand Dotterels (*Charadrius obscurus*) close at hand numbered 18, and I was looking for the colour-banded birds usually to be seen in this bay.

My attention was drawn to one dotterel as it hunted for food by the method sometimes used by Red-billed Gulls; that is, 'paddling' vigorously with the feet to bring tiny aquatic creatures to the surface. I followed this bird for 10 minutes and saw it use alternate feet as it moved forward. The physical effort was such that its whole body shook during the paddling, and judging by the quick short jabs of the bill, to right or left, food items must have surfaced frequently.

Foot-paddling by New Zealand birds has been considered before (Heather 1977, *Foot-trembling by the Black-fronted Dotterel*, *Notornis* 24: 1-8) and contrasted with foot-trembling, where the foot does not touch the surface, which is a feeding method of the Black-fronted Dotterel (*C. melanops*). I am not aware of any report of either method being used by *C. obscurus*.

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It is worth recording here the several observations of the late Alan Jones of Whitianga (in litt.) of foot movements by New Zealand Dotterels on Buffalo Beach, Whitianga. In December 1974, he watched a bird feeding in loose sand where the top of the beach merged with the foredune. It would stand on one foot, rubbing the other foot sideways over the sand surface with toes roughly parallel to the surface. After about six such passes of about 1 second, it would stand on both feet, watching the sand, and then take up something. In October 1977, he saw single birds on two occasions foot-trembling. One fed in this way for at least 15 minutes on dry sand above high-tide mark. It would tremble for about 5 seconds, stand still a few seconds, and then lunge ahead or to one side, usually picking up small "insects," presumably sandhoppers. Both feet were trembled alternately, so vigorously that foot, leg and half the body would tremble.—Ed.