

PARKSIDE

The beaches at Pencarrow Head and Eastbourne foreshore (Robinsons Bay) are important nesting sites for the nationally threatened tuturiwhatu/banded dotterel. They have the same threatened status as the New Zealand Falcon.

For the past five years, MIRO, Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC), Hutt City Council (HCC) and Taranaki Whanui have been working together to manage these two coastal-breeding populations of the banded dotterel. Management actions include intensive predator control together with protective fencing of nest sites, warning signage and the use of a temporary Rāhui at the Lakes Block to reduce disturbance during the breeding season. The number one threat is predation, most commonly by hedgehogs, with mustelids and possums following close behind. Storm action and then human disturbance are the next reasons for nest failures.

The banded dotterel raise their chicks from August to February. Their nests are little more than depressions in the shingle making them very difficult to spot and are easily crushed by vehicles, by bikes or under foot. Prior to management, these populations were experiencing very low levels of nest success, with only 3% of nests at the Parangarahu Lakes site successfully hatching during the 2011/12 and 2012/13 breeding seasons. Once management was implemented, this nest success rate increased to 20-30% during the last two breeding seasons.

Despite this apparent success, it's not yet clear whether this management is improving the viability of the breeding populations. The reason for this is two-fold. Firstly, it's almost impossible to monitor the survival of banded dotterel chicks between hatching and fledging, as chicks leave the nest immediately after hatching and continue to be relatively mobile through to fledging. Secondly, because the chicks are unbanded, it's also not clear what proportion of these birds subsequently return to Eastbourne as mature adults. Banded dotterels have the one of the most complex migratory and dispersal habits of any New Zealand-breeding bird so it's possible that a large proportion of locally-bred chicks emigrate to unmanaged populations rather than return here.

In order to gain a better understanding of the outcomes of this management, MIRO have obtained permission to combine the existing nest success monitoring work with a project to catch and band a sample of locally-breeding adults and fledglings over the next four breeding seasons (between 2016 and 2020). This will enable us to collect data on the survival rates of chicks between hatching and fledging, survival rates of adult birds, return rates of locally-fledged birds and winter movements of both adults and juveniles. Four seasons of banding and re-sighting work is considered necessary to provide robust estimates of local adult and chick survival, allowing us to average out any annual fluctuations in survival rates. Furthermore, juvenile dotterels begin breeding at 1-2 years of age, so banding juveniles over four seasons will provide us with the opportunity to monitor return rates over 2-3 subsequent breeding seasons, again providing us with a robust return rate, although some annual variation is likely to occur.

So please be very careful when you are on the Eastbourne and Pencarrow Head foreshore areas. MIRO tries to find the nests and fence them as soon as possible on the Eastbourne foreshore so people using the beach don't accidentally disturb these nationally threatened nesting birds. If you do find a nest, or if you are interested in helping, please email info@miro.org.nz.