


FAR-FLYING DOTTEREL

A global tracking effort is helping shed new light on where tūturiwhatu go after nesting on the foreshore of Wellington’s harbour.  **Zoë Brown**

In July 2020, a bold little tūturiwhatu took to the quiet Covid-era skies and embarked on a 2400km flight from Wellington to the pebbled shores of New Caledonia.

Nicknamed “PAP” after its leg tag, the banded dotterel was spotted on a beach in the

Nakutakoin district by

David Ugolini, a keen birdwatcher from the Société Calédonienne d’Ornithologie.

The bird’s precise location was registered online using an application developed by Pasi

Hyvonen, a Finnish Geographic Information Systems (GIS) expert, from the comfort of his home office in Edinburgh.

Pasi is a volunteer for New Zealand-based charity GIS in



Pasi Hyvonen



“PAP” photographed in New Caledonia in July 2020.  David Ugolini

Conservation, an organisation set up by Parker Jones in 2012.

“I feel very privileged to be able to help,” says Pasi. “While I can’t visit New Zealand to assist with the on-the-ground fieldwork, it’s great to be able to help remotely from Scotland.”

Parker recruits volunteer GIS experts from all over the world to help New Zealand conservation groups. They create bespoke mapping software and apps that allow volunteers to monitor trapping, planting, weeding, or bird movements.

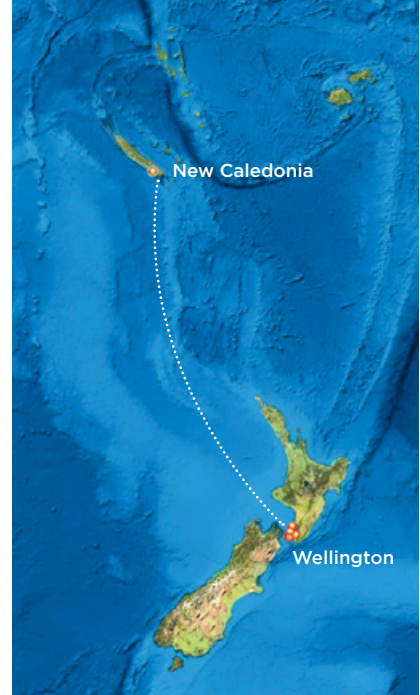
He also volunteers for the Mainland Island Restoration Operation (MIRO), a conservation group dedicated to restoring the forest and lake ecosystems of East Harbour Regional Park, Wellington.

Parker asked Pasi to help with the monitoring of the small tūturiwhatu population that nests there on the Eastbourne foreshore.

Once widespread, habitat disturbance and introduced predators – particularly hedgehogs and cats – mean banded dotterels are now in a state of decline. With no national funding being provided to save the birds, Parker saw the need to step in.

“I thought, what are we doing?” says Parker. “These dotterels have the same endangered species status as the rooroa great-spotted kiwi and whio, but there is no funding for them.”

MIRO applied for a five-year



The tiny tūturiwhatu flew from Wellington to New Caledonia, a distance of 2400km.

permit to catch, band, and monitor the tūturiwhatu. Pasi created an app that allows volunteers to record the dotterels’ nest, chick, and fledgling success. The birds are also banded so they can be tracked on leaving their summer breeding grounds.

“We’ve learned that most chicks stay quite close to the place they were born,” says Parker. “But without us banding these birds, nobody would have known they sometimes fly these long distances.”

In addition, thanks to the monitoring programme and intensive pest-trapping, the dotterels’ nesting success rate has increased from 3% to



Parker Jones

50% in the last five years. Parker and Pasi are keen to see their tūturiwhatu tracking methodology used in other parts of New Zealand as well. The app could also be modified to monitor other bird species.

Parker would love to help Forest & Bird branches with trapping, planting, and weeding projects. You can find out more at gisconservationnz@gmail.com.