

### **A Famous Eastbourne Dotterel!**

We have a feathered vixen in our midst. Over the last five years of our banded dotterel monitoring efforts, we have observed that the birds will pair up with the same partner season after season. They will also protect and nest within 10 metres of the same spot year to year. We know this by mapping each nest location using GPS and identifying the sitting birds by their 3-letter flag a Department of Conservation-approved bander places on their right leg. Over the last 3 years, PAT was partnered with the famous PAP. PAP was our bird whose flag was recorded in New Caledonia last June/July. This is a 2,240 km flight and dotterels do not soar—they have to flap their wings the whole way. PAP flew back to New Zealand in just 4 days, which caused much discussion among New Zealand and New Caledonia birding enthusiasts. So, we expected that PAT and PAP would meet up again this season, but PAT had other ideas. Instead, she flew to the Parangarahu Lakes breeding area, enticed a male dotterel away from his previous partner, and nested with him at the lakes. The nest successfully hatched, but the chicks did not make it to the fledgling stage, so PAT abandoned her lakes male, and flew back to the Eastbourne nesting area. PAP was happy with his new partner, so PAT then enticed another male away from his partner, and their Eastbourne nest just hatched. What will she do next year!

The birds have been much more successful at Eastbourne this year. We had 12 nests of which one was abandoned, one was predated by a domestic cat, nine hatched successfully and one is still active. We have had reports of black backed gulls eating chicks—they are the dotterels' natural predator. Over the last two years, not a single nest hatched chicks due to cat predation of the eggs, so thank you to those of you who kept your cats inside at night during the nesting season. The ERAT and MIRO trapping programmes are keeping the hedgehogs, mustelids and rodents out of the area as shown by our tracking tunnel monitors.

At this point, we estimate we will have at least 3 chicks make it to the fledgling stage, our first in three years at Eastbourne. The dotterels are still in decline losing 2.5% to 3% of their population each year, so their population will halve every 20 years. Our study shows that the chicks do not return to their birth location, so unless work is done on other dotterel nesting sites, our population will not grow. We are currently working with Greater Wellington to expand our management plan all the way to the Orongorongo river mouth, including Baring Head. If you are interested in helping, please email [info@miro.org.nz](mailto:info@miro.org.nz).

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