

Here we go again!

The banded dotterels/tūturiwhatu arrived Eastbourne's Robinson Bay in mid-June this year, but we always wait until the birds show signs of nesting before the temporary signage and fencing is put in place. This way, people and their dogs can enjoy the area for as long as possible without causing any harm to these endangered birds. A big thanks to the Eastbourne scouts (picture attached) who again helped put up the temporary fence and signage in late July. We do leave access ways from the promenade to the foreshore so people can easily access the waterfront, but please do not enter the nesting fenced areas. Should a bird happen to nest in one of these walkways, we will simply move the fence a bit. Over the last 5 years MIRO has GPS'ed the nest locations so we can predict where they will nest each year. Interestingly the birds mostly pair up with the same partner from year-to-year and will nest within 5 to 10 metres of their previous year's nests. You may remember in a Parkside article last year one of our female birds nested at Eastbourne, then nested at Pencarrow Lakes, only to return to Eastbourne to nest again with three different males—go figure! We call her the vixen.

Seasons 2018/19 and 2019/20 were disastrous at Eastbourne with all nests being predated, mostly by domestic cats, whereas at Pencarrow, we took the nest success from 3% to over 56%. We were told by our science advisor that if we had a third unsuccessful year, to abandon the Eastbourne site and concentrate our efforts at Pencarrow. We know that the domestic cat predation of the Eastbourne nests all occurred at night-time. As it is proven that cats can lead a happy life and live longer if kept inside, MIRO and Hutt City decided to mount a "Keep your cats safe" and "Keep the dotterel safe" campaign by using social media and having the Eastbourne Scouts deliver a brochure, giving information about how to keep a cat happy inside at night, to houses within 1km of the nesting area. It worked! In the 2020/21 season, we had 11 nests, of which 9 successfully hatched. One was abandoned and on December 21 2020 a domestic cat scared the female off her nest and proceeded to eat the three eggs. It is sad to see the female bird return and remove her eggshells away from the nest. We posted this to social media to try to get the owner to keep their cat inside at night for the rest of the season.

MIRO has just renewed its high impact permit to continue to protect, monitor and band for another 5 years at Eastbourne and the Parangarahu Lakes and we have now extended the monitoring to include Baring Head. The three sites contain approximately 70 birds, which are considered to be one population group. We make weekly visits to each site to identify individuals, GPS any nest, monitor the success of the nest from hatching to fledgling, and catch and band any unflagged birds. We are told that our work is up to the level of Landcare Research's best practice and our methodology is being used elsewhere to try to save ground nesting birds. If you would like to know more, or become one of our volunteers, please email info@miro.org.nz.

Parker Jones, MIRO