

Dotterel Season

After 170 monitoring trips to the Eastbourne foreshore, Parangarahu Lakes and Baring Head, the 2021-2022 dotterel 6th season of protection, monitoring and banding is ending. As we write this article, around 65 birds from the three locations are gathered at Lake Kohangatera preparing to fly to their wintering sites. Most of our birds go to Lake Wairarapa, Onoke Spit (Southern Wairarapa) and Pauatahanui for the winter season, with the one exception of male dotterel flagged PAP. PAP has now flown to feed at the exact same spot in New Caledonia two years in a row, a flight of 2550 km non-stop. He has also returned to the Eastbourne foreshore to nest with the same female (PEY) in the same spot for the last three years. Unfortunately, PAP and PEY nested 3 times this year and none of their eggs made it to fledgling. One of our Eastbourne hatched birds nested at the southern end of the Wellington Airport. This supports our theory that the birds leave their birthplace to breed elsewhere thereby strengthening their gene pool.

To meet the main objective of our management plan we need to have 1 chick make it to fledgling per 2 nests found. At Eastbourne there were 8 pairs of birds who nested 19 times with only 2 birds fledging—a big failure. At Pencarrow we had 7 pairs of birds who nested 9 times with 4 fledglings—close to target. At Baring Head we had 8 pairs of birds who nested 11 times with 8 fledglings—a big success. The only differences amongst the three areas is that we do not target cats at Eastbourne, and that there was a big surge in stoat numbers at the lakes, with MIRO and GW trappers trapping 35 in 6 weeks. Stoats prefer the open grassland such as that at the lakes. With the fencing, signage and Rahui, we had no human or dog damage at the three nesting sites which used to be the third most common reason for nest failure. The first reason for failure is predation and second is nests being wiped out by southerly storm surges.

MIRO would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those involved in this project including the weekly monitoring volunteers, Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika, Birds New Zealand, Friends of Baring Head, Greater Wellington Regional Council, Hutt City Council, DOC banding office, ERAT trappers, MIRO Lakes trappers, GIS in Conservation, Eastbourne Venturer Scouts, Eastbourne Scouts, Pencarrow Lodge and Hem of Remutaka. We would also like to thank those Eastbourne folks who kept their cats in overnight, the dog walkers who kept out of the Eastbourne fenced nesting areas and the public who did not enter the fenced nesting areas at Baring and Pencarrow while the Rahui was in place.

Attached pictures - PAP in full breeding colours upon returning from New Caledonia June 2021 and a photo taken 9th March 2022 showing post breeding colours before heading back to New Caledonia. Photo credit Geoff de Lisle

Parker Jones, MIRO