



Northern NZ Dotterel

TITANS OF THE TIDELINE

What's their superpower?

Also known as tūturiwhatu, these endemic beach-nesting beauties are masters of disguise. With sand-toned feathers that blend perfectly with their surroundings and their ability to freeze at the slightest hint of danger, they can be almost impossible to spot. They even pick nesting sites that blend in with their colouring, making their eggs and chicks extra hard to find.

Why do we need them?

They're tiny but mighty helpers for our beaches. As they feed, they recycle nutrients that dune plants and wildlife need to thrive. If tūturiwhatu are hatching and raising chicks until they can fly, it's a good sign the coastal environment is working as it should. If their numbers drop, it often means something's gone wrong.

Habitat: Coastal areas around the North Island and some inland areas of cleared land.

Breeding season: August – February

Diet: Small invertebrates, crabs, molluscs, insects and occasionally tiny fish.



Did you know?

They'll go to great lengths to protect their young. One of their trusty tactics is to fake a broken wing by hopping and dragging themselves along the beach to lure predators away from eggs and chicks.

Fascinating facts

Sound spies: Their slightly lopsided ears allow them to hear sound in 3D. While humans have a similar ability, ours is far less precise. While we might hear a jumble of notes when a bird calls, tūturiwhatu hear individual frequencies which help them identify the exact height and direction of a buzz, chirp or hum.

Puff power: Tūturiwhatu, like most bird species, breathe in and out at the same time through their unique lung and air sac system. It's how their bodies get a constant flow of oxygen, which helps them fly long distances without breaks.

One step ahead: After hatching, they leave the nest at just 1 day old to forage for food alongside their parents. This early exit is a survival strategy since their open-beach nests leave them vulnerable to predators.

The great summer mingle: Once breeding season's over, many gather in flocks at their favourite estuaries for the ultimate matchmaking event. Young singles pair up for the first time and older birds who have lost their mates get a second chance at finding their match.

Long lives, short odds: Tūturiwhatu can live for 20–25 years, but many don't make it past their fifth birthday, especially in the wild, thanks to pesky predators.

Conservation corner

Thankfully, there's hope for these tiny treasures. DOC has classified them as *At Risk – Recovering*, putting growing numbers down to predator control and site protection. But they're still at risk from coastal development, introduced predators like cats, stoats, hedgehogs and rats, as well as human and dog disturbance - especially during breeding seasons.

How you can help

- ✓ **Stay out of roped-off areas** around nesting zones, follow signs and stick to local bylaws, especially when it comes to dogs.
- ✓ **Don't approach birds** faking an injury. It's likely trying to lead you away from its nest, so move slowly in the direction it's heading until it flies off.
- ✓ **Keep dogs leashed on beaches**, especially during breeding season.
- ✓ **Don't drive on beaches** and sandspits.
- ✓ **Keep cats indoors** at night.
- ✓ **Support predator control** and habitat restoration, including beach dune restoration and vegetation planting.



IMAGE CREDITS: ADRIAN RIEGEN

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pfwra.org.nz/find-your-people

