

## SHORT NOTE

## Which subspecies of Mongolian dotterel visit New Zealand?

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The Mongolian dotterel (Lesser sand plover, *Charadrius mongolus*) breeds across eastern Asia from the Himalayas to northeast Siberia. The five subspecies form two groups: the *C. m. atifrons* group includes *C. m. atifrons*, *C. m. pamirensis*, and *C. m. schaeferi*, and breeds in central Russia, the Himalayas, and southern and eastern Tibet; the *C. m. mongolus* group comprises *C. m. mongolus*, and *C. m. stegmanni* which breed in eastern inland Russia, Kamchatka, the Commander Islands, and the Chukotsk Peninsula. Members of the *C. m. atifrons* group winter from Africa to India and the Greater Sunda Islands, whereas those of the *C. m. mongolus* group winter between Taiwan and Australia (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Marchant & Higgins 1993). Marchant & Higgins (1993) suggest that *C. m. schaeferi* may occur in northwest Australia. Turbott (1990) stated that it was not known which subspecies visit New Zealand, but Heather & Robertson (1981) state that a bird they saw was "highly likely to have been of the subspecies *C. m. stegmanni*".

On 4 April 1999 and 4 May 1999 I saw single Mongolian dotterels in breeding plumage at Tapora Sand Island in the Kaipara Harbour. On the first occasion a Mongolian dotterel was sitting in glasswort (*Sarcocornia quinqueflora*) at right angles to me and about 20 m away. The bird was aware of my presence and frequently turned its head. I observed it for about 2 min at 20 m using a 20–45X spotting telescope before it flew off with banded dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*), New Zealand dotterel (*C. obscurus*), wrybill (*Anarhynchus frontalis*), and red-necked stint (*Calidris ruficollis*). The Mongolian dotterel had a black mask extending from the base of a black bill across the forehead, lores, and ear coverts. There were

no white patches in its black mask. The crown was very pale chestnut with a pale whitish supercilium stripe. The nape, hindneck, side of neck, foreneck and breast were a deep brick red colour. The band at the upper and lower breast was sharply demarcated from the white of the throat and belly. This band appeared to extend to the upper flanks but my vision was obscured by glasswort. There was no black line dividing the white of the throat and the red of the breast. The back and wings were greyish brown with some white around the edge of the wing feathers. I concluded it was a Mongolian dotterel of the *C. m. "atifrons" group* (Hayman *et al.* 1986). It closely resembled figure 107b, plate 36 of Hayman *et al.* (1986: 109) except that it lacked a darkish line between the white throat and red breast band. Its bright plumage, black mask and brick red breast colour suggests that it was a male (Marchant & Higgins 1993: 864).

On 4 May 1999, Katrina Hansen and I saw another Mongolian dotterel in breeding plumage at the same site. This bird stood 25 m away in glasswort, facing away from us (at about 160°) and into a strong southwest wind. It frequently turned its head which provided clear views of its face, neck, and upper breast. This bird was much duller than the dotterel seen in April. The crown was brownish and the nape, hindneck and side of neck were chestnut rather than brick red. The bird had a thin dark line between the chestnut band and the white throat. The most obvious difference between this bird and that seen in April was the presence of two large white patches separated by a thin vertical black line within the black facial mask. The *C. m. "atifrons" group* have a mainly black facial mask (Marchant & Higgins 1993) whereas the *C. m. "mongolus" group* have white patches of varying size embedded in the black facial mask (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Marchant & Higgins 1993). I concluded that the second bird belonged

to the *C. m. "mongolus group"*. Hayman *et al.* (1986) and Marchant & Higgins (1993) state that females have a brown or rufous facial mask instead of black but may have some black around the eye, and that males have the dark line separating the breast band and throat. As this bird had a dark line on the upper breast and a black facial mask I believe it was a male. Marchant & Higgins (1993) consider that sexual dimorphism is usually marked in *C. m. "atrifrons group"*, but it is apparently less marked in the *C. m. "mongolus group"*.

In Australia, where 20,000 Mongolian dotterel visit annually, Marchant & Higgins (1993) considered the subspecies visiting each area to be "poorly known" and "unresolved". They suggested that *C. m. mongolus* predominates in northwestern Australia and that *C. m. stegmanni* predominates on the east coast of Australia (and presumably New Zealand) and speculate that *C. m. schaeferi* (*C. m. atrifrons* group) may also occur there. Previous records of dotterels in the *C. m. atrifrons* group in breeding plumage in New South Wales (Izzard 1985; McBride 1986) were not accepted by Marchant & Higgins (1993). However, my observations show that birds of both the *C. m. atrifrons* group and the *C. m. mongolus* group visit New Zealand. Further work is required to resolve the taxonomy and the subspecies and groups present in New Zealand (Turbott 1990) and Australia (Marchant & Higgins 1993).

These sightings of different subspecies of Mongolian dotterel have been accepted by the Rare Birds Committee of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (UBR 28/99).

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**Keywords** Mongolian dotterel; *Charadrius m. mongolus*; *Charadrius m. atrifrons*; *Charadrius m. mongolus*; New Zealand

## CORRIGENDA - March 2000 issue

### Rare Bird Committee - Combined report for 1992-1999

**Record 93/04:** Names *Anhinga melanogaster* omitted.

**Record 93/10:** Name should be *Pygoscelis adeliae*, not *P. papua*.

**Record 18/99:** Alternative common name for bridled tern (*Sterna anaethetus*) should be brown-winged tern.