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New Zealand Dotterel (*Charadrius obscurus*) eating plant material

While photographing birds on the shoreline at Taramaire near Miranda (37°11'S 175°20'E), North Island on 28 July 1997, I noticed a few members of a group of New Zealand Dotterels (*Charadrius obscurus*) running up to clusters of southern salt-horn (*Salicornia australis*) and vigorously tugging at them.

Closer observation revealed that the birds were indeed breaking off tips of the salt-horn plants and swallowing them. My attempts of photographing this behaviour mostly failed as the birds were shaking the plants vigorously and nearly all of the slides obtained were blurred.

On checking my notes and earlier photographs, I discovered that I have once before recorded this behaviour, at Miranda, 9 May 1985. On that occasion, 5 or 6 tips were broken off only after considerable struggling; twice the bird dipped the broken segment in brackish water before swallowing it.

New Zealand Dotterels are not known to eat plant material (Hayman *et al.* 1986, Marchant & Higgins 1993), although Banded Dotterels (*Charadrius bicinctus*) are recorded to eat "berries of prostrate plants" (Heather & Robertson 1996), fruit, and seeds in New Zealand, Australia, Tasmania, and the Auckland Islands (Marchant & Higgins 1993,). I cannot recall any other observation of this or other species of shorebirds consuming anything else than live animal food.

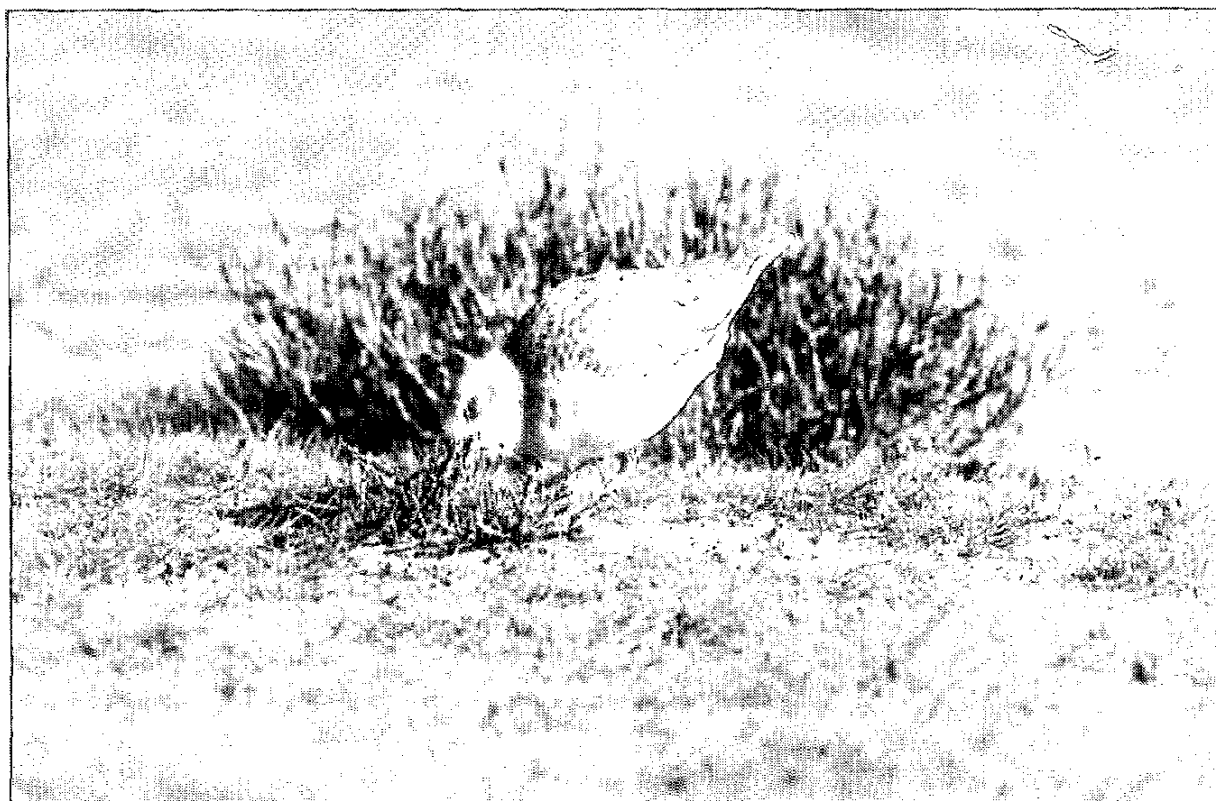


FIGURE 1 - New Zealand Dotterel (*Charadrius obscurus*) feeding on *Salicornia australis* plant tips at Taramaire, North Island.

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