

SHORT NOTE

New Zealand dotterel catches fish

KEVIN PARKER

35 Pine Road, Orewa, Auckland

There have been no detailed studies of foods and feeding habits of the New Zealand dotterel (*Charadrius obscurus*). Most foods taken appear to be live invertebrates (Marchant & Higgins 1993) but New Zealand dotterels have been recorded catching fish. Latham (1979) reported them catching cockabullies (*Forsterygion* sp. cf. *F. varium*) on the harbour flats at Opoutere, Coromandel, at low water, and Habraken (1980) reported a dotterel catching a fish of unknown species. Barlow (1993) reported New Zealand dotterels feeding on small flounders (*Rhombosolea* sp.) stranded at low tide on the mudflats at Paterson Inlet, Stewart Island.

On 21 March 1999, I observed a New Zealand dotterel catch a fish near the Pararaha Stream (37°01'S, 174°29'E), north of Whatipu on the Auckland West Coast. The bird was feeding on a shelf of sand c.1m over which a large swell was breaking, leaving big pools of water.

As I approached the dotterel to check for bands, it darted quite suddenly into one of the pools as if disturbed by my approach. It is usual to be able to get quite close to New Zealand dotterels in this area, so I stopped to observe the bird through my binoculars. The dotterel had seen a small fish trapped in a pool left by a retreating wave. It chased the fish, and quickly caught it, carried the fish away from the pool, and dropped it on to the

sand. It then picked the fish up again, dropped it once more, then picked it up again, before turning it in its bill and swallowing it head first. The fish was about 40 mm long and silvery white. It appeared to be a juvenile yellow-eyed mullet (*Aldrichetta forsteri*).

This observation confirms that New Zealand dotterel will take small fish opportunistically, at least when the latter are stranded by retreating waves or tide. It adds another vertebrate prey species to the diet of New Zealand dotterel.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Tim Lovegrove and John Dowding for their comments on this note.

LITERATURE CITED

- Barlow, M. 1993. New Zealand dotterel: South Island historical notes and Southland coastal records. *Notornis* 40: 15-25.
Habraken, A. 1980. New Zealand dotterel takes fish. *Notornis* 27: 159
Latham, P.C.M. 1979. New Zealand dotterels catching fish. *Notornis* 26: 36.
Marchant, S.; Higgins, P.J. (ed.). 1993. *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand, and Antarctic birds, vol. 2, Raptors to lapwings*. Melbourne, Oxford University Press.

Keywords New Zealand dotterel; *Charadrius obscurus*; diet; foods; prey; fish

Received 8 June 2000; accepted 14 November 2000