

# SHOREBIRD STORIES N.Z. ENDEMIC

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Birds that are found in New Zealand and nowhere else in the world are called **endemics**.

Island groups like New Zealand have lots of endemic species. Sadly this goes hand in hand with them being either **at risk** of extinction or actually **extinct**. This is very true for New Zealand. **All of our endemic shorebirds are at risk.**

## Our shorebirds can be put into two different groups:

**1 Gulls and terns** live and breed on the shore but they get a lot of their food from the sea. These birds often float and swim on water and their webbed feet help them to do this.

They have young that stay in the nest for some time. They need to be fed by their parents. They can't get their own food because they can't fly to where it is found, the sea. They still get food from their parents when they have **fledged**, that is, grown their flight feathers so they can fly. They breed in colonies which makes them an easy target for mammalian predators.

## N.Z. endemic species are:

Black-billed gull, **NATIONALLY CRITICAL**



Red-billed gull, **NATIONALLY VULNERABLE**



White-fronted tern, **AT RISK**



Also the **Black-fronted tern**, **NATIONALLY ENDANGERED** .

Our rarest tern, the **fairy tern** is **NATIONALLY CRITICAL** but is not endemic as it also breeds in Australia and New Caledonia. There are only 40 individuals left and they belong to a sub-species that is only found in N.Z. **This is New Zealand's rarest breeding bird.**

The **white tern** is also not endemic because it breeds across both the Pacific and Indian Oceans. It's only home in New Zealand is on the Kermadec Islands. **NATIONALLY CRITICAL**

**2 Those shorebirds that don't have webbed feet** are also known as **waders**. They seldom swim, although they can for a short time. These young variable oystercatchers aren't **fledged** just yet. They cannot fly and so must swim away from a land predator.



When the young of all of these birds hatch they are immediately able to walk and find their own food.

Oystercatchers are a little different. Young birds are taught by their parents just how to find shellfish and get the food out of the shell.

However all waders need the warmth and protection of their parents until they are fledged.

## N.Z. endemic species are:

South Island pied oystercatcher **AT RISK**





Variable oystercatcher **RECOVERING**



Chatham Island oystercatcher **NATIONALLY CRITICAL**

Black stilt, **NATIONALLY CRITICAL**



Keith Woodley watercolour

**Southern N.Z. dotterel , NATIONALLY CRITICAL**

**and Northern N.Z. dotterel , NATIONALLY VULNERABLE**





Banded dotterel **NATIONALLY VULNERABLE**



**Wrybill** **NATIONALLY VULNERABLE**



**N.Z. shore plover.** **NATIONALLY CRITICAL**





Image, Adrian Reigen.

## **THERE IS ONLY ONE SPECIES PICTURED OR MENTIONED ABOVE THAT IS NOT AT RISK**

Six of these species and one sub-species are **CONSERVATION DEPENDENT**. Without human help their **numbers would decrease over time. Eventually they would become extinct.**

**The Northern New Zealand dotterel** is a good example.

Intensive predator control during the breeding season has allowed this species to continue to breed on the mainland beaches. West coast communities in the N.I. produced this sign about their conservation efforts and similar activities occur on other breeding beaches elsewhere.



## New Zealand dotterel ...a bird on the brink

Once this small wading bird was found all around our coastline and inland on the plains, foothills and mountain ranges of the South Island.

Today these are the only places where it has survived. All of these populations are threatened, none more so than the one here on the west coast of the North Island where only 30 birds remain.



**TRUE TO THEIR ROOTS**  
New Zealand dotterels are very faithful birds:

- They may travel around the coast a little in winter but they always return to the same area where they were born to breed.
- They are very territorial during the breeding season and will try very hard to keep intruders away from their nests – rushing at them noisily or acting as if injured to draw them away.

**Colouring:**  
Males have a distinctive chestnut-coloured chest and underparts in the breeding season which reverts to pale in autumn.

**Nest:** Just a scrape in the sand.  
**Eggs:** Normally laid three at a time.

The New Zealand dotterel is the **largest dotterel** in the world!

**A BIRD AT RISK**

- In the North Island some people's **beach behaviour** is a problem – driving, walking and letting dogs run free through nesting areas.
- ✓ **Predation**, mostly by cats, stoats and hedgehogs, is another significant threat. Male birds do most of the night-time incubation and are more at risk.
- Habitat loss and damage caused by **development** has destroyed many dotterel breeding areas.
- ✓ **Storms & coastal erosion** also cause some dotterel nests to fail.

The other conservation dependent species are the **fairy tern**,

# Kiteboarders

## Your assistance please!



- The Sandspit is a Wildlife Refuge.
- It is the home to the critically endangered NZ Fairy Terns. There are only 40 of these birds left in the world and they nest here during October to February.
- No kites are permitted on the Sandspit at any time. Aerial disturbance can scare birds from their nests.
- Please keep clear of the spit during the nesting period.
- Nesting sites identified on map.



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THE NEW ZEALAND  
**FAIRY TERN**  
CHARITABLE TRUST

the white tern, Chatham Is. oystercatcher, black stilt and the N.Z. shore plover.

A positive outcome is not certain for all of these species.

For other species like the **black-billed gull**, which has the highest threat ranking, no effective plan is in place. **It is the most endangered gull in the world.**

Colonies do not always breed in the same location each year which makes protecting them even more difficult. Over the past thirty years there has been a 75% reduction in the population countrywide. Few new birds are coming into the population. This species is **one step away from extinction.**

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Certainly the braided river nesting endemics do have a huge range of problems.

- They lack mammalian predator awareness
- Colony nesting is like a takeaway bar for predators with a choice of eggs, nestlings and even adults.
- Braided rivers are used as highways for four wheel drive vehicles. Often colonies are intentionally.
- Water extraction for irrigation reduces river flow and gives easier access for predators to breeding areas.
- Increased weed growth due to controlled river flows destroys their bare shingle nesting habitats while, at the same time providing better cover for mammalian predators.

Saving these birds is going to be a costly  
challenge!

### ARE ANY SHOREBIRDS DOING WELL IN NEW ZEALAND?

The answer is yes, but none of them are endemic.

The **black-backed gull** is doing particularly well. It is a significant predator feeding on the eggs and chicks of endemic birds. As a scavenger It has **gained new habitat** on landfill areas around our towns and cities.





There have also been some fairly recent new arrivals from Australia. The **spur-winged plover** is also doing particularly well and has built up a big population.



Even more recently arrived and also very predator wary is the **black-fronted dotterel**. Its numbers are growing slowly but it is not country wide as yet.



**Nice to see “new” birds but better to keep our own!**