

Students 'join the dots' to save rare birds

After making a surprise appearance last spring, some of New Zealand's most endangered birds are again preparing to nest on the Waiheke High School field.

Dotterels are facing extinction and, with fewer than 2000 left in New Zealand, they are protected under law, making it illegal to disturb them. Last year, thanks to the efforts of individuals from Native Bird Rescue, Forest and Bird and the high school, the dotterel were able to hatch two of their three eggs on the field successfully.

This year, up to six dotterels have been sighted on the school grounds and a team of students have formed the Wildlife Protection Group to monitor them.

"We're calling this project 'Join the Dots'," says group spokesperson and year 10 student Melina Taylor.

"We have been meeting with Hue Ross of Forest and Bird and Karen Saunders of Native Bird Rescue to learn about how best to protect and care for the birds."

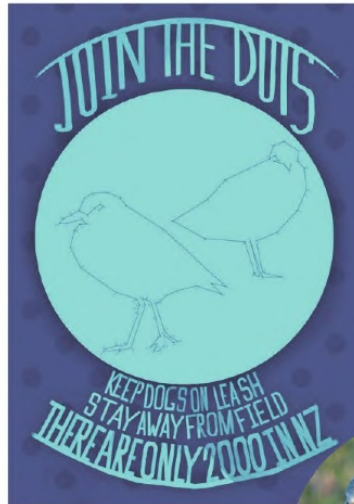
The students are all passionately invested in the project, spending between one and three hours each week during their lunch hour, meeting to discuss predator control strategies and ways to bring awareness to the plight of the dotterel and other endangered birds.

"We want exposure and support and to let everyone know that we as students are taking on the project of protecting the nesting dotterels," says Melina.

After creating a voting document, which was emailed to all high school students, 40 name suggestions were submitted for the dotterel.

"We are naming the six dotterels that have been sighted," says wildlife protection group member Ella Singh.

"This will help more people to become familiar with the birds and to work together to ensure they're able to nest here safely."



Waiheke High School year 11 student Francis Ryder designed the project logo above for the Wildlife Protection Group. They are working to protect a group of endangered dotterels on the school's grounds. My Eye Photography



the dotterel can successfully hatch their young. Ella says people who walk in the area need to ensure their dogs behave and are on a leash on at all times.

"Dogs should be kept at least 100 metres away from the dotterels. People also need to be aware of food scraps and how they dispose of them as they attract rats and stoats, which also prey on eggs and chicks."

Dotterels typically nest in open sites, on low-lying sand or gravel banks and sandbars close to beaches and lagoons. According to the Department of Conservation, their nests are often made just above the high tide mark and are easily lost to storms and very high spring tides.

The chosen location on the high school is rare and it likely has to do with natural habitat loss due to coastal development in other areas.

To help in their quest to combat the multitude of threats to the rare birds, the students have recruited several Waiheke individuals and groups.

"The Waiheke Local Board, our teachers and principal, Forest and Bird, Te Korowai o Waiheke and Native Bird Rescue have given us so much support," says Ella.

"Currently we're looking for help with poster printing and equipment, for the construction of eight signs, as well as waratahs to fence off the nesting area."

Anyone interested in supporting the dotterel by becoming a nest monitor or supplying equipment can contact Karen Saunders at karen@nativebirdrescue.nz • Sophie Boladeras

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