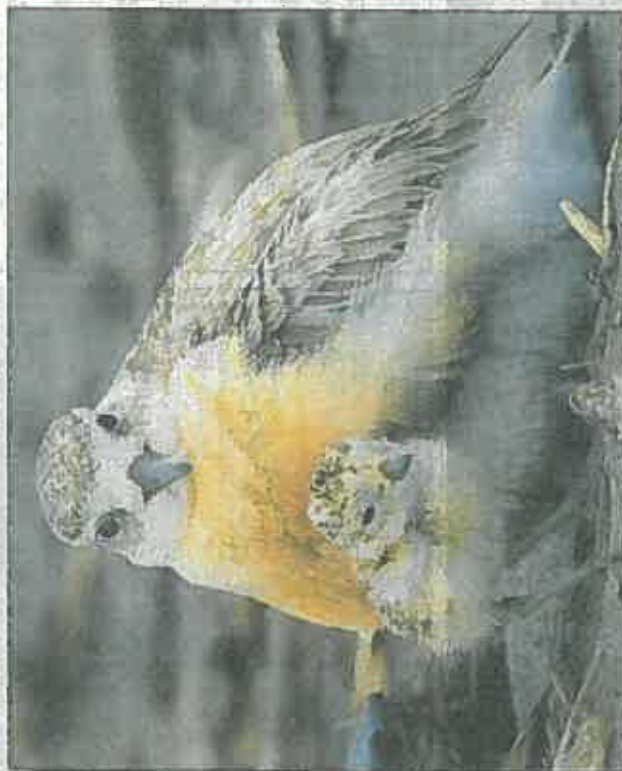


Dotterels raising a family at estuary



Two New Zealand dotterel chicks, closely guarded by their parents, have hatched at Walkanae Estuary for the first recorded time.

Department of Conservation has placed signs near the nest asking people to keep well away and keep dogs on a lead.

Rangers will be checking on the nest periodically and working with local volunteers to monitor how the birds are doing.

It's not new for the birds the visit the estuary but this is the first known successful breeding attempt.

In 2016 the threat status of northern New Zealand dotterel

A New Zealand dotterel chick at Walkanae estuary.

PHOTO/GAVIN/KLEE

improved slightly from 'threatened' — nationally vulnerable' to 'at risk — recovering'.

DoC biodiversity ranger Dave Allen said the species were mainly at risk from disturbance by people, vehicles and dogs, as well as predation from hedgehogs, stoats, cats and rats.

"Trapping of rats, mice, mustelids and hedgehogs in the area is carried out by three volunteers from Walkanae Estuary Care Group.

"The care group's dedication will help keep these little guys safe from predators.

"But everyone in the area can help out by giving them plenty of space, keeping dogs well away, and observing the legal requirement not to drive in the scientific reserve.

He said the chicks' hatching was good news as a female

dotterel was found dead at the estuary last week.

"Since then the chicks have been observed along with two adults.

"It is assumed the dead bird was a non-breeding female.

"There were no signs of obvious injury and the bird's body has been sent to Massey University's Wildlife for necropsy."

A pair were seen in a similar location at the estuary last summer where six eggs were laid in a nest.

"This was many more than a usual fertile nest and no eggs hatched.

"It was assumed these were young birds — perhaps two females — practicing for the real thing."

Birds also laid six eggs in a nest there in 2014 with the same result.