

**LARGE FLOCK OF INLAND DOTTEREL NEAR PORT WAKEFIELD.** Hayman *et al.* (1986) describe the Inland Dotterel as "...a peculiar plover of Australian sub-deserts" and assign it to the monotypic genus *Peltohyas*. Their entry under this species is very short and this illustrates how little is known about it. More recently Marchant and Higgins (1993) and Christidis and Boles (1994) merged *Peltohyas* into the much larger genus *Charadrius*, this change being based on biochemical studies by Christian *et al.* (1992). Marchant and Higgins (1993) illustrate how little we know about this species, despite it being an Australian mainland endemic, with comments such as: *Movements* "Very poorly known"; *Social Organization* "Not well known"; and *Voice* "Not well known".

The species is not common in the Adelaide region, as illustrated by the two SAOA Atlases (SAOA, 1977 and Paton *et al.* 1994). During each of these surveys, 21 months in 1974/75 and 24 months in 1984/85, the species was recorded on only four occasions. This sparsity of records may be seen as an indication of the bird's general occurrence in the area, since 1974/75 was a very wet period and 1984/85 a relatively dry period and the Inland Dotterel *Charadrius australis* is known to be nomadic. It is therefore of interest that a large flock was present in the Pt Wakefield area (34°11'S, 138°09'E) from at least 14 January 1995 until at least March 1995. The bird is gregarious, but a study by Maclean (1976) of a large number of flocks in western N.S.W. recorded a mean flock size of 13 and median of 5-6. Thus a flock of at least 32 near Pt Wakefield on 19 January can be seen as large, though Marchant and Higgins (1993) report occasional flocks of hundreds.

The birds were first located on 14 January by the authors on a hot but cloudy and thundery day in open paddocks about 10 km due north of Pt Wakefield. The area is well known for Australian Pratincole *Stiltia isabellae* and in fact we were looking for this species when we located 10 Inland Dotterel at about 300 m using telescopes. The birds were in an open paddock with very sparse vegetation, a maximum of 10 cm high. Banded Plover *Vanellus tricolor* were present in large numbers and two Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus* were also present. The next day only six Dotterel were observed at the same spot, but the area of suitable habitat was large and the birds behave very cryptically especially in hot weather and during daylight hours. Most

texts refer to their semi-nocturnal behaviour and during the heat of the day they tend to squat in small depressions, some of which are of their own making. On 19 January, there were at least 32 birds including at least two juveniles. Various sized groups were subsequently seen in the area and the last sighting by one of the authors was on 3 March 1995, when at least six birds were present.

Thus a substantial number of this nomadic and essentially inland bird were present near Pt Wakefield for at least seven weeks. Most of the observations were in daylight hours and during warm to hot weather, and the birds were inactive. Little active feeding was observed and no calls were heard. While these observations are in no sense an extension of range, the size of the flock, its persistence and its southerly location are of interest. Marchant and Higgins (1993) state that the species breeds at almost any time of year but usually after rain and this is consistent with its inland distribution and its vagile nature. One of the authors saw three adults and a chick just N of Farina (30°04'S, 138°17'E) on the Marree road on 5 April 1997. Heavy rain had fallen in the area in February. The Bureau of Meteorology kindly provided rainfall figures. Marree and Farina received 14 and 23 mm respectively in January, and 124 and 123 mm in February. Post-breeding flocks are known to wander and the presence of juveniles near Port Wakefield probably indicates that this was such a post-breeding flock. Breeding dates cluster in the late winter and early spring and there had been heavy rain in the interior in 1994.

## REFERENCES

- Christian, P. D. *et al.* 1992. *Australian Journal of Zoology*, 40, 225-33.  
 Christidis, L. and Boles, W. E., 1994. *The taxonomy and species of birds of Australia and its Territories*. RAOU, Melbourne.  
 Hayman, P., *et al.* 1986. *Shorebirds*. Croom Helm, London.  
 Marchant, S. and Higgins, P. J. (eds). 1993. *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*, Vol. 2. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.  
 MacLean, G. L. 1976. A Field Study of the Australian Dotterel. *Emu*, 76, 207-15.  
 Paton, D. C., Carpenter, G. and Sinclair, R. G. 1994. A second bird atlas of the Adelaide region. Parts 1 and 2. *South Australian Ornithologist*, 31(7) and 31(8).  
 SAOA. 1977. *A bird atlas of the Adelaide region*. SAOA, Adelaide.

*John Hatch: 100 Fifth Ave, Joslin, S.A. 5070*  
*Colin Rogers: 2 Muscatel Ave, Wattle Park, S.A. 5066*

Received: 7 July 1997