

tiveness closely and, at the same time, taking small blood samples from a few birds so that genetic tests can be made. These will allow us to check for differences between the Stewart Island and North Island populations.

Earlier this year, a memo on management priorities emerged from the Protected Species Policy Division of DoC, recommending that certain listed species "are candidates for reduced level of activity". In effect, this suggested that DoC conservancies around the country spend less time and money on them. The New Zealand dotterel is on that list. Presumably because the department is short of money, the whole species is now designated as one of conservation's second-class citizens. Already, DoC has stopped the direct funding for the full-time warden at Opoutere this coming season (see page 12) as a direct result of this reduced status.

To those of us involved in trying to help the New Zealand dotterel, this is a particularly ill-timed blow. Just as the species is starting to get some of the belated public attention it deserves, just as the draft recovery plan is completed, the rug is pulled from under our feet. In spite of the critical situation on Stewart Island, the Protected Species list makes no dis-

inction between northern and southern populations, although the approval for the cat-control programme suggests that the priority of the southern birds may now be under review.

The New Zealand dotterel may be endemic, threatened and declining. It may be down to less than 1,500 individuals, with one of its two populations critically endangered, but all this is no longer enough — there are too many species in the same boat. DoC simply does not have the financial resources to act. Currently, New Zealand prides itself on being a world leader in threatened-species conservation, but its hard-earned reputation in this field will not last long under these conditions.

This lack of money means that the dotterel, like other species, will probably have to rely heavily in the longer term on sponsorship, volunteers and public involvement for its conservation. How can we raise the New Zealand dotterel's public profile? It's not easy. In most people's eyes, a small brown shorebird simply can't compete with media stars like the yellow-eyed penguin, in spite of the fact that there are nearly five times as many of the penguins.

Those who know the New Zealand dotterel find it a fascinating, attractive and

endearing animal. The sad fact is that like much of our endemic fauna it is ill-adapted to cope with today's problems — the predators, disturbance and habitat destruction; this is hardly its own fault of course, but it does need our help to survive. I believe it would be reprehensible and tragic if these distinctive Stewart Island birds were allowed to become extinct without a determined effort being made to save them.

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He has been studying New Zealand dotterels in the North Island for six years and recently wrote the draft species recovery plan for DoC.



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