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SHORT NOTE

NEW ZEALAND DOTTERELS CATCHING FISH

On a visit to Opoutere, eastern Coromandel Peninsula, on 6 February 1978, I spent some time watching a group of New Zealand Dotterels (*Charadrius obscurus*) feeding on the harbour flats at low tide. My interest quickened when I saw one of them flip over an empty shell with a sideways flick of its bill. After examining the spot thus bared and finding nothing of interest, the bird moved on to another shell where it stopped, cocked its head and seemed to listen intently. The shell was then flipped over in the same way as before, this time revealing a small 'cockabully' (*Forsterygion sp. varium?*). These little fish commonly spend low tide 'high and dry' below the single valves, concave side down, of such molluscan species as the Pipi (*Paphies australis*), Common Cockle (*Chione stutchburyi*) and the Wedge Shell (*Tellina liliana*).

The dotterel made a quick stab at the fish, then stepped back smartly as though afraid of it as it leaped about. After a short wait the bird stabbed again, then twice more. The fish was then taken in the bill and battered on the ground a few times before being swallowed whole, head first.

During the hour or so that I watched this bird it fed almost entirely in this way, catching and eating four fish. Three more of the twelve New Zealand Dotterels present were seen to catch fish in the same manner.

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