

An Observation of Aggression Between a Hooded Plover and a Black-fronted Dotterel

In December 1997, I was making a regular check of the territory of a pair of Hooded Plovers *Thinornis rubricollis* near Apollo Bay, Victoria, on a spit at the mouth of a river, where I located two adults and a nest containing two eggs. I retreated from the territory to make observations, with binoculars, from a nearby vantage-point. I was surprised to see a Black-fronted Dotterel *Elseyornis melanops* feeding on the spit along the edge of the river. Black-fronted Dotterels occasionally occur on the coast, typically in sheltered areas (Schulz & Kristensen 1990), though there is one record of a single bird on a beach heavily washed by waves (Peter & Weston 1997). Nevertheless, in eastern Australia, Black-fronted Dotterels are rare in Hooded Plover habitat, and despite several years of intensive field-work studying Hooded Plovers, this is the only occasion I have seen a Black-fronted Dotterel and Hooded Plovers in reasonably close proximity.

As the Dotterel worked its way along the river, it moved closer to the nest of the Plovers. One of the Plovers then began moving slowly towards the Dotterel as it approached, walking from the nest area towards the river. As it neared the Dotterel, the Plover began walking more quickly, and then ran at the Dotterel. The Dotterel briefly looked at the Plover and immediately began moving away. Both birds were then in the shallows of the river, and the Dotterel ran away from the Plover before taking flight and landing further along the river bank. The Hooded Plover then stood, head-bobbing, for over five minutes while the Black-fronted Dotterel stood about 15 m away, apparently watching. This behaviour continued until a group of walkers moved through the area, disturbing the birds, and causing them to move away from each other.

Although such interactions between these species appear very rare in eastern Australia, they may occur more commonly in southern Western Australia, where both Black-fronted Dotterels and Hooded Plovers occur away from the coast. Black-fronted Dotterels are recorded at inundated claypans (Marchant & Higgins 1993), a habitat where Hooded Plovers have also been seen in Western Australia (pers. obs.), and Black-fronted Dotterels sometimes also occur around highly saline water (Marchant & Higgins 1993), a common feature of the habitat of western populations of Hooded Plovers. Regular surveys between 1981 and 1985 showed that both species occur at the same salt-lakes in Western Australia, such as Lake Warden, near Esperance (see Jaensch et al. 1988), and thus may come into contact with each other.

Marchant & Higgins (1993) summarised the interspecific aggressive behaviour of the Hooded Plover. They noted that aggression has been directed at species of waders including Red-capped *Charadrius ruficapillus* and Double-banded Plovers *C. bicinctus*, Pied Oystercatchers *Haematopus longirostris*, Red-necked Stints *Calidris ruficollis*, Bar-tailed Godwits *Limosa lapponica* and Common Greenshanks *Tringa nebularia*. However, there does not appear to be any record of aggression towards Black-fronted Dotterels. Besides waders, Hooded Plover aggression has been seen to be directed at other non-passerines such as Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae* and even the much larger Pacific Gull *L. pacificus* (M.A. Weston unpubl. data). In addition, passerines such as Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* and White-fronted Chats *Epthianura albifrons* are occasionally attacked by Hooded Plovers when they are close to nests, false-nest scrapes or chicks (M.A. Weston unpubl. data).

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References

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