



WADER GURU



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Female Eurasian Dotterel incubating © Vojtěch Kubelka



Female Eurasian Dotterel © Ian Davies

The short answer is yes; they do.

Background: Eurasian Dotterels exhibit unusual plumage and behavioural differences to most bird species. The female birds are brighter and more colourful, usually the preserve of the males.

For more northerly breeding populations pairing starts before the birds reach their breeding grounds. In this case they will select flat areas where they gather, usually near water. Southern breeding pairs will reach their breeding grounds before they are paired, and it may be several days after arrival before the rituals begin.

Pairs are formed from 'trips' (the collective noun for a group of Dotterels). It is usual for the female to initiate proceedings. This is manifested in the frequent raising and re-folding of both wings, or maybe stretching a single wing whilst spreading the tail simultaneously, as she pursues a male that she is trying to separate from the trip. Sometimes the male will respond by raising his wings too.

Males have also been seen to strut around the females raising their wings so that they meet above their backs.

If a female is having difficulty with separating her chosen male, she will draw attention to herself by running away from the trip and then squatting down as though she were brooding, presumably in the hope that a male

will be encouraged by her desire to breed. If she is unsuccessful in attracting attention the first time she will repeat the process, returning to the trip raising her wings and running off once again.

If during this ritual the male flies away, the female, if she is serious, will pursue him and together they may then do a display flight, flying fast with synchronised twists and turns, crossing each other. Alternatively, they may fly with slow deliberate wing beats instead. Sometimes the male will follow the female with these slower wingbeats dangling his legs underneath him. As pair bond grows, males sometimes take the initiative and chase females.

If it is the case that there are few other Dotterels in the vicinity, either early in the season or perhaps the habitat is not optimal, when no trip exists from which to select a mate, a female may establish a 'display centre' from which she will launch song flights. Here she flies with shallow, shivering wings, a habit known as winnow-gliding. At times this flight will be level and at others it may be undulating, either way it follows a circular, elliptical or straight path over a wide area. These different flights are carried out between 30 and 100 m from the ground. Throughout the flight the female gives a series of peeping calls. If she is fortunate enough to attract a male then the chasing flight described above may ensue.

After incubation, by the male, commences, the female sometimes starts song flights again to seek new males with whom she can breed. Interestingly a female ringed in Scotland was also found breeding with a different male in Scandinavia the same season taking advantage of two breeding time frames at different locations. Visit the [Wader Guru webpage](#).

Bibliography:

Nethersole-Thompson, Desmond; *The Dotterel* (1973)

Cramp, Stanley, Simmons, K. E. L. (Eds.); *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle-East and North Africa* Vol III (1983)



Part of a small trip of Eurasian Dotterels © Elis Simpson



Male Eurasian Dotterel incubating © Vojtěch Kubelka



Male Eurasian Dotterels © Elis Simpson