

NOTES ON BANDING SPUR-WINGED PLOVERS.

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The Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*) is a common and conspicuous bird in Tasmania, particularly in the dairy farm districts. Provided one has the opportunity and time to traverse suitable areas, it is comparatively easy to band fair numbers of chicks during August, September and October. The Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*) is not uncommon around Launceston, and inhabits the same general cleared districts as the Spur-winged Plover, but prefers drier paddocks. Some 328 Spur-winged Plover chicks and 62 Banded Plover chicks have been banded during the past two seasons, mostly around Launceston.

The best banding period (weather permitting) is from mid-September to early October. During August and September many chicks sighted are not banded as they share paddocks with young lambs etc. This year the first chicks (4 families) were seen on 29th July, in the Lilydale area. However, almost fully grown chicks seen near Devonport on 21st August must have been hatched in early July. Last eggs found were on 10th November. Comparatively few chicks are seen after late October.

During the past season the number of chicks sighted in each family group was noted, and when banding, the ages of the chicks are estimated. Comparison of the average size of egg clutches (84 eggs in 27 clutches) with the average size of families of chicks estimated to be older than 4 weeks (59 chicks in 28 families) indicates that there is heavy mortality of chicks. The samples are too small to be reliable, and some allowance has to be made for egg loss and infertility, and also for families wiped out altogether. Spring ploughing is a not uncommon cause of the latter. However, indications are that there is a mortality of perhaps 50% of the chicks before they reach the flying stage.

The Spur-winged Plover's aggressive defence of young is well known. In two seasons I have banded chicks from about 170 families, and in most cases have been attacked by the adults. Only two birds have actually hit me. Near Perth on September 15th 1962, I was hit five times on the head and shoulders by the wing of one particular bird. At Port Arthur on November 3rd, 1962, I was hit solidly on the rump by an adult. So far the spur has not connected.

To date there have been two recoveries of dead birds, each within one to two miles of the place of banding.

During the autumn and winter, Spur-winged Plovers often congregate in large flocks, and I have seen several flocks of almost 1,000 birds near Longford. At one time I contemplated attempting to mist net these. However, one taken in a mist net in our back yard made such an indescribable amount of noise, that I abandoned the idea in the cause of public relations. Surprisingly, a second bird netted later did not call at all.

The following notes may assist banders visiting Tasmania in the spring who are interested in banding plover chicks. Gumboots are most useful, as most fields are waterlogged. Sighting is best done from a car, and more chicks are found if spotters are available to help. Many adults with chicks pay little attention to a car, but will quickly freeze the chicks as soon as you alight. With experience it is possible to quickly decide from the actions of the adults whether or not chicks are likely to be present. If adults continue to feed without giving alarm as the car stops, it is unlikely that chicks are present. Plover giving alarm as the car slows down should always be investigated. Chicks are usually near the adults, but are occasionally up to about 50 feet away (particularly with larger chicks), and the chicks may be on the other side of the road or across a hedge from the adults. Unless the precise positions of the chicks (or chick) are known, I drop a piece of white cloth as near as can be judged to the hiding place of each chick before making any search for them. This prevents misorientation in a featureless field and gives a much higher percentage of "finds", particularly when banding without the assistance of spotters. Naturally not all chicks are found (or can be caught in the case of large chicks). Including a few previously banded birds, my notes indicate that I found some 329 of 388 chicks sighted, but this would exclude a few cases when no chicks were found. Chicks which cannot be located by search can usually be relocated by driving the car perhaps 100 yards, and returning and waiting 5 or 10 minutes to allow the missing chick to move about again. Except under particularly good conditions, I find it seldom worth while to attempt to locate chicks sighted more than about 100 yards from the road, and even at 50 yards, many chicks are not found, particularly in the absence of a spotter. The main cause of non-location of chicks is the distraction caused by climbing through the paddock fences. Adults standing with feathers fluffed out should always be inspected, as they are probably sheltering chicks. Running down chicks that are almost full grown is a sport all of its own, particularly in waterlogged fields.