

SPUR-WINGED PLOVER SURVEY

Peter Allan, Victorian Ornithological Research Group.

The notes on banding of Spur-winged Plovers (Lobibyx novae-hollandiae) by John Liddy were of considerable interest to many Victorian banders, in particular to those who have worked on a survey of the species in Southern Victoria, principally on Phillip Island. Briefly, the two main aims of the Victorian survey are:

- (i) to trace patterns of movements by the species by means of colour-banding and numbered bands;
- (ii) to study in more detail the general life history of the birds in the Phillip Island area.

The primary reason for introducing colour-banding was the general scarcity of recoveries obtained to date. This is probably occasioned by several factors. No satisfactory method of retrapping the birds except in their breeding area has been developed, although I believe that mist netting could be successful in some areas. The bird is not subject to noticeable large scale mortality in certain locations or seasons as is the case with some species of seabirds and duck.

However, as a runner the bird can be caught and banded in considerable numbers. The bird is fairly conspicuous, easily recognised and also appears to thrive in populated areas. It was thus considered that marked birds could be seen by observers particularly if publicity was given to the scheme.

The scheme has accordingly been developed on these lines, and at present banding is in progress with three colours in three separate areas in Victoria. In the last two seasons approximately 150 plovers on Phillip Island have been banded with dark blue rings. Several birds banded in the first season were seen the following year, but to date only on the Island. In 1962 colour-banding was extended to the Geelong-Colac area, including the Bellarine Peninsula, and to the western area centered around Port Fairy to Casterton. Totals of 30 birds were recorded for both districts in spite of interruptions due to illness of some of those taking part. All plovers in the three areas mentioned are banded with a colour band on the left leg, and a C.S.I.R.O. band on the right. Anyone interested in colour banding in these areas is invited to contact me for further information.

One feature of Liddy's article was his detailed explanation of catching young plovers by car. This is very similar to the methods evolved independently on Phillip Island. The ultimate system which had been developed by the end of the 1962 season involved four operators using a Holden station sedan. One member acted as driver and spotter, another sat beside him as

director and recorder, and the other members stood on the lowered tailboard, where by their additional height, they could see into paddocks hidden to others by low tea tree and roadside gorse bushes. Young birds up to 250 yards from the road were located and caught. Large nest traps could be easily handled and positioned by the group.

Liddy does not mention the catching of adult plovers using nest traps. We have found this method fairly effective, having caught 50 adults by it. Careful examination afterwards indicated no desertion that could be attributed to trapping in this manner. However, it is felt that great care and efficiency is necessary in the handling of traps and birds. *

Our records support the mortality rate noted by Liddy. Of fiftyseven nests examined in one season, fortyseven contained clutches of four eggs, seven contained clutches of three, two contained clutches of two and one nest had five eggs in it. The localities of fortysix of these nests were revisited, and only fourteen adult pairs with young were found. Eight of these clutches, totalling eighteen young, reached the age of three to four weeks. Subsequently, one clutch of two and another of three, vanished without trace and we estimated finally that only eight young reached flying age, the net product of over 150 eggs.

A breeding pair will often continue to lay, if unsuccessful, up to three or four times if necessary.

Originally I considered that large scale movement over long distances may be undertaken by the plovers. As yet this has not been supported by banding recoveries. Details of the two longest recoveries to date appeared in the December, 1962, issue of "The Bird Bander".

Apart from No.080-69928, we have had six other recoveries from Phillip Island, all within yards of the banding point. Five were banded as runners, but the sixth was an adult, killed by a car only 50 yards from the nest on which it had been banded two weeks previously. It appeared that the surviving parent

*(As the author realises, the trapping of adults at the nest, of any species, is an act of major interference which should never be undertaken lightly. In a species such as the present one, it is advisable to trap birds only after incubation is well established, when the instinctive urge to return to the nest is strong. It is always important to ensure that adults are not kept too long from eggs, otherwise desertion may occur. - Editor.)

bird was still looking after the three young, but on our next visit no trace could be found of them.

Observations indicate that large flocks appear around permanent waters in summer and autumn, particularly in dry conditions. These areas, in many cases, obviously do not support such numbers in the breeding season, and the distance travelled by some birds could be considerable. The increase in numbers after a successful breeding season in limited areas such as Phillip Island, must result in some birds leaving their natal area to feed and breed. More intensive banding and an increased recovery rate are necessary to test these theories fully.

SIX YEARS' SILVEREYE BANDING - AN ANALYSIS

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To supplement D.M. Walker's interesting observations (*Bird Bander* Vol. 1. No. 3, p. 26), my sister and I present our own experience of banding Silvereyes (*Zosterops lateralis*), which covers, with strikingly different results, the same period plus some 1956 birds. All birds involved were trapped in the garden of No. 46 Iluka Road, Mosman.

In 1956 we banded, with individual colours only, 30 birds, and since February 1959 we have C.S.I.R.O. banded as many Silvereyes as we have been able to catch in a pull-string trap. We also added individual colours to two more series, each of 30 birds, in 1959 and 1962. In an attempt to take reasonably representative samples, we trapped for colour-banding over the period late July to October, with one bird taken in November.

Dividing the seasons similarly to Walker :-

Summer: November, December, January, February,

Autumn: March, April, May.

Winter: June and part July.

Spring: late July, August, September, October,

we have obtained the following results:

30 BIRDS, COLOUR-BANDS ONLY, 1956 (Series A.)

<u>Season</u>	<u>No. Banded</u>	<u>No. seen during and after 1957</u>
Winter	1	1
Spring	28	25
Summer	1	1
Total:	30	27

The above figures are taken from sight records of colour-bands.