

rounded cap of one egg, symmetrical in shape, and consistent with successful hatching. The birds were not seen. On this scanty evidence, it was assumed that this was a successful hatch, and that with this species all the eggshell is removed by the incubating bird.

Some notes relating to clutch size may be of interest. On 6 November 1958, at Lake Murihiku, Invercargill, RRS saw a pair of adults with a brood of five to eight young. The chicks moved so quickly in different directions that an accurate account was impossible. In the same Lake Murihiku area RRS, with Mr R. S. Andrew, saw three chicks on 6 November 1961.

The Athol pond was visited again by MLB, with Mrs Olga Sansom, on 7 January 1975. In a dry summer the pond level had receded still further. The day was memorable for its tussock butterflies, dragonflies and sweet wild raspberries, but no Marsh Crakes were found.

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THE TAXONOMY AND NOMENCLATURE OF NEW ZEALAND SPUR-WINGED PLOVERS

The question of whether or not to regard morphologically distinct allopatric populations of closely related birds as of the one species is one to which there is no ready answer. Even where interbreeding along a narrow zone of distributional overlap indicates that reproductive isolation has not been achieved, opinions will probably always differ. Mayr (1942, *Systematics and the Origin of Species*, New York) has distinguished between zones of primary intergradation, in which the characters of one subspecies grade into those of another, and zones of secondary intergradation, in which the population consists of birds which are phenotypically similar to those of the allopatric populations and others which are intermediate in various character combinations. Mayr suggested that zones of secondary intergradation occur where formerly isolated populations have come into contact before developing either ecological or reproductive isolation.

Van Tets *et al.* (1967, *Emu* 67: 85-93) found that the Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novaehollandiae*) and the Masked Plover (*L. miles*) form a zone of such secondary intergradation. The Spur-winged Plover breeds in south-eastern Australia and the very similar Masked Plover in northern Australia and New Guinea. *L. n. gracemeri* Mathews, 1915 is characterised by more wattle above the eye and less

black on the hind neck and shoulders than in *L. n. novaehollandiae*. Its breeding distribution is from Mackay, Queensland, southwards, grading into *novaehollandiae* somewhere near the border with New South Wales. North of Mackay, *gracemeri* hybridises with *L. miles harterti* Mathews, 1912. *L. miles* has no black on the shoulders, a thin grey line on the hind neck and the wattle extends to a point above and behind the eye. *L. m. harterti* is the same size as *L. n. gracemeri* and larger than *L. m. miles*. With care, most birds in the field and in the hand may be assigned to the correct subspecies, but intermediates are not uncommon and may turn up as vagrants or non-breeding migrants anywhere in Australasia. It is, therefore, more practical to treat the Spur-winged and Masked Plovers as a single species and refer to the subspecies only when the necessary diagnosis has been made.

The taxonomic status of these birds is of more than academic interest to New Zealand ornithologists as Van Tets considers that the New Zealand birds conform more to *L. n. gracemeri* than to *L. n. novaehollandiae*. In our opinion, until field and museum studies have established the phenotypic uniformity of the New Zealand population, it would be misleading to name it subspecifically. We must also point out that Australian ornithologists have generally adopted the recommendation of Bock (1958, *Bull. Mus. comp. Zool. Harv.* 118: 27-97) who has united all the vanelline plovers in the Genus *Vanellus*. We submit, therefore, that in the meantime the name *Vanellus miles* (Boddaert, 1783) should be used for the Spur-winged Plovers of New Zealand.

Another point of interest, arising from the above, is the clear indication that Australian vagrants in New Zealand can originate from areas further north than might be expected. Although the colonisation may have originated from a single pair as far back as 1932 (Barlow 1972, *Notornis* 19: 201-211), the possibility cannot be excluded that later arrivals might have contributed to the build-up, and that records of stragglers, particularly in the North Island, might as easily be attributable to Australian vagrants as to Southland-bred birds. The exhausted bird picked up at Waitotara in late November 1945, might be such an example. This possibility is mentioned to emphasise the importance of a careful study of all birds seen, and to suggest an examination of museum specimens.

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