

## SPUR-WINGED PLOVER IN NEW ZEALAND.

By Olga Sansom, Invercargill.

The spur-winged plover (*Lobibyx novaehollandiae*), an Australian bird, appears to be establishing itself in the vicinity of Invercargill. At least two local residents saw nests, each containing two eggs, in 1947, while last year, 1950, a nest of three eggs was found. It is estimated that there are at least 100 birds within a ten-mile radius of Invercargill and there may be more further afield.

The first news many people outside of Invercargill had of this colony was given in a broadcast by the Rev. C. J. Tocker, in 1940, in which he said there was a small colony near Invercargill. About 15 years ago, Mr. George Moffett saw seven birds in a grass paddock near the Borstal Farm, Invercargill Estuary, which at first sight he thought to be red-billed gulls. Attracted by their persistent raucous cry and their shyness he investigated further, identifying the birds as spur-winged plover, or alarm birds. Later, others reported their presence near the city. In 1943 a shot specimen was sent to the Southland Museum for identification. Elsewhere, in recent years, in New Zealand odd birds have turned up with increasing frequency at places as far north as Waitotara in the North Island.

Localities near Invercargill in which the spur-winged plover have been seen are the swampy ground on the Borstal Farm, near the Aerodrome (Invercargill Estuary), on the northern foreshore and the southern end of the foreshore of the estuary; cultivated paddocks on the east side; near the mouth of the Waimatuku River; on Mr. Price's property on the Oreti River near Oporo (five to six miles from the mouth), and on Mr. Wm. Fosbender's property at New River Ferry. This property, a fairly extensive area of sheep run, sand dune, natural tussocky country, marsh-land and flax-encircled lagoons appears to be a favourite habitat.

Mr. McKenzie, the manager of this property, who for many years has mustered the area, estimates 50 birds in the whole range of habitat there. Inquiries from reliable sources, including Mr. W. Fosbender, Mr. A. B. Moffett, Mr. A. H. Hamilton and Mr. Geo. Moffett consider Mr. McKenzie's estimate a fair one. They would add another 50 birds from other areas making a total of 100 birds.

Two residents saw nests in 1947, viz., Mr. Christie, manager of the Borstal Farm, and Mr. W. Fosbender. In each case the clutch was two eggs. Last year (1950) Mr. Wilfred Fosbender saw a nest of which he gives the following description:—

"Nest on bare shingle, very carelessly made. Three eggs, the size of a bantam's or somewhat smaller. Colour, light greenish-yellow, spotted and speckled with brownish-black. On approaching nest bird made vicious dives at his head. About 10 days later, in August, Mr. Fosbender saw three very lively chicks.

My notes relative to this bird in 1950 are:—

June 18.—Saw 17, the most I have seen in one day, as follow: Near Lagoon, Fosbender's Farm, four; on roadside, near Lagoon, two flew up and settled further up; on swamp edge, roadside, eleven feeding at 4 p.m. (dull day).

June 25.—At the same place saw eight plovers.

November 1.—Visited Fosbender's Farm, usual haunts, saw none. The musterer had seen eight that morning but they were not there at 4.30 p.m. on a bright sunny afternoon. He will look for nests during week.

November 2.—Went to Price's Farm, Wallacetown. On shingle and river banks there were black-billed gulls, black-fronted tern and dotterel, all obviously nesting. The tern dive-bombed at me beautifully, with more grace than any plane and loads of defiance. No spur-winged plover. I had seen a pair here a little further inland last year.

November 4.—Visited Borstal Farm. One pair feeding on swamp. Had very good view of them through binoculars. (Starlings feeding nearby). The watermilfoil, buttercup and cotula made a flowery carpet for yards. The spur-wings were beautiful, the wattles like orange peel. They flew low, up the swamp and settled again. They did not complain or seem agitated as a nesting pair might do.

(The spur-winged plover, on the application of the Southland Acclimatisation Society, has been declared a protected bird.)

## OBITUARY.

The death occurred in Auckland on June 9, 1951, of Major G. A. Buddle, D.S.O., M.C., a foundation member of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand. He was well-known for his photographs of wild life, including birds, and his scientific visits to the Three Kings, Poor Knights and other islands off the coast. Contributions to the society's bulletins included: Notes on the birds of Mokohinau, breeding of the red-billed gull, gannets of Three Kings and elsewhere north of Auckland, and birds of Three Kings and neighbouring waters. In the "Emu" he had articles on photographing the spotless crane on the Poor Knights, notes on the breeding habits of the dabchick, and two papers on the birds of the Poor Knights. He took a keen interest in the affairs of the Auckland War Memorial Museum.

Another member of the Society, Mrs. A. S. Wilkinson, died on December 1, 1950. She had a wonderful knowledge of bird life, much of it gained during her 18 years on Kapiti Island bird sanctuary, and it is some satisfaction to know that she left carefully written notes on the birds of that island, written from day to day during her residence there. An expert photographer, she secured an unrivalled series of studies, not only of bird-life, but of the native flora, insects and other natural history subjects, which provide an impressive memorial of her work. Photographically, one of her achievements was the feeding of a young long-tailed cuckoo by its foster parent, the whitehead. She tamed many of the wild birds coming around her house on Kapiti, her most notable success, after many months' of patient work, being achieved when three kakas fed from her hand.

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**BREEDING OF WEKA.**—I used to wonder how it was that wekas increased at such a rate from one pair. On Bravo Island, where I have a shack, the breeding habits of the only pair on the island, which have been there a long time, are interesting and seem to follow the accepted theory. They have two young in the very early spring, two in mid-summer and in late summer two or three and even, on one occasion, four. The young ones are looked after solicitously till the next chickens appear and then are relentlessly driven away; they cross to the nearby shore which they can do by walking at low tide, though swimming an equal distance is often done by wekas. Among the young have several times been black ones. I have recognised the progeny of our residents on the opposite shore, for instance, one black chick for some reason had a slight limp. I easily recognised him later and he had grown into a fine specimen. The two permanently attached to us for rations are a large cock bird and a small slim little hen. Referring to the fact that some and probably all mated wekas have three clutches of chicks per year and assuming that these bred next year the explanation of the quick increase of the weka is simple. July 3, 1951: The wekas at Bravo Island are at an interesting stage. The young ones have not yet been driven away, though the cock bird is paying amorous attention to his mate. The young ones, now fully grown, are sometimes by themselves—sometimes associated with the parents. In the latter case, their treatment by their father is erratic, as one moment he is feeding them and a second later attacking them savagely. I expect when the hen bird lays, or at any rate certainly when the chicks are hatched, these last season's young will be finally driven off the island.—R. H. Traill, Halfmoon Bay, Stewart Island.