

SPUR-WINGED PLOVER IN SOUTHLAND.

By Olga Sansom, Invercargill.

During the spring months of 1953, Mr Geo. Moffett and I did a good deal of observation of the spur-winged plover (*Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*). Although we have managed to secure a photograph of the egg and chicks we must admit that the spur-winged plover in Southland is an elusive bird. This, coupled with the fact that it is a noisy bird, presents a paradox. The bird cannot be pinned down to one locality: it ranges widely over its area.

Our observing-field includes Lake Hawkins (more correctly a shallow marsh); the Invercargill Aerodrome, on reclaimed ground of the Oreti Estuary; the Borstal Farm; and Mr. Fossbender's farm. The cover includes peat-bog, soft marshland, natural tussock country, extensive sand-dunes, cultivated paddocks and flax and toi-toi encircled lagoons. This stretch of country, flanked on the south by a fourteen-mile surf beach with another fourteen-mile stretch of estuary on its other flank and some 10,000 acres in Mr. Fossbender's farm alone gives the birds a wide range. And they use it.

For instance, on December 15, 1952, on a calm day, following gale-force south-westerlies, the reclaimed ground about Lake Hawkins seemed to sprout "spur-wings." We counted sixty birds in small separate groups, 15 on the edge of the Borstal Lagoon and six in a ploughed paddock—81 birds. Yet on October 11, 1953, with Dr. W. R. B. Oliver as our guest, we searched the same area without result. Only on the following day did we locate two birds. The usual noisy alarm gave them away—there is no mistaking it—and one bird flew close enough for us to say "lemon-yellow wattles—not orange." I have seen them looking like orange peel. (*Notornis*, Vol. 4, No. 6.).

Early in July, 1953, the birds had paired, according to Mr. McKenzie, farm manager of Mr. Fossbender, who keeps a close watch on the birds. He reported a nest on August 15 and on August 20 the speckled spur-winged chicks, white collar and egg-tooth complete were in the nest.

The nest was a shallow natural depression on a lump of land in open wet marsh on Mr. Fossbender's farm, New River Ferry. Sparsely lined with dry tussock the nest held four buff-grey eggs splashed with brown. Three chicks hatched. One of these died—the weather was wet and cold at this time—and the two chicks in the picture were quickly on their feet.

On the day of this photograph we watched the parent birds defending the nest. A harrier sailed low over the nest. The sitting bird had only just settled, after arriving by zig-zag trail, to our extreme relief, as it was a bitterly cold day. Both birds went up in a swift parallel flight, overtook the hawk and quickly put it to rout. The strong, black-tipped spur on the carpal joint of the wing must be an adequate weapon of defence. Harriers are plentiful in Southland. Rabbits are fewer. Any bird that can defend its nest against the harrier appears to have an excellent chance of survival.

THREE SHINING CUCKOOS FED BY ONE GREY WARBLER.—

One grey warbler was observed feeding three young shining cuckoos. Mrs. Parkin first saw them and called me over. This was 27/1/53, in the afternoon and they were in kanuka in the bull paddock. We watched them closely for over half an hour and there is no doubt that the grey warbler was feeding the three of them. They worked their way down to a jacaranda at the back of the house. On the 29th we again saw them being fed in the garden. The poor little warbler was looking very worn and no wonder, it was working at top speed.—Charles Parkin, Little Barrier Island.