

Bill — black, similar in shape and proportion to a Black-billed Gull.

Back — from crown to tip of tail was ashy-grey in colour. The whole under-surface of the bird appeared to be pale greyish-white — lighter in colour than the back.

Primaries: dark brown or black.

Voice: Only one type of call was heard — a loud "Chow Chow-ow." It called frequently — both when in flight and when perched.

The Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike has been recorded in New Zealand several times before: Motueka (1869); Invercargill (1870); Westport (c1895 and 1931); Lake Ellesmere (1904); Greymouth (1914 ?); Taranaki (1914); north Kaipara Heads (Jan.-Sept. 1953); Himatangi (Jan. 1955); Fielding (1965) and Okuru (Sept. 1966).

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SPUR-WINGED PLOVER LONGEVITY RECORD

On 31 July 1966 a breeding adult Spur-winged Plover (*Vanellus miles novaehollandiae*) was banded by P. M. Muller in Otatara, Southland (Band E.61314). On 6 August 1977 this bird was found dead on the roadside by Mr J. L. Baker of Otatara with injuries consistent with its having been struck by a vehicle.

Some Spur-winged Plovers are capable of breeding at the end of their first year (Barlow *et al.* *Notornis* 19 (3): 212-249). Earliest recorded hatch-date is 2nd July. (op cit.) This bird's minimum age was therefore 12 years 1 month.

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TALON-GRAPPLING BY NEW ZEALAND FALCONS AND AUSTRALASIAN HARRIERS

Aerial talon-grappling has been recorded in a number of raptors. Brown & Amadon (1968: 99) mentioned it as part of courtship displays in some eagles of the genus *Haliaeetus* and some kites (*Haliastur* and *Milvus*). Hamerstrom *et al.* (1961), Carson (1962) and Clark (1975) recorded talon-grappling in Short-eared Owls (*Asio flammeus*) and considered it to be a form of courtship. Simms (1975) observed Merlins (*Falco columbarius*) talon-grappling and interpreted it as courtship, as did Chater (1975) who saw it in Common Buzzards (*Buteo buteo*).

On the other hand, Parker (1975) interpreted talon-grappling by Red Kites (*Milvus milvus*) as territorial conflict. Hume (1975) who observed it in Snowy Owls (*Nyctea scandiaca*) thought the birds were fighting, and Clark (1975) saw some territorial conflicts between Short-eared Owls which involved talon-grappling.

On 20 November 1977 I was watching at a nest of an Australasian Harrier (*Circus approximans gouldi*) from about 300 m. At one point an adult female harrier from an adjacent territory flew over the nest. The resident adult male, who had been perched in a Cabbage Tree (*Cordyline* sp.) 100 m from the nest, chased the intruding female away by using a series of shallow swoops. Each time he swooped the female cartwheeled over and presented her talons. On one of these occasions the birds locked talons and tumbled together for about 5-6 m before disengaging about 10 m above the ground. Although I interpreted this as a territorial conflict the question of polygamy in this species has yet to be clarified. On 15 October 1977 I observed copulation by the harriers on this adjacent territory and throughout the proceedings a second adult male was perched only 200 m from the birds, in full view. This leads me to suspect that the pair bond may be a rather flexible feature in this species, especially as multiple courtship displays are common.

On 5 December 1977 I was watching a pair of New Zealand Falcons (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) in North Canterbury. A harrier (age unknown) approached within 500 m of the nest bluff and the adult male falcon sallied out to defend his territory. The harrier, taken by surprise, failed to cartwheel in time and the little falcon knocked out several feathers at this first stoop. A rapid chase ensued, the harrier successfully parrying every stoop. Unfortunately the harrier chose to fly right over the nest site and the female falcon joined in. Alternating their stoops the falcons gave the harrier little chance to make progress. During the dispute the female falcon twice locked talons with the harrier. On the first occasion the birds fell about 25 m before breaking free, on the second occasion about 30 m. Considering that the falcons had no eggs or chicks in the nest at this time, they were being particularly ferocious. Indeed, I was myself unable to approach within 400-500 m of the nest without being frequently hit and this defended area was unusually large (see Fox 1978).

Although these instances of talon-grappling were not courtship displays I have seen Australasian Harriers briefly touch during their "sky-dancing" courtship displays. Talon-grappling frequently occurs between courting or playing New Zealand Falcons when perched or on the ground, but despite extensive observations of courtship in this species I have not observed aerial talon-grappling between paired falcons.

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SPUR-WINGED PLOVER: BROADLANDS

On 25 March 1977 I sighted seven Spur-winged Plovers feeding in a temporary rainwater pond near the main Reporoa-Taupo highway just south of the Reporoa Lucerne Company's drying plant (map ref. NZMS 1: N94/551787).

While driving along the road I noticed these unusual birds and stopped my vehicle. When approached I could see their characteristic slightly humped posture, contrasting brown and white plumage and yellow wattles. When they finally flew, several called and all had the characteristic flight (round winged) of the Spur-winged Plover.

As far as I know, this is the first sighting of these birds in this half of the North Island and it would be interesting to have subsequent records for the vicinity.

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