

The Spur-winged Plover in North Queensland

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That there is some over-lap in the ranges of the predominantly-southern Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novæ-hollandiæ*) and the more northern Masked Plover (*L. miles*) has been established only recently by Amiet (1957) who reports seeing both species at Bowen, north Queensland. In Western Australia both have been recorded from the south-west (Serventy and Butler, 1957; Lindgren, 1958; Ford, 1960).

In eastern Australia the northern-most limit for the Spur-winged Plover has generally been given as Mackay. During the writer's fifteen months field trip in Queensland during 1958-1959 no further information in the position of the boundary between the breeding ranges of the species was gained. At Rockhampton the birds seen were all *novæ-hollandiæ*, at Ayr all were *miles*, but at Atherton I was informed by our member, J. A. Bravery, that Spur-winged Plovers were occasional visitors to the Tablelands. Soon after I saw a single bird myself only a few miles from Atherton, and subsequently, when in company with Mr. Bravery or alone, ten Spur-winged Plovers were recorded. These black areas might or might not be connected with the crown by a black line along the shoulder and over the nape. Sightings of this species in north Queensland totalled 27 birds, as follows:

June 29 and 30, 1957	Mark's Lane, 3½ miles north of Atherton	8 birds	T. Abel and J. A. Bravery
July 4, 1957	Tolga, 3½ miles north of Atherton	2	J. A. Bravery
July 18, 1958	do	2	do
Oct. 19, 1958	do	2	do
Dec. 27, 1958	Hastie's Swamp, south- west of Atherton	1	J. A. Bravery and J. Warham
May 7, 1959	2 miles east of Ravenshoe	2	do
May 10, 1959	Minnamoolka Station, 30 miles south-west of Mt Garnet	4	do
May 31, 1959	Hastie's Swamp, Ather- ton	1	do
June 20, 1959	Sandy Pocket, 12 miles south of Innisfail	1	J. Warham
June 27, 1959	4 miles north of Ravens- hoe	2	do
Sept. 22, 1959	Hastie's Swamp, Ather- ton	2	J. A. Bravery

Our criterion for registering a bird as *novæ-hollandiæ* was the presence of black on the sides of the breast, black that showed when the bird was at rest with folded wings.

Most of the Spur-wings were seen among flocks of Masked Plovers. Thus the two near Ravenshoe on June 27 were in company with 14 *L. miles*, and that at Hastie's Swamp on May 31 was among a mob of 20 *L. miles*. The bird at Sandy Pocket on June 20 was a lone individual. Where several birds were observed they were generally in pairs. Those on June 27, surrounded as they were by Masked, nevertheless kept near each other all the time and re-settled together when the flock moved: it seemed probable that they were paired. The four at Minnamoolka were similarly associated as two pairs amidst a preponderance of Masked. Incidentally, the latter locality is close to the Herbert River, and suggests that Broadbent did not err in reporting the Spur-wings from that area (Broadbent, 1910).

Seeing both species side by side I was surprised in some instances to note how alike they were. Thus the bird on December 27 appeared only very slightly larger, and the back no darker, than the Masked Plovers alongside it. Conversely, those on June 27 were appreciably larger and darker than the Masked Plovers nearby. In no instance was there any apparent difference in the size of the facial masks in the two species.

There was a considerable variation in the amount of black on the neck and flanks of these northern Spur-wings. Some had no line of black from the crown down the sides of the neck to link the crown with the breast markings. The latter were often small. Others had prominent black lines down the neck and over the shoulders and extensive breast markings as in the accompanying photograph of a Spur-winged Plover at Rockhampton.

During the course of these observations many Masked Plovers were inspected, and these were mostly rather different from those seen in northern Western Australia. Very few wore white collars across the nape as do most birds from the Kimberleys. Instead, the black crown typically extended down the nape, ending in a point at the mantle. Some birds were seen whose crowns were starting to spread sideways down the neck in the manner of *novæ-hollandiæ*, but since these birds showed no black on the flanks when the wings were folded they were judged to be *miles*. They might, of course, have been intermediates between the two species. A pair at Townsville on September 11, 1958, was of this kind, and Amiet also suggests tentatively that birds he saw at Mackay and Bowen might have been intermediates. It was also noticed that most of the north Queensland Masked Plovers had small black patches at the roots of the underwings. Sometimes such patches

were quite large and obvious when the flying bird was seen from below.

In a recent review of the plovers, W. J. Bock supposes *novæ-hollandiæ* to be a race of *miles* and believes that the two forms are allopatric (Bock, 1958). The sightings of the two species together recorded in this paper do not conflict with that view since there is as yet no evidence that *novæ-hollandiæ* actually breeds north of Bowen. Nevertheless, the presence of these birds as late as October 19 suggests that breeding may take place far north of this township. Furthermore, the fact that any Spur-wings in flocks of Masked always kept company rather suggests that the two are specifically different.

The presence of the Spur-winged Plover in north Queensland has presumably been overlooked because most observers have taken *Lobibyx* to be *miles* without making a closer check. Non-ornithological residents usually refer to the Masked species as the Spur-wing under the impression that their birds are the same as those they have seen in the south. Visitors to the area and resident ornithologists could help in clarifying the position by keeping a look-out for the species, and particularly for evidence of breeding. It is clear, too, that further collecting is desirable in the Mackay Ayr section to clarify the situation in that area.

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