



Spur-winged Plover at eggs, Rockhampton, Queensland

Photo. by John Warham

Spur-winged and Masked Plover in South-western Australia

By JULIAN FORD, Attadale, W.A.

Recently the Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novæ-hollandiæ*) and the Masked Plover (*L. miles*) were recorded for the first time in the south-west of Western Australia. Serventy and Butler (1957) collected a specimen of the former species at Lake Muir in November, 1956, and Lindgren (1958) reported the occurrence of the latter at Narrikup in June, 1957. Previously only the Masked Plover occurred in Western Australia, being confined to the extreme north (Serventy and Whittell, 1951). In this contribution, further records of both species are documented with some comments on their identification.

During a visit to Moora on December 13, 1958, with Dr. G. F. Mees and Mr. K. Vermey, I observed a solitary Masked Plover with several White-headed Stilts (*Himantopus leucocephalus*) on an islet in an open, shallow, brackish swamp. The diagnostic feature which differentiates the Masked from the Spur-winged Plover, that is the absence of black on the nuchal collar and chest, was noted. I was unable to collect the specimen. However, Dr. Mees verified the identification after examining museum material.

On March 7, 1959, I was informed by Mr. H. V. Wees that two unfamiliar plovers, possibly Masked, were at Perry's Lake, Floreat Park, four miles west of Perth. An immediate investigation revealed both a Masked and a Spur-winged Plover. Later this news was relayed to Dr. D. L. Serventy, who accompanied me on a second visit to this particular lake, and together we noted that although only one bird had black on the nuchal collar and sides of the chest, the length of the yellow facial wattles on both birds appeared to be of similar magnitude. The following week-end I learned from Mr. Wees that the birds had moved to a small open swamp at Innaloo, five miles north-west of Perth. Subsequently Dr. Mees and I visited this locality and collected the first specimen of the Masked Plover for the south-west.

Particulars of the specimen are as follows: W.A. Museum no. A8355; female adult; collected March 14, 1959, at Innaloo; iris, pale citrine yellow; bare skin around eye, lemon yellow; bill, pale yellow, paler towards tip; spur, pale yellow; legs, dirty carmine; weight, 308 gm.; wing length, 224 mm.; tail, 97 mm.; tarsus, 78 mm.; exposed culmen, 35 mm.

The size of the yellow facial appendage of the specimen is smaller than that usually attributed to this species, but, contrary to what has been claimed in literature, it seems

this characteristic is an unreliable field guide for distinguishing between *miles* and *novæ-hollandiæ*. In fact, the Innaloo bird is not unlike specimens of *miles* from the Kimberleys in this respect. All the other features agree with *miles* and not with *novæ-hollandiæ*—the naked skin on the face is continued around and beyond the eye, and the nuchal collar and under-parts are white. *L. miles* is also slightly smaller than *L. novæ-hollandiæ*, wing measurements of specimens in the W.A. Museum being as follows:

miles ♂ 210, 217, 217, 220, 221.

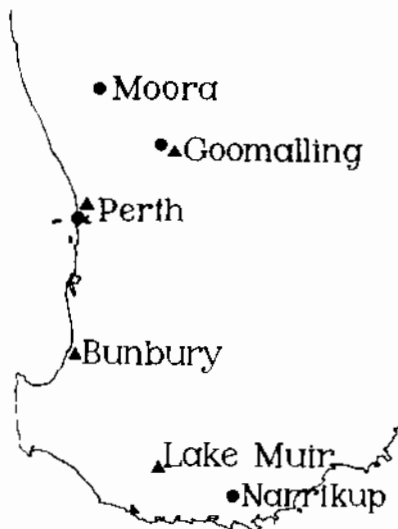
novæ-hollandiæ ♂ 230, 232, 241, ♀ 241.

The new specimen is the only female of *miles* in the collection. The comparatively large wing measurement of the new specimen is probably due to the fact that it is in very fresh plumage, whereas the others are strongly abraded. In the foregoing series, *novæ-hollandiæ* is slightly darker on the back than *miles*, but in this respect the new specimen compares more closely with *novæ-hollandiæ*. This discrepancy would be caused by birds in fresh plumage being darker than those in abraded plumage.

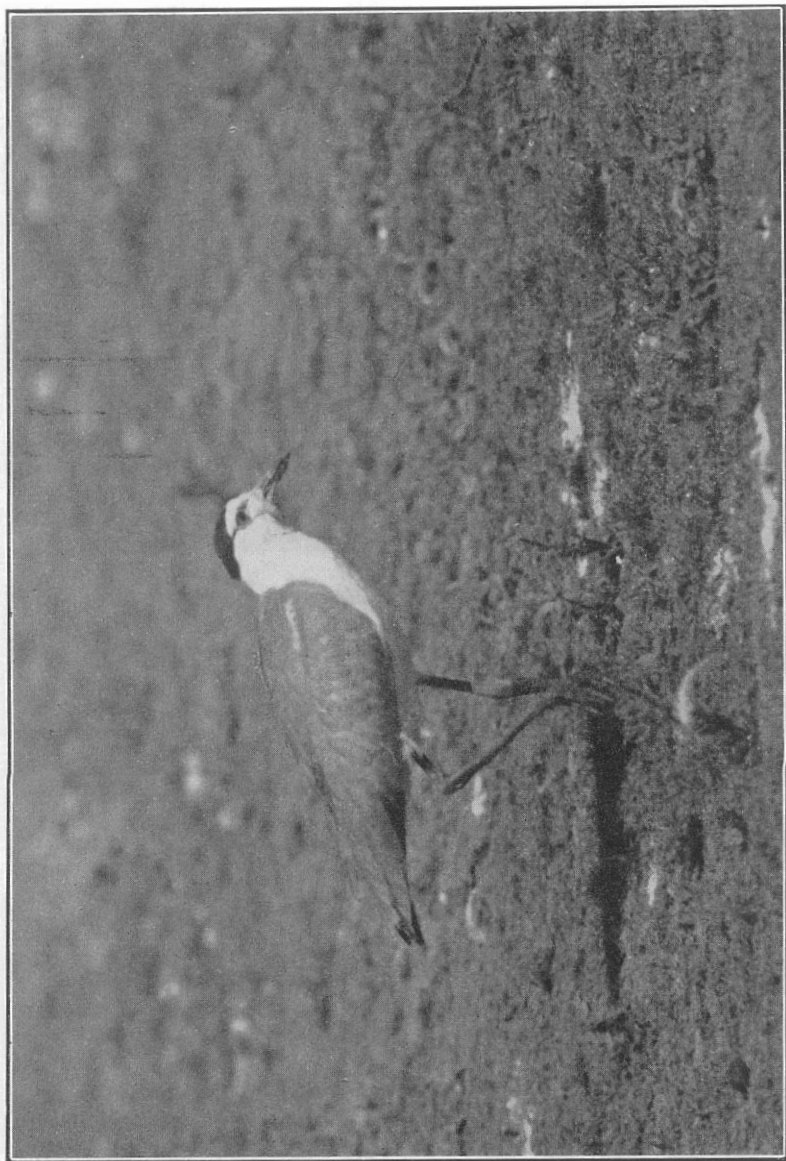
Other reports of the Spur-winged Plover have been received from Goomalling and Bunbury; and a report of the Masked Plover was received from Goomalling. Dr. Serventy was informed by Mr. A. L. Milhinch that an individual of each species were seen together on October 13, 1958, some 14 miles north-east of Goomalling, and I was informed by

Mr. T. G. Dixon that he observed a Spur-winged Plover near Leschenault Inlet, Bunbury.

That *miles* and *novæ-hollandiæ* were seen together is not surprising because both plovers are extremely gregarious, and it is probably more conservatism than biological fact that makes many taxonomists treat the two as different species. In eastern Australia their breeding ranges appear not to overlap (see Cayley 1958), and therefore Bock (1958) considers them as conspecific. There is no evidence whether *miles* and *novæ-hollandiæ* interbreed, or indeed breed, in the south-west; consequently it is not



Distribution of Spur-winged Plover (solid circles) and Masked Plover (solid triangles) in south-western Australia.



Masked Plover on feeding ground, West Kimberley, W.A.

Photo. by John Warham

possible to elucidate the exact significance of their association in the reported instances. Observers in eastern Australia, particularly Queensland, would be in a better position to resolve the problem of the taxonomic status of these plovers by determining whether *miles* and *novae-hollandiae* are allopatric or sympatric, and whether a hybrid population exists.



Distribution of *Lobibyx* in Australia. The arrows indicate the probable pathways into south-western Australia.

Movements of the Spur-winged Plover over long distances and across inhospitable barriers are well known, the species having flown across the Tasman Sea to Lord Howe Island (Hindwood and Cunningham, 1950) and New Zealand (Oliver, 1955). Its foothold in south-western Australia appears to have been gained by birds from South Australia negotiating another somewhat inhospitable barrier—the Nullarbor Plain. It is suggested that during 1955, when above normal rainfall was recorded throughout Western Australia, and widespread flooding of the Nullarbor Plain occurred twice (Ford, 1958), this barrier between

the south-western and south-eastern portions of Australia was temporarily broken, allowing the species to gain entry into the South-west. If this was actually what happened, Serventy and Butler's original observation would coincide approximately with its time of arrival.

The origin of the Masked Plovers in the south-west is obscure, but it is probable that they came from the north of the State and not from south-eastern Australia. This assumption is supported by the peculiar distribution of the two plovers and the close resemblance of the Innaloo specimen to birds collected in the Kimberleys. Another puzzling point worth considering is the cause of the two plover-species simultaneous arrival. Perhaps the heavy rainfall experienced throughout the State in 1955 induced a partial movement of the Masked Plover from the north to the south-west.

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Hawks Bathing.—A few years ago Baron H. Geyr von Schweppenburg (*Journal für Ornithologie*, 93 (2), 175, 1952) remarked that he had rarely seen a raptorial bird bathing in water. He recorded observing a Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) bathing in puddles. Alf. Bachmann (*Ornithologische Mitteilungen*, 4, (9), 210, 1952) subsequently reported having seen various birds of prey bathing in the River Nile.

Vincent Serventy (*Western Australian Naturalist*, 5 (5), 102, 1956) recorded seeing two Brown Hawks (*Falco berigora*) lying in water of the soak at Queen Victoria Spring, W.A.

I have seen Whistling Eagles (*Haliastur sphenurus*) bathing in the Murray River during hot weather. Brown Hawks and Nankeen Kestrels (*Falco cenchroides*) have been observed by me on rare occasions bathing in dams.—E. F. BOEHM, Sutherlands, S.A., 9/11/59.