

A large diverse group of birds of estuaries, coasts, riverbeds and farmland. Most are long-legged and feed in or near shallow water. Bill shape is varied; short and stubby in those (e.g. dotterels) that peck from the surface, but longer in those that feed in shallow water (e.g. stilts), or probe deeply (e.g. godwits). Flight strong and direct. Often form flocks while roosting or flying, but disperse to feed. Many species seen in NZ breed in the Arctic and arrive in September, with remnants of breeding plumage, and depart in March, often in breeding plumage. Most subadults and a few adults spend the southern winter here.

SPUR-WINGED PLOVER *Vanellus miles*

Abundant native

38 cm; ♂ 370 g, ♀ 350 g. Conspicuous *noisy* large plover. Black crown, hindneck and shoulders in front of bend of wing; smooth brown back and wings; white rump and tail tipped black. White underparts; wings have dark trailing edge. *Yellow facial patch, wattles and bill*; legs and feet reddish. Spur on bend of wing usually hidden. Juvenile has small wattles, and feathers on upperparts are narrowly edged black and buff. *Flies with slow deliberate beats of rounded wings. Call a loud staccato rattle: 'kerr-kick-kick-kick-kick'.* **Habitat:** Farmland, rough grassland, wetland margins and estuaries. **Breeding:** Jun–Dec. [Sp 189]



PLOVERS, DOTTERELS and LAPWINGS
Charadriidae

About 65 species, most of which are migratory. There are about 29 plovers and dotterels, of which 5 (formerly 6) breed in New Zealand and 8 visit as migrants from the Northern Hemisphere; 26 lapwings, 1 of which breeds in New Zealand. Some authorities place the Red-kneed Dotterel with the lapwings rather than the plovers.

with a high forehead and bill shorter than the head, pointed and slightly swollen at the tip. The plumage is a blend of black, white, brown and grey, sometimes more colourful in breeding plumage. They often have a bold pattern in flight. They have a characteristic 'walk and stop' way of feeding.

In New Zealand, the terms plover and dotterel mean the same thing; there is no clear distinction. All are plumpish with a thick, short neck, short tail, small, rounded head

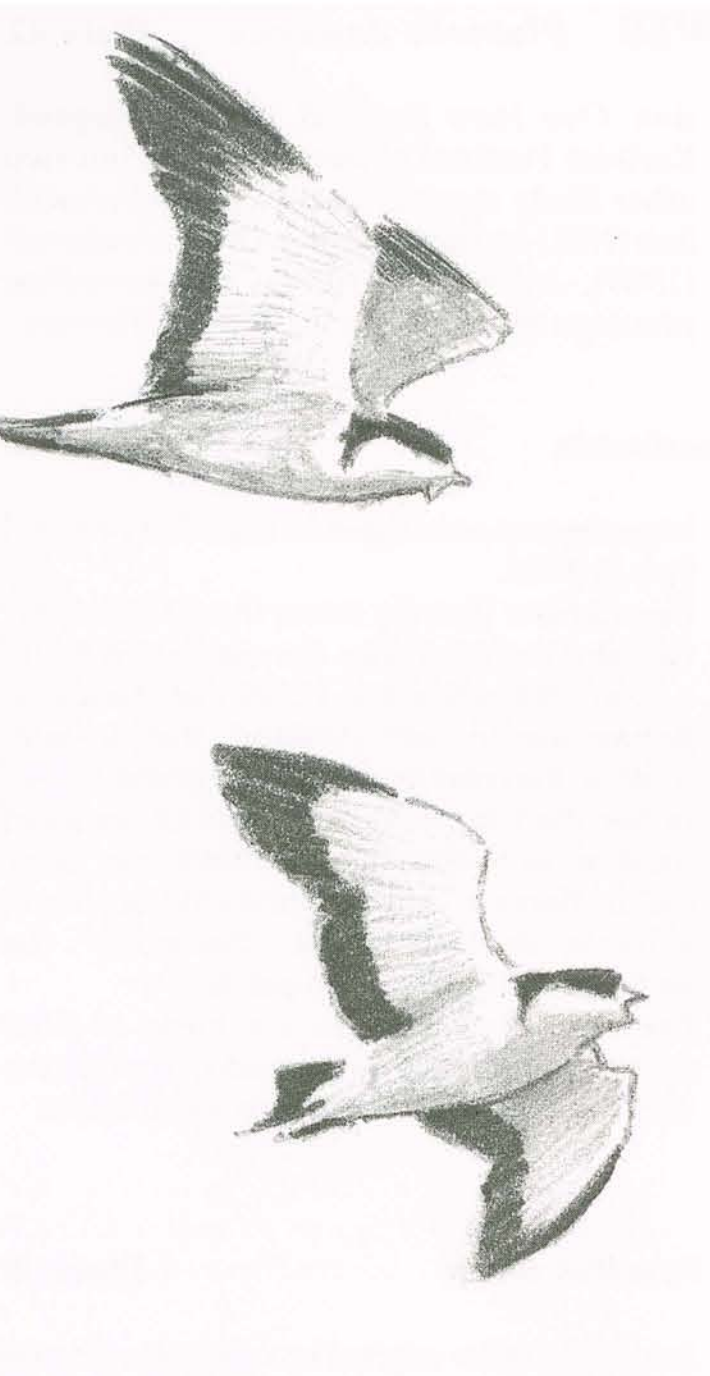
Lapwings tend to be inland on pasture and around coastal wetlands. They have wattles on the face and spurs on the bend of the wing, and are noisy on the ground and in flight, by night as well as by day.

189. SPUR-WINGED PLOVER

Vanellus miles **Plate 38**

Other names: Masked Lapwing, Masked Plover
Size: 38 cm; males 370 g, females 350 g
Geographical variation: Two subspecies: *miles* in northern Australia and New Guinea and *novaeollandiae* from mid-Queensland to southeastern Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand. The subspecies overlap extensively and hybridise in Queensland and in the interior of the continent.
Distribution: New Guinea, Australia, Lord Howe Island and New Zealand. A vagrant to the Moluccas, Christmas Island (Indian Ocean), Norfolk Island and the Cook Islands. Vagrants were recorded at Kai-iwi (1886) and at Hokitika (1892). A pair bred for the first time in New Zealand at Invercargill Airport about 1932. By 1951, there were c. 100, and by 1971 c. 1250 breeding birds within a 16

km radius of the original breeding site. During the 1950s, they expanded to inland Southland and appeared near Lake Wanaka, Central Otago, but remained rare outside Southland to the mid-1960s. From the late 1960s to the 1980s, they spread to Stewart Island and to the rest of the South Island. The first breeding records in the North Island were in the early 1970s near Gisborne, Dannevirke and Paraparaumu. Now abundant in coastal Manawatu and southern Wairarapa, and becoming more common throughout the North Island, including Northland. They have become well established on the Chatham Islands since breeding was first recorded there in 1981, and have apparently established at Raoul Island, Kermadecs, since 1993. Recorded from the Auckland (1995), Antipodes (1995) and Bounty Islands (1998).



ground (e.g. chewed-down turnips or chou-moellier, or consolidated riverbed shingle). The nest is a scrape in the ground, unlined or scantily lined with whatever material is nearby.

They lay 1–4 khaki eggs (49 x 35 mm, 31 g) with brownish-black spots and blotches. Both sexes incubate for 30–31 days after the last egg is laid. The chicks soon leave the nest and follow the adults, but find their own food. The fledging period is 7–8 weeks. Young are capable of breeding at the end of their first year, but most pair for life in their first year and breed in their second year. The oldest bird recorded in New Zealand lived over 16 years.

Behaviour: Often gregarious when not breeding; flocks of up to 600, presumably juveniles and non-breeders, have been recorded at Lake Wairarapa in October–December. Spur-winged Plovers are extremely noisy; their main call is a loud, penetrating and staccato 'rattle', often at night, on the ground and in the air. Among their various displays is the conspicuous piping party; in a loose circle on raised ground, six or seven birds face one another in an upright stance with legs straight, breast pushed out and wings held slightly open, exposing the spurs; they call harshly at one another, alternating with silence; some birds stiffly advance and retreat.

Population: Abundant in Southland, coastal Otago and Canterbury, Manawatu and southern Wairarapa; common or becoming so elsewhere.

When alarmed, they are wary and alert with an upright stance, although an incubating bird usually creeps unobtrusively away from the intruder. They are aggressive in defence of their nest and chicks, screaming and dive-bombing to divert intruders, and attacking Australasian Harriers and Australian Magpies as they fly over.

Conservation: Protected common self-introduced native. Spur-winged Plovers are a recent arrival in New Zealand and are clearly suited to the arable and pasture habitats. They are probably beneficial to farmers, as they eat a wide range of invertebrates, including pests such as grass grubs and porina larvae.
Breeding: Laying is from June to late November, with the peak in August. Several clutches are laid each year. The preferred site is rough, open pasture without farm animals, or a flat, wet area with some surface irregularity and a wide outlook. They also breed on bare

Feeding: Diet on short-grassed pasture and ploughed paddocks is mainly earthworms and insects and their larvae, but also seeds and leaves; in tidal and other coastal habitats, crustaceans and molluscs are taken. They feed with a slow, stalking walk, shoulders hunched and head forward, with a sudden dip to catch prey.

Reading: Barlow, M. 1972. *Notornis* 19: 201–211. Barlow, M. 1983. *The Year of the Spur-winged Plover*. Invercargill: Craig Printing. Barlow, M.L. et al. 1972. *Notornis* 19: 212–249.