

Order Charadriiformes, Family Vanellidae,
Genus *Zonifer*.

Zonifer tricolor—The Black-breasted Plover, sometimes called the Queen Plover to distinguish it from its larger relative the spur-winged plover, which in some parts is called the King Plover.

Description—Upper Surface.—Upper part of the head, black; upper back, brown; middle and lower back, brown, tinged with dull purple; upper tail coverts, white.

Under Surface—Throat, neck, and upper breast, white; lores and a line under the eye, black, bounded above by a narrow line of white broadening behind the eye, and extending to the sides of the occiput; breast, black extending up the sides of the neck to join the black line on the sides of the head; abdomen and under tail coverts, white.

Wing—Primaries, black; the bases of the inner webs, white; secondaries, the first seven or eight with the outer webs and tips, black; the inner webs white at the base, the white gradually increasing until the last four or five are entirely white; upper wing coverts, brown, tinged with dull purple, the lower ones tipped with white; under wing coverts, white.

Tail—White at the base, followed by a broad band of black, and tipped with white.

Legs and Feet—Dull dark red.

Bill—Yellow, tip brown.

Iris—Yellow.

Wattle at the base of the bill, bright red.

Measurements—Total length of skin, 26 c.m.; wing, 18 c.m.; tail, 9.50 c.m.; bill, 2 c.m.; tarsus, 5.10 c.m.

The female resembles the male.

Chick—"Covered with pale brown down on all the upper parts of the body, the base of the down black, giving it a mottled appearance; forehead and crown of head like the back; lores and down above the eye with a rufous wash; a crescent shaped marking on the nape, black; sides of the forehead, pale rufous; down below the eye, on the cheeks, and all the under surface pure white; ear coverts and a patch on each side of the forehead, blackish brown; long down on the outsides of the thighs and under tail coverts tinged with fulvous; tips of pin feathers of inner secondaries and scapulars, fulvous; bill, olive-brown, the under mandible paler; legs and feet, olive grey; iris, dull greenish yellow."—(North).

Distribution—The Black-breasted Plover is found in all the non-tropical parts of Australia, including Tasmania, Kangaroo Island, and most of the islands of the Bass' Straits. They are still fairly common on the Adelaide plains, and in some parts, where not disturbed, become very tame. Unlike the Spur-winged Plover it does not favour wet and swampy country, but is generally to be found in dry plains, often such as are grassless and stony. Dry lagoon beds and fallow fields are favourite localities. Its range extends far into the interior.

Habits—They go in flocks from six or seven up to forty or fifty in number. As a rule they are very wary and difficult to approach on foot, especially in districts where they have been much disturbed, but can usually be easily stalked in a buggy or on horseback. When their backs are turned, to the observer, they harmonise wonderfully well with their

surroundings, and are distinguished with difficulty; on the other hand the white breast and black band are very conspicuous when seen face to face. If one of the flock be wounded the rest come to his rescue, circling and screaming round the intruder, and making bold dashes at him. They are not regular migrants, but wander from place to place as food or other consideration impel them. These flights are usually high in the air, and often take place at night; at such times they are only distinguished by their call.

Flight—Rapid and straight, with rather slow powerful wing beats. Occasionally the flight is zig zag, almost like that of a snipe. This kind of flight is most often seen in windy weather, and seems to be in play.

Song—A succession of loud harsh notes like kak-kak-kak—kak kak uttered when in flight, rarely uttered on the ground.

Food—Chiefly insects, such as grasshoppers, beetles, and caterpillars, occasionally worms; if insect life be scarce seeds are taken.

Nest—A few short pieces of grass in a depression of the ground. Sometimes the eggs are laid on the bare ground. When breeding the old birds become very cunning and brave, and are most energetic in trying to take one away from the young or eggs. When not too near the nest they will dart down on the intruder, often within a few inches of his face, making one believe he is near the nest, when as a matter of fact he is some distance off. The chicks when disturbed immediately scatter and squat, and become almost invisible, so that if a clutch of four be seen it is usually only the one upon which the eyes have been kept fixed that is caught. They are early breeders, eggs being commonly found in June, but in an early season they breed in May, or as soon as the green grass appears.

Eggs—Four in number, occasionally only three, of the usual ploverine pointed shape. They are placed in the nest with the pointed ends inwards.

Eggs—Ground colour, brown with a tinge of green, thickly and evenly covered with irregularly shaped spots and blotches, varying in colour from medium brown to almost black. Average measurement of 17 eggs, 4.28 x 3.20 c.m.

Largest egg, 4.60 x 3.25 c.m.

Smallest egg, 4.05 x 3.10 c.m.