

Notes upon the Black-breasted Plover  
(*Zonifer tricolor*, Vieillot).

(By S.A. WHITE, C.M.B.O.U.)

The Black-breasted Plover is widely distributed, being found all over Australia with the exception of the tropical parts. It also inhabits Tasmania, Kangaroo Island, and the Islands of Bass Straits. This bird's presence is soon known by its far-reaching, but musical note, which is given both upon the wing and on the ground; it moves over the ground in series of short runs, pausing in between. It was once very numerous upon the Adelaide Plains; especially here at the Reed-beds, where it is still to be seen, but not in such numbers as in the days gone by.



Eggs of the Black-breasted Plover (*Zonifer tijicolor*)  
S. A. White, Photo.



Black-breasted Plover's Nest in dry lumps of horse manure.  
S. A. White, Photo.

Black-breasted Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*) brooding on eggs.



S. A. White, Photo.

Still a few pairs nest every season upon my property, and I give them all the protection within my power. The Black-breasted Plover is one of our most useful birds, for it lives almost entirely upon insect life. Although found very often upon low swampy country it does not confine itself to this habitat for it can be seen in all manner of places, I have met with it in the dry interior, upon fallow land, in grassy valleys of the Ranges, and on the stony tableland country, as well as on the vast expanses of dry sand.

I do not look upon this bird as a migrant, but as one which shifts from place to place according to the food supply. I have noticed that it is very plentiful when crickets and grasshoppers are abundant.

It is a very intelligent bird, knowing when it is protected, and becoming very confident and tame under these conditions. Next to man the fox is now its greatest enemy, and there is no doubt great numbers of birds and their eggs fall victims to the wily fox, who works the ground systematically for their nests. The Plover moves about both by day and night, and it must take much of its food at night time, when many noxious insects are abroad. It is a very wary bird when molested, and can detect the approach of human beings long before they are seen, and will give the warning call, very much after the manner of the Spurwing (*Lobibyx novachollandiae*). The Black-breasted Plover is often heard at night, flying high, it is no doubt then shifting its quarters. Yet I have known this bird to remain within the radius of a mile for many months, and long after it has brought out its brood; it moves about as a rule in parties of ten or a dozen, but I have seen over thirty at times.

The eggs are from three to four in number; but in dry seasons I have known it to incubate two eggs; at times the eggs are laid on the bare ground without the semblance of a nest, while at others a few sticks or stones are placed around the eggs. Yet again, in rare instances a snug nest is formed of dry grass and rootlets.

The accompanying photographs illustrate the last two cases, in the one with three eggs a few sticks are placed around, in the other the nest was made in the centre of an old dry flattened out lump of horse manure, and the eggs were difficult to detect. It is an early breeder, for I have often seen nests in June, and in the case of the illustration of the four eggs, they were well incubated when seen on July 3rd. The young leave the nest very soon after being hatched, and they are of a dull brownish black in colour, and so like the earth on which

they squat at the slightest sign of danger, that it is almost impossible to pick them out unless they move. The old birds are very cunning in their efforts to draw the attention of the intruder from their nest, and will sometimes fly straight at one, when well away from the nest, to make believe the nest is close handy.

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