

## SHORT NOTE

### Consecutive use of the same nest scrape by spur-winged plover (*Vanellus miles*) and South Island pied oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus finschi*)

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It is well established that breeding-site fidelity is high among many wader species (Pierce 1989; Thompson & Hale 1989; Dowding & Chambers 1991), but it is generally unusual for waders to re-use the same nest scrape from one season to the next (Richards 1988; Terres 1996). The consecutive use of a nest by two different species is also unusual, although it is not uncommon among some bird groups such as birds of prey (Terres 1996) and burrow-nesting petrels (West 1994; West & Nilsson 1994).

On 2 October 1997 we found a spur-winged plover (*Vanellus miles*) nest containing one egg on the Ahuriri River bed, near Omarama in North Otago. We marked this with a stone cairn, 1.5 m from the nest. On 14 October the nest contained a complete clutch of 4 eggs. On subsequent checks there were 4 eggs until our final check on 23 November 1997, when the adults were seen with 3 chicks near the nest site.

In late August 1998, we relocated the former nest, our cairn being still intact. On 8 September, we observed a pair of spur-winged plovers and a pair of South Island pied oystercatchers (*Haematopus ostralegus finschi*), both behaving defensively close to the nest site. An inspection of the nest scrape showed that debris had been cleared and the bowl slightly widened and deepened. As no bird was observed actually attending the nest, it was not clear which of the two species had appropriated it.

On 20 September we found a spur-winged plover pair in possession, with 3 eggs in the nest. Oystercatchers were not seen close to the nest again until after the plovers had finished nesting and had moved away. As the spur-winged plovers that occupied the nest in the previous season had not been banded, we have no way of knowing whether the pair nesting in 1998 was the same as nested at this site in 1997. Two of the 3 eggs were hatching at the time of a nest check on 4 October. What we thought to be the same pair of plovers stayed in the general area for some weeks, and eventually fledged one chick.

We noticed a pair of South Island pied oystercatchers acting defensively near the spur-winged plover nest site on 17 October, and observed a single oystercatcher egg in the plovers' former nest scrape. The only change that the oystercatchers had made was to deepen the scrape slightly, forming a more distinct bowl. There were 2 oystercatcher eggs in the nest on 20 October and an adult was incubating. There were 2 eggs on 29 October and 1 November.

The nest was found empty on 5 November, with no sign of the adult oystercatchers. Crumpled egg fragments and many ants in the nest suggested that the clutch failed. At most, 17 days had passed since incubation began, which is well short of the usual 24-28 day incubation period (Heather & Robertson 1996).

Our observations of a spur-winged plover nest being used in two consecutive seasons adds this species to a list of at least nine New Zealand charadriiforms that occasionally re-use former nest scrapes: black-backed gull

(*Larus dominicanus*); black-fronted tern (*Sterna albostrigata*); wrybill (*Anarhynchus frontalis*); South Island pied oystercatcher (S. Butcher pers. comm.; pers. obs.); Chatham Island pied oystercatcher (*Haematopus chathamensis*); (F. Schmechel pers. comm.); banded dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*) (Soper 1963; Crossland & Butcher unpubl. data); New Zealand shore plover (*Thinornis novaeseelandiae*) (Davis 1994); and New Zealand snipe (*Coenocorypha aucklandica*) (Miskelly 1999).

Re-use of nest scrapes by spur-winged plovers has been observed before in Australia. Allen (1967) recorded the use of an identical nest site for three successive years, while Thomas (1969) observed a pair laying a replacement clutch in the same nest within a single breeding season.

We have found no previous record of South Island pied oystercatchers nesting in a recently used spur-winged plover nest. In monitoring over 80 oystercatcher and 30 spur-winged plover nests on South Island riverbeds between 1984 and 1999, AC has not observed this behaviour before. Among other charadriiforms, use by one species of another bird species' nest is apparently rare: some *Tringa* sandpipers, notably green sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*); solitary sandpiper (*T. solitaria*); and wood sandpiper (*T. glareola*) re-use the old nests of passerines up to the size of crows, and occasionally those of pigeons (Cramp & Simmons 1983; Richards 1988; Terres 1996).

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