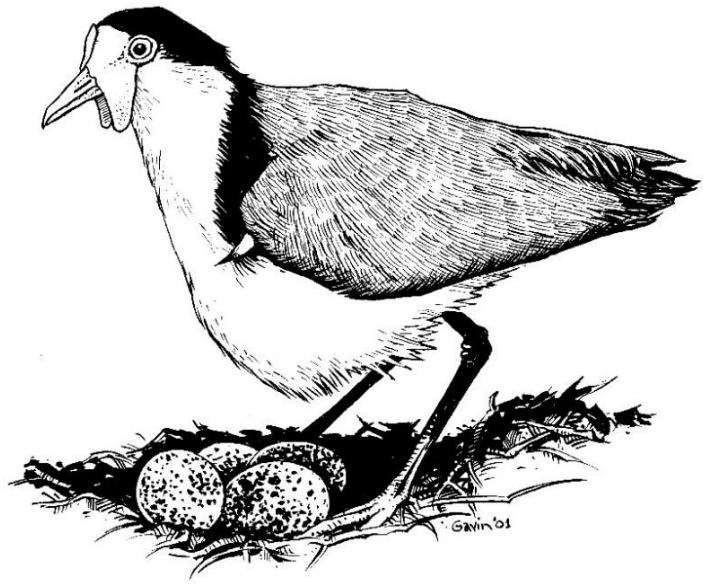


Living with masked lapwings

Masked lapwings (a type of plover) are native birds protected under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. It is illegal to chase, harass or kill a masked lapwing.

For most of the year masked lapwings go unnoticed, living in small flocks near water, feeding on worms, insects and seeds. In late winter a pair may come together after bobbing their heads and calling to each other. They choose a place to nest in an open, grassy area, keeping intruders away with their ear-piercing screech and fast, low swoop. Pairs will often return to the same place every breeding season.

Male and female masked lapwings are difficult to tell apart. Both have long reddish legs and brown wings. The male has slightly larger yellow wattles on its face.



The female lays three or four brown speckled eggs on the ground in a small depression called a scrape. Sometimes nests have been seen on flat roofs, keeping them safe from lawn mowers, pets and foxes. The parents take turns sitting on the nest and guarding it from intruders twenty-four hours a day. It is no wonder they seem cranky. They never get a good night's sleep. They live on the ground and have only short naps because they must watch out for any danger that may be lurking. You may even hear them calling at night if they are disturbed by a night time hunter.

A masked lapwing will try to distract anything that approaches too closely. It may hop on one leg or pretend to have a broken wing to lure an intruder away from the nest. If you continue to go too close, it may force you on a different path by screeching and flapping around you.

Chicks leave the nest at around six weeks. The parents are more relaxed. Only a few hours after hatching the chicks have a full covering of speckled downy feathers and leave the nest to feed themselves. The parents have their own language to guide the chicks. Long calls tell the chicks to come closer, while a single chirp every few seconds tells them to move away. The chicks are fully grown after five months and stay with their parents for up to two years, when they finally move on to find their own place to nest. Masked lapwings are known to live up to 12 years of age.

Another name for a masked lapwing is a spur-winged plover because of the non-poisonous, yellow spur on the front edge of its wing. It uses the spur to attack other birds, such as ravens, as well as cats, dogs and foxes when they try to attack the young chicks. Spur strikes on people are rare.

If you can see a masked lapwing up ahead, try to avoid it by taking a wider path around it or be prepared to cover your head and walk crouched down. They are only trying to protect their young.

To avoid conflict, remember:

- L**apwings swoop and call loudly to protect their young
- A**void them or go around the nesting area, until nesting season is finished
- P**rotect your head with a hat and sunglasses or an umbrella if you must pass them
- W**alk quickly through the area. Do not run or speed past on a bike
- I**nform others or erect signs so they can choose to avoid the area
- N**ever harm birds, chick or eggs. It is illegal to chase or harass masked lapwings
- G**round dwellers are always alert and try to defend their chicks from all intruders