

Spur-winged Lapwing

Vanellus spinosus

Bird

Scientific Name

Vanellus spinosus

Other Names

None

Range

Sub-Saharan belt of Africa and the eastern Mediterranean

Habitat

Savannas and grasslands near fresh water

Average Size

Height: 9 – 11 in.

Wingspan: 27 – 31 in.

Weight: 127 – 177 g.

Description

A medium-large wading bird with a black crown, chest, foreneck stripe and tail. The face, back of the neck and belly are white, and the wings and back are light brown. The bill and long legs are black.

Diet

In the wild: Insects, mollusks and fish

In captivity: Insects and prepared waterfowl and insectivore chow

Lifespan

In the wild: 17 years

In captivity: 17 + years

Incubation

28 days

Fledging Period

7 – 8 weeks

Clutch Size

2 eggs

Predators

Birds of prey and small carnivores

Population Status

Not Threatened



Behavior

Spur-winged Lapwings are ambush predators that hunt throughout the day and/or night depending upon the density of prey and predators in any particular habitat. This species forages by waiting stealthily for its prey to show itself, then running rapidly and stabbing the animal with its beak.

If prey is not abundant, they will flush animals from their hiding spots by stamping their feet (foot trembling) in the water and shrubbery.

Throughout its African range, this species is largely sedentary and makes only local, irregular movements. Mediterranean populations, however, have been documented as being fully migratory, moving north and south with the seasonal changes.

Spur-winged Lapwings are found in flocks of 15 to over 100 and are very vocal and communicative with upwards of ten different vocalizations used for warnings, alarms, threats and attracting mates.

Reproduction and Breeding

Because of the large geographical range of this species, the breeding season is quite variable. The species nests from March to September in western Africa and the eastern Mediterranean, with the breeding times varying greatly elsewhere.

Spur-winged Lapwings nest in solitary pairs or, where nest territories are actively guarded against other bird species, loose colonies. The males combine complex mating calls with dancing as courtship rituals to attract a female. The monogamous pair will build a nest together in a shallow scrape on the ground that is sometimes lined with vegetation.

Both the male and female incubate and feed the young. If the pair re-clutches in the same year, the male tends to the older chicks while the female incubates the second clutch of eggs. The juvenile birds are independent after fledging, but will often remain in the area until the next breeding season.

Conservation

Although the Spur-winged Lapwing has suffered from past declines as a result of natural and semi-natural salt marsh habitat loss and exposure to local hunting pressures, the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) lists this species as one of least concern. Because this species has an extremely large range, it does not approach the thresholds for a vulnerable listing under the range size criterion. In addition, the population trend appears to be increasing, so the species does not approach the thresholds for a vulnerable listing under the population trend criterion either.



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Amazing Facts

The bird got its name because of a spur, like a small claw, hidden among the feathers at the front edge of each of its wings.

Although this is considered a wading bird, they are found in a variety of dry habitats as well.

One of the calls most often heard from the Spur-winged Lapwing is an alert for human interlopers. In some areas of Africa, these birds have even included the sight of motorized vehicles in their alarm calls.

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