

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher, Jim Butler



BREEDING IN FULL VIEW

The Plover is notorious for its gutsy defence of its nesting site. This behaviour stems from the plover's uncommon reproductive process of nesting on open cleared ground. To achieve reproductive success many birds hide their nests from predators, but not the plover! They place it in full view so that they can clearly see the approach of all nest robbers. In the suburbs their nests are often placed in carparks and on playing fields, lawns and roofs.

The plover's strategy is to force their predators out into the open and then protect the eggs and chicks by repelling the raiders with a range of techniques. The photo shows the plover's menacing visage! Much like a battle helmet, large fleshy wattles cover the forehead and dangle down beside the beak; and threatening black-tipped barbs protrude ready to strike. This all says 'don't mess with me' as they harass and drive-off the exposed predators! Then there are threats: raucous alarm calls; aerial swooping; and standing defiantly tall with extended wings. Finally, they trick the predator: while one parent hurriedly departs with the chicks,

the other limps off in the opposite direction inviting an easy kill. Arguably, the plover has evolved the most risk-prone form of parental care because it invites confrontation with predators; but clearly it is very effective because plovers are plentiful.

Plovers on-ground nests and full-on attack of predators, inevitably leads to 'conflict' with us. They perceive us as predators. Research has been done on how to manage this conflict. Plovers can discriminate between different human activities (walking and lawn-mowing) and they select their defensive behaviours to suit. One anti-swooping tactic – placing-eye stickers on the back of our heads – was tested. It decreased swooping of pedestrians but increased swooping of those mowing lawns. So, eye-stickers are an effective method to mitigate 'conflict' in some, but not all, circumstances.

Respect plover parents

– Jim

Image: Plover or Masked Lapwing taken by Ed Frazer at Brookfield



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