

RECENT RECORDS OF THE ORIENTAL PLOVER

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INTRODUCTION

The Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus* is known to breed in arid inland areas of northern China and Mongolia. It visits northern Australia in the austral summer, being found in great numbers in dry grassland and thinly vegetated plains, both near to and remote from water (Storr 1977, 1980). Records from southern Australia are rare. In South Australia, three records are to be treated as confirmed in Parker *et al.* (forthcoming): one in a claypan at Kolendo in the Gawler Ranges, on 13 September 1912; over 50 in dry claypans 100 miles due east of the Musgrave Ranges, in September to October 1928; and two in an almost dry dam near Sutherlands, on 30 January 1968.

The Caspian Plover *C. asiaticus* is very similar in appearance, and apparently in ecology, and has been recorded once in Australia (Condon 1975). It can, according to the literature (Prater *et al.* 1977; Dement'ev *et al.* 1951) be distinguished from the Oriental Plover in non-breeding plumage by:—whitish underwings and axillaries (grey in Oriental); distinct but small wingbar (indistinct or unnoticeable in Oriental); duller legs (variable in both species but never pure yellow as in Oriental); slightly smaller size; pink-buff edges to coverts and/or upperparts generally (pale buff to pale chestnut in Oriental — evidently a slight distinction).

The task of distinguishing the Caspian from the Oriental Plover tends, unfortunately, to be neglected by observers.

THE RECENT RECORDS

In addition to the foregoing records, there are five recent ones which are treated as confirmed in this paper, for reasons given below.

1. One Oriental Plover was seen by I. A. May, feeding on kelp on an ocean beach a little north of Beachport (37° 29' S, 140° 00' E) on 7 January 1977 (further details to be published by the observer in an article on Beachport Conservation Park).
2. One seen by L. P. Pedler in a sparsely vegetated pasture at Collinsfield (33° 36' S, 138° 14' E) on 13 to 22 October 1977 (also to be published by observer).
3. Nine were seen together in a temporarily flooded claypan about six km S of Port Neill (34° 07' S, 136° 21' E) by T. Cox on 12 December 1977.
4. Two were seen together on bare mud besides water at the ICI saltfields near Adelaide by D. Harper, R. Jaensch and others on 2 February 1981.
5. Eighteen were seen resting together in wet mud and shallow water in the Coorong, eight km S of Magrath Flat (35° 52' S, 139° 24' E), on 8 February 1981, by J. Hatch, myself and others.

In each case the birds were identified as Oriental Plovers by some or all of the following features:— dimensions like those of a Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, but with proportionately longer legs and wings, and thinner bill; yellow legs; indistinct or unnoticeable wingbar; all-brown rump; back darker, duller and less mottled than that of Golden Plover; tail mainly the same colour as back and rump, but noticed (by Pedler alone) to be narrowly edged and tipped white.

The birds seen by Pedler and Hatch were distinguished from the Caspian Plover by grey underwings and axillaries, as well as the indistinct or unnoticeable wingbars, and yellow legs. Those seen by Harper were distinguished by indistinct wingbars, yellow legs, and "rich buff to dull rufous scapulars". Those seen by Cox were distinguished by "yellow to orange" legs, and the one seen by May by lack of wingbar.

Different ages and sexes can be identified in the foregoing records. Two of the Coorong birds were adult males in full breeding plumage, and six others closely resembled them. The two had a nape differing from the back in being fairly bright rufous; a white chin and frons; bright rufous breast, separated from white belly by a black band about one centimetre or more in width; the eyebrows pale buff; and the crown and ear coverts the same colour as the back. One of the Sutherlands birds (of which the observer, E. F. Boehm, retains a slide which I have seen) was also an adult male in fairly advanced breeding plumage. The ICI saltfields birds seemed to be adult males coming into breeding plumage, because they had white chins, breasts which were rich brown with a chestnut tinge, and an indistinct dark band dividing the breast from an off-white upper abdomen.

The Collinsfield bird seemed to be an adult male because of its indistinct greyish chest band. Some of the Coorong birds may have been adult females, because they had a pale buff throat, a brown breast with no breast band, and no mottling on the upperparts. One or two of the Coorong birds seemed to be immatures, because they had backs mottled with buff, a throat and breast which were pale buff with a greyish tinge, and a blackish smudge in place of a breast band.

DISCUSSION

Noteworthy in the South Australian records is the diversity of habitat and region. These features are also apparent in the New South Wales records (Morris *et al.* 1981). Birds in both States have been recorded on dry mud and by fresh water in arid inland regions, on relatively rich grassland, in saltfields, a saline estuary and an ocean beach.

Another interesting feature of the S.A. records is the high degree of mobility, indicated by the utilization of ephemeral habitat (in Cox's record), and by the reluctance of most of the birds concerned to remain in the area where they were found. The Sutherlands, Port Neill, ICI, Coorong (and perhaps the Beachport) birds seem to have left the area completely after they were seen. The Collinsfield bird stayed in the same area for at least ten days, but could not be found on the eleventh. Birds at Bankstown airport near Sydney (Larkins & McGill 1978) seem unusual in staying in the same place for ten weeks or more, from November 1977 to January 1978.

In three of the S.A. cases, and at least two of the N.S.W. ones, the birds were recorded in

flocks, of six to 50+. The solitary Collinsfield bird was noted to associate briefly with another species, the Inland Dotterel *Peltohyas australis*. It is worth noting that a comparatively large flock (for southern Australia) of 18 was seen near Newcastle in N.S.W. on 6 January 1981 (Bigg 1981), not long before the two at ICI saltfields and the 18 on the Coorong.

To judge by the records in this paper, this species seems to come into breeding plumage earlier than the other species of *Charadrius* (*mongolus* and *leschenaultii*), or of charadrii in general, which visit southern Australia from the northern hemisphere. Especially interesting in this respect was one of the Newcastle birds just mentioned, which was in advanced breeding plumage as early as 6 January.

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