

AN UNUSUAL FORAGING HABITAT OF THE RED-CAPPED PLOVER. On 6 March 1995 while driving along the Eyre Highway about 40 km E of Ceduna, South Australia, I flushed a small wader from the road in front of my vehicle. I immediately stopped the car, and observed the bird, a Red-capped Plover *Charadrius ruficapillus*. The morning was overcast but bright and warm. Although rain had fallen within the previous 24 hours, there was no wetland or other surface water in the area.

The Red-capped Plover was actively foraging on the recently resealed bitumen road, in the stop-run-peck pattern typical of the species. While foraging, the plover would occasionally head-bob. Inspection of the road surface did not reveal any obvious food sources. Food items may have become stuck in the bitumen as it hardened, or might have been knocked down or run over by passing traffic (e.g. insects).

Each time a vehicle passed by, the plover reacted in a similar way: at a distance of about 150 m the plover stopped feeding and watched the approaching vehicle; as the vehicle closed in, the plover ran directly away from the oncoming vehicle for 1–2 m, then in the last seconds it flew at right angles to the road, narrowly avoiding a collision with the vehicle. The bird then circled back to the road and after a short time resumed foraging. During these observations the rate of disturbance by vehicles was estimated at about once per minute. The speed limit on this section of the road was 100 kph. On one occasion when I attempted to slowly move my car alongside the bird, the plover ran across the gutter and up an adjoining embankment before taking flight, circling and returning to the road.

Red-capped Plovers are usually recorded foraging around margins of marine and terrestrial wetlands, including intertidal mudflats, sandy beaches, lakesides, stream banks and saltmarshes; they occasionally also forage in pastures and on gibber plains (Marchant and Higgins 1993). There do not appear to be any previous observations of Red-capped Plovers foraging on sealed roads. However other waders have been recorded foraging on sealed surfaces, e.g. Black-fronted Plovers *Elseya melanops*, Common Sandpipers *Tringa hypoleucos* and Red-kneed Dotterels *Erythrogonys cinctus* have been seen foraging on a concrete causeway in a riverbed (Johnson 1990). Indeed, another member of the genus *Charadrius*, the Double-banded Plover *C. bicinctus* has been recorded running on sealed footpaths and roads, and foraging on tar-seal in the centre of a town in New Zealand (Sibson 1978).

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