

viridis), and nestlings by lion-tailed macaque. However, this is the first report of predation on the nests of two large columbids by the lion-tailed macaque. A recent study identified only a single predator species, Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*, of the nests of Nilgiri Wood Pigeon, although about 80% of nests were lost by predation (Somasundaram 2006). To my knowledge there is no record of any other nest predators of Mountain Imperial Pigeon. The observations presented here indicate that the arboreal predators like macaques play an important role in the population dynamics of open nesters such as pigeons. Further intensive studies using video surveillance monitoring of predation may help in understanding the relative significance of macaques as nest predators of rainforest birds.

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Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus* at Tal Chhappar: first record for Rajasthan

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On receiving a message, and three images, of a 'new' plover from SSP, on the evening of 23 August 2009, HSS and GB dashed to Tal Chhappar Wildlife Sanctuary the next morning. Despite the poor quality of the images, they were quite confident that the 'new' bird was a Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*, a species never recorded before in Rajasthan. On 24 August 2009 HSS and GB looked for the bird where SSP had seen it in Tal Chhappar but they did not find it. However, on 25 August 2009 the bird was spotted at 0842 hrs, after a search of one hour. They observed it for about 20 min while it fed on sparsely covered ground.

Caspian Plover does not appear to have been previously reported from Rajasthan, and is rarely reported from across the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1980; Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

Description

The bird was an adult male in winter plumage. It still retained some of the strong markings of an adult male in breeding plumage.

Its crown, nape, mantle, and entire upper-parts were sandy brown while the tail-coverts were brown above, and white below. The feather fringes were almost pink-buff, almost rufous, being fresh.

The extensive greyish-brown unbroken breast-band showed vestiges of breeding plumage in the form of three-four rusty patches. Even the black edge, which is below the rusty band, was partially present. The forehead, lores, cheeks, supercilium, and throat were pure white; a small patch in front of the eyes appeared almost black. The supercilium was long, broadening behind the eye. The wing tips projected well beyond the tail-tip,

(whereas they are of equal lengths in Greater Sand and Lesser Plover).

Bare parts: Bill black, longish and rather slim. Iris dark brown. Legs longish and greyish-green.

Foraging/general behaviour

The Tal Chhappar bird was largely solitary, feeding over open seared patches of the grassland. At times it loosely associated with a flock of Indian Courser *Cursorius coromandelicus* and three–four Greater Sand Plover *C. leschenaultii*. Its feeding behaviour was almost like that of an Indian Courser, standing upright briefly, then running and stopping to peck at the ground. It was partial to patches where vegetation was very short and on the morning of 25 August we found it foraging where ‘loonias’ (*Portulaca* sp.), and ‘moothia’ (*Cyperus rotundus*) grew.

The bird was very approachable in a vehicle, at times down to c. 5 m. Only once did it fly a short distance when we were too close. It remained at Tal Chhappar for 13 days, until it was last seen on 4 September 2009.

Discussion

Historically the Caspian Plover has been treated as a vagrant in the Indian Subcontinent by various authorities (Ali & Ripley 1980; Grimmett *et al.* 1988; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). However, Ali & Ripley (1980) speculate that it could actually be, “possibly less rare but overlooked”.

Ali & Ripley (1980) documented that through most of the 19th century, and late into the 20th, sightings from the Indian Subcontinent have been sporadic: “a single specimen was shot near Ratnagiri” in c. 1880; one in Sri Lanka in February 1951, a pair in the Maldives Is. in November 1958, and another sight record in Sri Lanka (Norris 1964, *Loris* 10: 119). Sightings of this species have begun to occur with increasing frequency between 1985 and 2008 e.g., in Sri Lanka, there were “three in 1985, one in 1986, seven in 1987” (Hoffmann 1992); and Sri Lanka (Robson 1998).

From India, sightings have been reported from Delhi (Vyas 1996), Gujarat (Robson 2007; Sørensen & Tiwari 2009), Goa (Lainer 2004), Maharashtra (Prasad 2006), Pondicherry (Balachandran 1994), and Tamilnadu (Kazmierczak *et al.* 1993; Robson 1996).

One bird was sighted at Bajana jheel, Dasada, Little Rann of Kachchh (Gujarat) on 21 January 2007 (Arpit Deomurari *in litt.*).

Thus the species is probably not as rare as indicated in literature. Apparently very small numbers winter in the Indian Subcontinent, and occurrence of the Caspian Plover at Tal Chhappar is not entirely unexpected.

The local conditions also played a role for the bird to occur and stay at Tal Chhappar for few days. Usually the monsoon arrives in Tal Chhappar in the first / second week of July, and almost instantly the sanctuary is transformed into a lush grassland for a few months. Although the knee-high grass, teeming with grasshoppers and locusts attracts hundreds of harriers and buzzards to the sanctuary in late August and September, it is unsuitable for plovers to feed. However, thanks to early, but poor, rains this season, conditions were ideal for plovers, including Caspian Plover, during their autumn passage. Unexpected rains in June led to an early sprouting of grass, but this was followed by an extended dry spell in the sanctuary. The little grass that had grown was soon grazed by Black Buck *Antelope cervicapra*, and Blue Bull *Boselaphus tragocamelus*, and soon the sanctuary

appeared flat and dry by mid-August. Flat open areas with patches of sward attracted Kentish Plover *C. alexandrinus*, Lesser Sand Plover *C. mongolus*, Greater Sand Plover *C. leschenaultii*, and Caspian Plover during autumn passage.

In the last few years, a small number of birdwatchers have been actively using digital cameras and posting images on email groups. This has resulted in interesting information about the species and records. The Caspian

Plover at Tal Chhappar is an excellent example of this trend, as it was not merely reported as “seen on 23 August 2009,” but was photographed, and the images posted with alacrity to HSS and GB, by SSP, that very evening, enabling positive identification! Judicious and sensitive use of digital bird photography will help advance ornithology in the Indian Subcontinent in the years to come.

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Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*.

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