

Caspian Plover

Asiatiese Strandkiewiet

Charadrius asiaticus

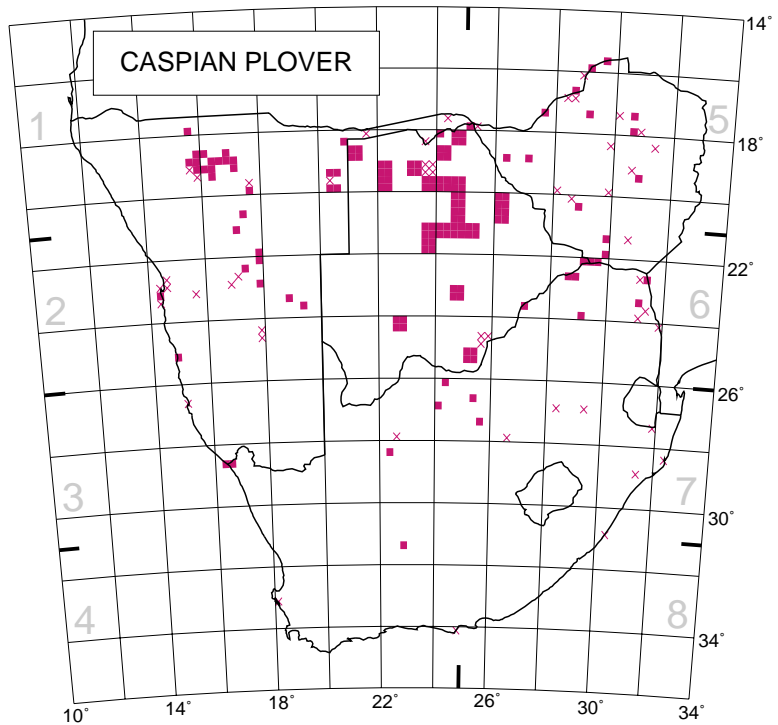
The only Palearctic migrant plover visiting the region to frequent dryland habitats, the Caspian Plover occurs in southern Africa mainly in the lacustrine grasslands on the northern periphery of the Kalahari in Botswana, with smaller numbers in northern Namibia, especially the Etosha Pan, and in western Zimbabwe. There is a scatter of records from the Transvaal and Free State dwindling southwards into the Cape Province and KwaZulu-Natal. The main nonbreeding grounds are on the plains of East Africa. It is easily overlooked unless in flight.

It occurs mainly in flocks of 20–50 birds, but in Botswana flocks of 600–1000 occur. Although found in a variety of different vegetation types, it favours open, sparsely vegetated plains (often saline), such as the lacustrine pan and fossil drainage systems of northern Botswana; it also occurs on short-grazed parts of broad floodplains and, on passage, on the damp sandbanks and pebble beds of the Zambezi River. Extensive ploughed lands are sometimes used, but it prefers an undisturbed substrate with grazed grass and bare patches; it avoids totally overgrazed areas lacking insect food.

It arrives from late-August, with the main influx September–November (Taylor 1979; Irwin 1981; Herremans 1994d). There are suggestions, not clearly supported by the models, that it undertakes a loop migration, arriving first in Zimbabwe and Botswana, moving westwards and southwestwards towards Namibia later when the summer rains commence there, before migrating northwards February–March (Irwin 1981; Ginn *et al.* 1989). The assumption of loop migration was derived from a lack of evidence for return passage in the east of the region (Irwin 1981), but return passage is inconspicuous even in the western part of the range (Taylor 1979), indicating that departure is simply very fast with few stopovers (Cramp *et al.* 1983; Urban *et al.* 1986). Arrival on the breeding grounds, which lie in the steppes to the east of the Caspian Sea, is from early April (Cramp *et al.* 1983).

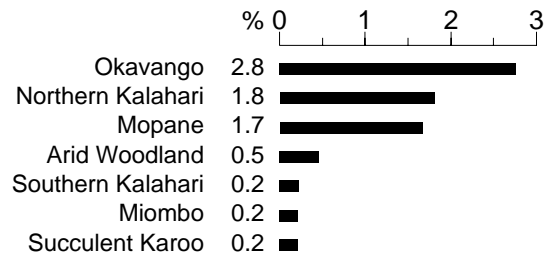
It was described as ‘widely spread’ at the beginning of the 20th century (Stark & Sclater 1906); for example, Brown (1905) observed large flocks in the vicinity of the Swartkops River estuary (3325DC). There has been a contraction in range and a decline in numbers, with a shift to the more mesic northeastern part of the region, particularly during drought years (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b). Until the late 1980s it was a rare visitor to Zimbabwe, except in the dry west; with droughts it has become annual; the largest number recorded was 108 at Lake Manyame (1730DC) in October 1987 (Tree 1988a). Negative factors are likely to include habitat destruction on its steppe breeding grounds. Owing to its nomadism and preference for well-grazed habitats, the Caspian Plover is not of conservation concern while in southern Africa.

A.J. Tree



Recorded in 198 grid cells, 4.4%
Total number of records: 328
Mean reporting rate for range: 3.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in Namib, Central Kalahari, Sweet Grasslands and Nama Karoo.

