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NOTE

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CEYLON KENTISH PLOVER *CHARADRIUS ALEXANDRINUS SEEBOHMI* BREEDING IN VANI VILASA SAGARA, HIRIYUR TALUKA, KARNATAKA, INDIA

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The Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* is a small and stocky wader belonging to the family charadriidae. Two subspecies occur in India: nominate race *C.a. alexandrinus* (Kentish Plover) and *C.a. seebohmi* (Ceylon Kentish Plover). *C.a. alexandrinus* has white hind collar, rufous cap and a prominent black fore-crown and eye-stripe during the breeding season. In the Indian sub-continent, it breeds in western Pakistan, northern India, and Gujarat (Ali & Ripley 1983) and spends the winter in the coastal and inland wetlands of the rest of India (Barnes 1887, 1891; Bulkley 1893; Dharmakumarsinhji 1947, 1950; Ali & Ripley 1983; Zöckler et al. 2005; Kasambe & Wadatkar 2007; Ashok 2009; Grimmett et al. 2011; Hippargi & Zambre 2013; Fernandes & Besten 2013). *C.a. seebohmi* is slightly smaller than the nominate race and lacks the black fore-crown and eye-stripe during the breeding season. *C.a. seebohmi* breeds in Sri Lanka and some parts of the southeastern coast of India-Cuddalore (Krebs 1956; Ali & Ripley 1983), Chengalpattu-Chennai, and Point Calimere (Melluish 1966; Futehally 2006),

and in Upper Wardha Dam at Vidarbha, Maharashtra (Kasambe & Wadatkar 2007; Kasambe 2007). Yet, at Pulicat Lake, breeding birds were not identified up to the sub-species level. Unlike the nominate race, the breeding and wintering range of *C.a. seebohmi* appear to be narrow and hence identifying their breeding sites is important for the conservation of this range-restricted sub-species. In this context, we report a breeding observation of the Ceylon Kentish Plover in Vani Vilasa Sagara of Karnataka for the first time.

Vani Vilasa Sagara (VV Sagara) (13.891466°N & 76.477886°E; 648m) was constructed during the Mysore Maharaja's period across river Vedavathi to irrigate nearly 100km² agriculture fields in Hiriyyur and Chellakere Taluka of Chitradurga District. Within the dam area, Onion *Allium cepa* and Groundnut *Arachis hypogaea* are extensively cultivated above the maximum water level. The dam is surrounded by hilly savannah grasslands and open thorny scrub forests. We recorded nearly 42 species of water birds including Near-threatened species, viz.: River Tern *Sterna aurantia*, Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*, and Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*. During our bird survey on 6 May 2017 in the forest areas of VV Sagara, we observed a few foraging terns over the dam water around 13:00hr. Upon approaching the water, we observed a sparse flock of small waders on the edges of the water and subsequently, it turned out to be Kentish Plovers. Meanwhile, during our search for



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Figure 1. Breeding records of the Ceylon Kentish Plover in southern peninsular India

nests of ground nesting birds such as larks and lapwings in the grasslands and barren soil of backwater area, we found two unidentified active nests: one on a small depression in the grass, which had two eggs (Image 1) and another on wet bare soil that had a chick. We stayed away from the nest to allow the parent birds to come back to the nest. One Kentish Plover approached the nest and stood over it for a while (Images 2 & 3). Upon confirming the species, we took documentation shots and videos. While examining the photographs it was noticed that the bird's plumage lacked a black forehead band and rufous wash on the crown that matched with the Ceylon Kentish Plover *C. a. seebohmi*. It is difficult to differentiate from the nominate race during winter. Since we observed incubating individuals, it was easy to differentiate it from the nominate race.

Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) mentioned that the northern distribution limit of the *C.a. seebohmi* is not demarcated and the Kentish Plovers observed in the south are expected to be *C.a. seebohmi*. The Kentish Plover is known as a winter visitor to the coastal and inland habitats of Karnataka (Grimmett et al. 2011). While reviewing existing breeding records of the Kentish Plover across Peninsular India, it is observed that a small



Image 1. Close view of eggs of the Ceylon Kentish Plover



Images 2 & 3. Incubating adults on nest

population of this sub-species might be breeding in the wetlands of southern India and Maharashtra (Krebs 1956; Melliush 1966; Ali & Ripley 1983; Futehally 2006) but there was no published literature on the breeding of *C.a. seebohmi* in Karnataka (Fig. 1). Hence, the current

breeding report of Kentish Plover in VV Sagara might be the first breeding record of the sub-species for the state. Furthermore, the current observation also indicates that the sub-species might be breeding in other wetlands of Karnataka. Therefore, large-scale seasonal monitoring of birds in major tanks/lakes in southern India is a prerequisite to enhance our knowledge on the breeding sites of this sub-species along with other ground nesting birds.

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