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### A new Kenyan breeding site for the Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Populations of the Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* that are resident in the Afrotropical region are known to breed in several areas of southern Africa, in Kenya and north-eastern Tanzania, and in the Awash Valley of north-eastern Ethiopia (Urban *et al.* 1986). Instances of breeding in Kenya are confined to an old record from Lake Nakuru (Jackson 1938), and annual nesting of small numbers around Lake Magadi (Britton 1980, EANHS nest record cards). Another old record, of large numbers breeding on freshwater marshes near Nyeri, 0°25'S, 36°57'E, (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1957), is considered doubtful (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989).

A third Kenyan breeding site was discovered on 28 June 1989 about 1.5 km west of Amboseli Lodge (2°39'S, 37°16'E), along the main Ol Tukai–Namanga road. The habitat consisted of a deeply rutted stretch of this road, which had been flooded to form small lagoons within which the road's ridges between the wheel-ruts, emerged a few centimetres above the water level to form long narrow islands of bare mud.

About ten adult Avocets were present, including two individuals which, sitting motionless on the narrow spits, may have been incubating. Positive evidence of breeding was provided by two flightless chicks, about one third grown, that were moving together along one of the muddy margins.

Although the other Kenyan breeding records are from the shores of large, permanent soda lakes within the rift valley, the low islands in these temporary lagoons provide a similar habitat. The water is most probably saline, since the soils of the Ol Tukai area are generally salty, and saline encrustations were present on the soil surface nearby. The date conforms to the June–July breeding peak given for Kenya and Tanzania by Brown & Britton (1980).

The road has diverted around this flooded area, and the birds showed no sign of being disturbed by the passage of numerous motor vehicles only 10 m or so away. Since this area is within the Amboseli National Park, however, very few, if any, pedestrians pass along this stretch.

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### Range retraction of the White-eyed Gull *Larus leucophthalmus* from the eastern coast of Africa

The White-eyed Gull *Larus leucophthalmus* is virtually restricted to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Although present in most parts of this range throughout the year, there are pronounced movements in the spring and autumn.

The shift is northwards during the northern summer, when birds reach the Gulf of Aqaba and are numerous in the Gulf of Suez (Cramp & Simmons 1983, Hollom *et al.* 1988). Breeding data are apparently few. Alexander (1963) mentions July–September “egg-dates”, but Harrison (1983) considers these imperfectly known, noting that breeding is perhaps during June–September. Nikolaus (1987) records egg-laying on the Sudan coast in August. From October/November to March/April, there is a return to the south and east, when the species becomes scarce in the northern reaches of its range but abundant in the Gulf of Aden (Cramp & Simmons 1983, Urban *et al.* 1986, Nikolaus 1987).

Vagrants to the south and east of the normal range appear to be associated with these movements. A single immature reached Lake Turkana in northern Kenya during early April (Hopson & Hopson 1975), and stragglers to the island of Masirah, off the southeastern coast of Oman, were in April and October (Cramp & Simmons 1983). Reports from far south along the eastern seaboard of Africa have come from southern Mozambique (20°S) during January 1947 and March 1972, and from South Africa (34°S) in January 1962. These southern African occurrences are quoted by Cramp & Simmons (1983), but doubted by Harrison (1983) and considered erroneous by Urban *et al.* (1986).

Hitherto unpublished records show that this gull formerly extended south to coastal Kenya (4°S) with some regularity. The birds were seen from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s during the February–early May period (though possibly not annually), at Horne’s Reef (4 km north of Kilifi) and at Kanamai (20 km north of Mombasa). Precise dates for the occurrences at these two localities were not kept since the regularity of the birds made them commonplace; but there were single records a little further south at Nyali (Mombasa) and Diani Beach (4°18S), on 2 February 1956 and 14 April 1958, respectively.

The birds were mainly adults, often observed at distances down to 20–30 m, and they were invariably perched amongst flocks of the much commoner Sooty Gull *L. hemprichii*. Their most obvious field characters were the deep red bill (dusky towards the tip), the white patch above and below the eye and, less obvious, their slightly slimmer build when compared with the Sooty Gulls. Three to six White-eyed Gulls in a flock of 20 or 30 Sooty Gulls was not unusual. The tendency for these two species to associate with each other is well known (Urban *et al.* 1986, Hollom *et al.* 1988).





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