

Voice

The call was a high-pitched trill, "trrrrrt", repeated often and usually the first sign of the species' presence. The song, heard once, was a rich medley of silvery trills, suggestive of a sunbird.

Behaviour

Seen in small groups of three to four (up to six) birds, often with other species in mixed bird parties. Fed on the ground, taking to trees when disturbed. Often seen sitting inactive in high branches. A disused nest was at a height of about 4 m on a branch of a small understory tree. In general appearance and construction it was like that of White-browed Sparrow-Weaver *Plocepasser mahali*.

References

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Cape Shoveler *Anas smithii* the first record for Tanzania

On 9 October 1997 we were counting waterbirds on one of our local wetlands 2 km south of Boma Ng'ombe, west Kilimanjaro, when we found a Cape Shoveler *Anas smithii*. We had clear but distant views through a 30x telescope and returned the following day to photograph the bird. The record has been accepted by the East African Rarities Committee as the first for Tanzania.

The wetlands are ephemeral, fed by the south-western foothills of Mt. Kilimanjaro. On the day there were nearly 500 waterbirds of 31 species present amongst much emergent and floating vegetation. It is unusual for these pools to hold water as late as October but the previous long rains had been heavier and later than normal. The shoveler was not associating with any other waterbirds and none of the other species present were unusual for the locality.

There are no collections of exotic waterbirds in Tanzania and none can be traced in Kenya so the likelihood that this bird had escaped from captivity seems remote. As a breeding species in southern Africa the Cape Shoveler is more or less confined to fresh water habitats. Peak laying in Zimbabwe, the nearest breeding population to Tanzania, is July–September (Hockey *et al.* 2005). The species is described as nomadic and subject to restlessness (Brown *et al.* 1982). It is a rare visitor to Zambia between May and November with

only 6 acceptable records (Leonard 1999, Dowsett *et al.* in prep. *The Birds of Zambia*) and none further north than 15° S. The current record roughly doubles the distance that past vagrants to Zambia have wandered.

What was almost certainly the same bird was observed in Arusha National Park (30 km to the northwest) the following week. Daudi Maige, a park ranger, submitted this record to the Tanzania Bird Atlas (Baker & Baker in prep. *Birds of Tanzania: an atlas of distribution and seasonality* <http://tanzaniabirdatlas.com>) without knowledge of our sighting

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A photograph of this bird was published in *Scopus* 24, p54 (editor).

Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus* feeding grounds in northern Tanzania

Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus* is currently evaluated as a species of least concern (www.iucnredlist.org, accessed November 2006) with a world population estimate of 40 000–55 000 individuals (Delany & Scott 2002). Caspian Plover breeds in Central Asia and migrates to southern Asia and Africa for the winter (Urban *et al.* 1986, Maclean 1988). The Serengeti short grass plains have long been recognised as possibly the most important winter feeding grounds for Caspian Plover in East Africa (Britton 1980, Urban *et al.* 1986, Baker 1995, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996), but adjacent grasslands may be equally, if not more, important.

Between 10 and 14 January 2005, we counted 1678 Caspian Plovers in the Eyasi Basin of northern Tanzania during the Tanzania waterbird census. We counted 533 Caspian Plovers feeding on short grass plains in the Yaida Valley (03°51'S, 34°47'E) on 10 January and a further two flocks numbering 545 and 600 feeding on two of the Matala short grass plains (03°51'34"S, 34°47'15"E) between 12 and 14 January 2005.

398 Caspian Plovers counted on the southeast side of Lake Eyasi in 1995 (Baker 1995) were assumed to be using the shallow waters of the lake as a safe



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