

# Winter breeding and distraction display of the Cream-coloured Courser

Patrick Triplet & Pierre Yésou

Triplet, P. & Yésou, P. 1994. Winter breeding and distraction display of the Cream-coloured Courser. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 72: 32.

One pair of Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor* laid in December in Senegal, the first breeding record for the species during the winter (October-January) period. The distraction display performed by this pair consisted in false nest-scraping, crouching and mock-brooding, as shown by Egyptian Plover *Pluvianus aegyptius*.

Triplet, P. & Yésou, P., CNERA Avifaune Migratrice, Office National de la Chasse, 53 rue Russeil, F-44000 Nantes, France.

On 12 January 1994 we observed a pair of Cream-coloured *Cursorius cursor* with a chick between Ndiaye and Tidem (16° 05' N, 16° 10' W) in Senegal, at the very south-western limit of the species breeding range. The chick was no more than ten days old, thus laying must have occurred in the first half of December. The species laying date is known to vary from February-May to April-September according to the area, with the only published records for Mauritania and Senegal in April-May (Cramp & Simmons 1983; Urban *et al.* 1986; Morel & Morel 1990). Our record thus fell well outside the usual breeding period and occurred in the coolest part of the dry season.

The distraction display performed by this pair differed markedly from the open wings and fanned tailed posture and injury-feigning type behaviour mentioned for this species by Cramp & Simmons (1983) and Urban *et al.* (1986).

When we were at c. 20 m from it, the sandy-coloured chick crouched down in a partly vegetated area and stayed remarkably concealed. Then the parents flew c. 60 m away to a large area of bare sand where they began to move in a direction opposite to the chick, watching us all the time. After a few tens of metres they stood still for some time, facing us in an erect posture. Then one individual made as if to sit on a nest, although with exaggerated scraping movements which put a lot of dust in the air, all to time looking at us without any head movement towards the would-be egg or chick under it. It maintained this position for 5-10 seconds, then stood up, keeping the legs folded and the neck hunched for a similar duration before performing its pseudo-scraping/incubation display again for some seconds.

As we did not move, the pair walked closer to us, stopping every 5-10 m. At each stop the birds stayed erect, motionless, for at least one minute before one individual, apparently always the same, resumed for 2-3 times the imitation of a bird sitting on a nest. On one occasion it stayed still and relaxed for a longer period, sufficient to make us believe that it could have really been protecting a

second young: we were ready to go to it when it stood up again showing that it was, however, still luring us. This stratagem lasted for about 10 minutes, during which time the birds moved in various directions, coming up to 20 m from us, but always at the opposite of the chick. We then decided to leave them in peace and left the area.

This behaviour recalls the displacement brooding used by Burchell's Courser *C. rufus* (Urban *et al.* 1986) and, particularly, the distraction display of Egyptian Plover *Pluvianus aegyptius* which includes making false nest-scrapes, crouching and mock-brooding (Cramp & Simmons 1983). Such ethological similarities reinforce the close but still debated taxonomic relationships between these two genera.

## REFERENCES

- Cramp, S. & Simmons, K.E.L. 1983. *The birds of the Western Palearctic*. Vol. III. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Morel, G.J. & Morel M.Y. 1990. *Les Oiseaux de Sénégalie*. ORSTOM, Paris.
- Urban, E.K, Fry C.H. & Keith S. 1986. *The birds of Africa*. Vol. II. Academic Press, London.

