

December nesting of the Collared Plover in western Mexico

With notes on identification

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DURING THE WINTER of 1977-1978 I spent some months in San Blas, Nayarit, Mexico studying the abundant bird life of this remarkable area. Having a particular interest in shorebirds, I wanted to find the Collared Plover (*Charadrius collaris*), which has been reported as occasional there (Clow 1977), and is found regularly in small numbers on the San Blas Christmas Bird Count. For several days I searched feeding flocks of Semipalmated Plover (*C. semipalmatus*), Wilson's Plover (*C. wilsonia*), and Snowy Plover (*C. alexandrinus*) on the outer beaches and estuary bars, but could not find any *C. collaris*. On November 30, 1977, I was scanning an extensive area of drying mud, or marisma, about 5 km inland when I discovered a small, beautifully marked plover feeding alone. As I approached the bird for a better view, a second bird, which seemed to be executing a "rodent run", appeared off to my left. The first bird was, beyond question, *C. collaris*. I retreated and concentrated on observing the bird that had run off to the left. After about 20 minutes it retraced its course, bobbed its head, and settled in the incubating posture typical of small plovers. As I rose to approach, the bird ran off at least 60 m with no display. The nest lay in a cattle track in damp but firm mud, sparsely lined with dry grass, and contained 3 tan-colored eggs, dotted and scrawled with dark brown. Meanwhile, the first bird observed stood motionless approximately 100 m from the nest.

On December 1, I again approached the nest, and again the incubating bird departed without any display. I then did a float check of one of the eggs, using lukewarm water. The egg floated with 10 mil-

limeters exposed on its larger end, suggesting that incubation was far advanced and that hatching would probably occur within a few days.

On December 2, I checked the nest again. An adult was incubating the 3 eggs, the second adult was present some 90 m from the nest site, and neither bird displayed.

I VISITED THE NEST again on December 4. One of the adults was incubating, and the second adult was about 45 m from the nest when I approached. The incubating bird departed as usual, but the second adult commenced a slow, continuous run with head and tail low, as if concealing its departure, unlike the short, rapid runs observed on the previous days. I could see no chicks. The nest contained one egg, and there were no shell fragments or evidence of predation. I believe the second adult was tending two chicks at some distance from the nest site when I approached. I could not find them near the nest, and assumed the second bird had hidden them before commencing its "concealed departure." I did not approach the area where the chicks may have been hidden for fear of stepping on them.

I returned to the site on the morning of December 5. I saw no adults and the remaining egg was cold. I assumed that the adults had taken the chicks to another area for feeding and rearing. I never saw them again. The remaining egg measured 30 by 21 millimeters.

In the literature I have found no previous nest record of this species north of South America, although evidence of breeding in Mexico has been reported and Monroe (1968) also reported downy young *C. collaris* in Honduras. A fledg-

ling just old enough to fly was collected May 13, 1952 at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Veracruz (Binford, 1968) and very small chicks were observed with their parents in Chiapas May 20, 1952 (Amadon and Eckelberry 1955). A year after my observation, on December 23, 1978, Kenn Kaufman found a nest near the town of San Blas.

"The nest locality was just inland from the town of San Blas, at the junction of Highway 54 and the road to Mantanchen Bay. The surrounding area was mangrove swamp, but there was a large open mudflat at the corner where the two roads met. The nest site was surrounded by an extensive patch of short ($\pm 3''$ tall), light green succulent plants; it was separated from the nearest open water by about 100 yards of damp flats. The nest itself was a circular scrape with a few dry twigs covering the bottom. When found, the nest contained one egg and one very recently hatched downy young (still had egg tooth on bill). While we examined the nest, both adults remained in the area, calling anxiously, but they gave no distraction display of any sort. On December 24 the nest was empty; there were no signs of predation, and both adults were showing apparent concern at our presence, so we assumed that the second egg had hatched and that both young were hiding nearby" (*pers. comm.*).

Later in December I located two more adult pairs of this uncommon plover. Both were in similar habitat—drying mud with shallow water nearby—and both pairs were exhibiting what I believe was courtship behavior. One bird approached the other, puffing out its breast feathers and, with head erect, chased the other bird in a continuous run for about

45 m Both birds then stopped abruptly, and the chase was repeated in the opposite direction. After perhaps 2 minutes of this performance, the birds resumed feeding together. Semipalmated and Wilson's plovers were present in the display area; *C. collaris* appeared to tolerate them. I found no more nests; possibly the two displaying pairs nested in a nearby marisma. By the end of December they had left the areas under observation.

DURING MY OBSERVATIONS I had an excellent opportunity to compare the field marks of the three species of small plovers which were present, and frequent observations of the Snowy Plover on the outer beaches during this period was also helpful for comparison. In field marks and behavior the Collared Plover most closely resembles the Semipalmated Plover during the winter months, but its posture is more like that of the Snowy Plover: rather erect. Although Peterson's excellent picture of *C. collaris* (Peterson and Chalif 1973), shows clearly the delicate cinnamon coloring on the head and neck, one must be close to the bird for this to show, even when the bird is in breeding plumage. The picture in Ha-

verschmidt (1968) might better be used to note this mark. More important, the leg color of *C. collaris* appeared in the field, very much the same as *C. semipalmatus* in winter: pale yellow-orange. Although both Ridgely (1976) and Land (1970) mention the yellowish color of the legs; most other books indicate that the legs are pink. There has been no study of its variations. The bill of *C. collaris* is dissimilar to that of *C. semipalmatus* in winter. *C. collaris* has a bill approximately 20% longer than *semipalmatus* but *collaris* is a considerably smaller bird whose weight is nearly 30% less than *semipalmatus*; its bill is long and thin (Haverschmidt 1968) compared to the short, stubby one of *semipalmatus*. Probably one of the most diagnostic field marks of the Collared Plover is its incomplete white collar. In fact, Collared Plover is a misnomer. *Collaris*, contrary to what is found in many works, is not closely related to the ringed plovers, all of which have white collars that completely encircle their necks; it is a member of a southern group of plovers, all slim in appearance and all of which have a reddish hood (*falklandicus*, *bicinctus*, and *ruficapillus*, for example) and no white on the back of the neck.

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RARE OCCURRENCE

A record of Blackburnian Warbler (*Dendroica fusca*) for southeastern Brazil

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ON DECEMBER 1, 1982 I found a brightly-colored, male-plumaged Blackburnian Warbler (*Dendroica fusca*) at an elevation of ca. 800 m in the Nova Lombardia Reserve, about 10 km west of Santa Tereza, Espirito Santo, southeastern Brazil. This reserve is a small island of humid montane forest surrounded by coffee plantations. The warbler associated with a mixed-species flock in the canopy that contained tanagers: Gilt-edged (*Tangara cyanoventris*), Green-headed (*T. seledon*) and Flame-crested (*Tachyphonus cristatus*) and furnariids Buff-fronted Foliage-gleaner (*Phylidor rufus*) and Streaked Xenops (*Xenops rutilans*). The warbler gleaned small leaves on slender branches about 20 m above ground. It was carefully watched for about 5 minutes by myself and the following observers (all familiar with the species): Harvey and Eva Gilston,

Norman Hill, and Fred and Naomi Loetscher.

The Blackburnian Warbler was previously known from the highlands of Bolivar and Amazonas, Venezuela (Meyer de Schauensee and Phelps 1978) south through the Andes to La Paz, Bolivia (Parker *et al.* 1980, Remsen and Traylor 1983). Meyer de Schauensee and Phelps (*op. cit.*) include northern Brazil in the range of the species, but I was unable to find the source of this reference. The mountains of Espirito Santo are over 3700 km from Amazonas, Venezuela and nearly 2800 km from La Paz, Bolivia. Whether our record represents an isolated occurrence or suggests that a small wintering population of *Dendroica fusca* has been overlooked in the highlands of southeastern Brazil cannot be determined at this time. The species should be watched for in mixed-species flocks of

canopy birds in this region.

I thank Augusto Ruschi for introducing me to the birds of Nova Lombardia and for sharing his extensive knowledge of them.

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