

SHORT NOTE

Probable visible migration of Grey Plovers *Pluvialis squatarola* at Swakopmund, South West Africa/Namibia

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Received May 1988; accepted June 1988

Between 19h05 and 19h15 on 8 April 1988, I observed, from the pier at Swakopmund, six flocks of grey plovers *Pluvialis squatarola*, totally c. 1000 birds, flying northwards. The flocks were flying parallel to the shore, c. 50 m from the beach at a height of c. 10 m. Each flock veered and rose slightly as it rounded the end of the pier. No further flocks were observed between 19h15 and 19h30.

Sandwich Harbour and Walvis Bay Lagoon are two major wetlands for waders, 40 km and 80 km to the south, respectively (Whitelaw *et al.* 1978). If these flocks were on migration, it is possible that they departed from either of these two wetlands shortly before sunset (18h45). I had observed grey plovers in near-complete breeding plumage at Walvis Bay Lagoon earlier on the same day, and at Langebaan Lagoon in the southwestern Cape three weeks earlier on 19 March 1988. Tarr & Tarr (1987) observed that densities of grey plover on the northern Skeleton Coast were highest in October and April, indicating that these are the peak months of southwards and northwards migration, respectively.

Grey plovers ringed in southern Africa have been recovered in northern Italy, Romania and the Crimean region of the U.S.S.R. This suggests that at least part of the population migrates along the east Atlantic coastline to the Gulf of Guinea, across the Sahara to the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, and on to their assumed breeding grounds in the Taimyr Peninsula (SAFRING unpubl. data). This route is close to the Great Circle linking southwestern Africa and the Taimyr Peninsula. Thus Swakopmund lies along a migration route for grey plovers.

There are no important feeding areas for grey plovers along the coast immediately to the north of Swakopmund to which these birds could have been flying (Un-

derhill & Whitelaw 1977). However, an alternative explanation for the movement of birds past Swakopmund at dusk is that they were *en route* to the salt works 5 km north of Swakopmund to roost overnight. This seems unlikely because there are also saltworks at Walvis Bay Lagoon at which they could roost.

Whether these particular birds were on migration or not, the pier at Swakopmund might prove to be strategic observation point for visible migration. If waders do tend to set out on migration from nearby wetlands at about sunset, they would pass Swakopmund before nightfall. Radar studies, such as those conducted by Grimes (1974) and Grimes and Vanderstichelen (1974) in Ghana, would also be valuable in observing migration along this section of coastline.

Support from the Foundation of Research Development of the CSIR is acknowledged. I am grateful to M. Waltner, A.J. Williams and M. Yates for useful discussions and to T.B. Oatley (SAFRING) for supplying recovery details.

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