

## POSSIBLE BREEDING OF THE COLLARED PRATINCOLE *Glareola pratincola* IN CROATIA

*Moguće gniježđenje pješčarke Glareola pratincola u Hrvatskoj*

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Two Collared Pratincoles *Glareola pratincola* were observed for a long time during the foraging flights for insects over the Kolansko blato (on the island of Pag, Northern Dalmatia, Croatia) on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019 in the afternoon. Afterwards, both birds landed on fallow farmland with low vegetation eastwards of the swamp. Based on the contrasting head-pattern and the colouring of the lores, the two individuals were identified as male and female.

After landing on the field, the female ran a few meters and headed directly to a scrape or hollow on dry ground. The bird settled down, and lowered itself until it was at the ground level and barely visible from a horizontal perspective. The male ran from the landing point just a few meters in the direction of the female, and remained there at a distance of one to two meters. During the entire observation period of about one hour, both birds no longer changed their locations and made no calls.

The date of the described observation falls within the main breeding season of the Collared Pratincole. The arrival in the breeding sites in Southern Europe takes place mainly in May (GLUTZ VON BLOTZHEIM *et al.* 1986, SNOW & PERRINS 1998). Mating often takes place in winter quarters. Laying in Southern Europe occurs predominantly during the second half of May (GLUTZ VON BLOTZHEIM *et al.* 1986). The birds' behaviour indicates possible breeding. In order to avoid disturbing the birds, inspection of the field area for the control of the nest trough was avoided. Therefore, it could not be confirmed whether a clutch or chicks were in the nest scrape. The observations were made only from a path, at the distance of about 50 meters.

In 2019, several observations of the Collared Pratincole were collected: On 7<sup>th</sup> May 2019, one individual was observed and photographed in Kolansko blato by BILJANA JEČMENICA and BOLESŁAW SŁOCIŃSKI near the observation site of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019. A flock of 10 birds was observed there, and seven of them were banded in mid-May 2019 by DEJAN GROHAR. Two of them (ringed birds) were observed at the same site by IVICA LOLIĆ on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2019. At least one of the two birds, which

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were observed on 1<sup>st</sup> June, was ringed. In Croatia, the Collared Pratincole can be observed only during its migration, from April to early June (STIPČEVIĆ 1996), and in the latest report from the rare birds' committee (BARIŠIĆ *et al.* 2016), it was classified as irregular migrant. In view of the earlier observations, it cannot be ruled out that the Collared Pratincole previously colonized the area surrounding Pag. More research is needed to determine if it a possible new breeding site north of the currently recognized Eastern Adriatic breeding range. Whether an increased occurrence north of the known distribution area, for example in 2009 (TAUTZ *et al.* 2010) took place in this context, ought to be left open.

The recent fragmented breeding range of the Collared Pratincole in Europe extends from the Iberian Peninsula eastwards across the Mediterranean, the Great Hungarian Plain and the Black Sea (HAGEMEIJER & BLAIR 1997). The Collared Pratincole, which form a part of the eastern Mediterranean population, are scattered to the south of the Balkan Peninsula in Albania and Greece (DELANY *et al.* 2009, HANDRINOS & AKRIOTIS 1997, BARTOVSKY *et al.* 1987), as well as in Montenegro, where the species currently breeds regularly in the Saline of Ulcinj (SCHNEIDER-JACOBY & SAVELJIĆ 2006, SAVELJIĆ & JOVIĆEVIĆ 2015). On the Italian side of the Adriatic, the breeding records have been confirmed in the area of Comacchio in Emilia-Romagna (BOLDREGHINI & MONTANARI 1978, CANOVA & SAINO 1983, TINARELLI & BACCETTI 1989, BRICHETTI & CHERUBINI 1996, 1997).

The European population has been declining since the 1970s due to habitat destruction (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2004). Especially in the northern part of the range, year-to-year fluctuations are characteristic. Brood stocks are influenced by climatic variations. The possible breeding behaviour described here might therefore be associated with unfavourable weather conditions (cool and rainy period) in the spring of 2019 in large parts of the Balkan Peninsula, forcing birds from more southerly breeding areas to “divert” to the north. While the nearest breeding site on the Eastern Adriatic coast in the Buna-Bojana delta (Montenegro / Albania) is located about 450 km away, the Italian breeding grounds in Northern Adriatic are only 200 km away from the island of Pag. This might also indicate the Italian origin of the observed birds.

The documented observation of the Collared Pratincole on the island of Pag is probably the first documented behaviour that might indicate possible breeding in Croatia. The evidence underscores the importance of the wetlands on the island of Pag and the necessity of strict protection of these areas. Threats to broods in the field consist mainly of cultivating fallow land for intensive (late seasonal) vegetable cultivation and grazing fallow land by large livestock.

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**SAŽETAK**

Par pješčarki, *Glareola pratincola*, promatran je 1. lipnja 2019. na Kolanskom blatu na otoku Pagu. Nakon hranjenja, ženka je legla u udubinu u tlu, a mužjak stao na oko 1-2 m od nje i tako su ostali kroz sljedećih sat vremena. Ovakvo ponašanje ukazuje na moguće gniježđenje. Na području Kolanskog blata, pješčarke su 2019. godine promatrane od početka svibnja. Najbliža gnjezdilišta nalaze se u Italiji i Crnoj Gori, na udaljenostima od 200-450 km.