

FEEDING METHODS OF AN ORIENTAL PRATINCOLE

Wide gape, deeply forked tail and long angular wings distinguish pratincoles (*Glareola* spp.) as an aberrant genus of the suborder Charadrii. For at least five days in the 1977 autumn, an Oriental Pratincole (*Glareola maldivarum*) frequented the muddy shores of Lake Wainono, South Canterbury. The bird was first noticed on 28 March 1977 at which time the lake had been low for several weeks, exposing extensive drying mudflats — conditions favoured by glareolids in other countries (e.g. Guggisberg 1970, in Gooders, J. (ed.), *Birds of the World* 3 (12): 981-982).

While I was watching a flock of about 100 Pied Stilts (*Himantopus h. leucocephalus*) feeding at a drying-up pool during the mid-morning, a bird with proportions and actions of a giant swallow circled overhead. The forked tail, chestnut underwing coverts and striking facial pattern were quickly recognised as being diagnostic of *G. maldivarum* so that closer attention could then be given to the bird's behaviour. The pratincole continued to fly in wide circles, interrupted several times each minute by rapid (usually upward) changes in flight direction to capture an insect. Most insects were captured 10-20 m above the mudflat. Adult chironomids were sometimes seen to be taken at lower heights, but they may not have been the main prey, as larger insects (possibly muscid flies and/or bees) were regularly taken, particularly at greater heights.

According to Guggisberg (1970), glareolids catch most of their prey in the air. This bird fed mostly in the air, but on 1 April between 0700 h and 0820 h it was feeding differently. It was watched walking over the dried mudflat snapping up adult shoreflies (*Ephydrella aquaria*) from the ground. These flies are particularly slow-moving at low air temperatures, making them easy prey early in the morning. Later in the same day almost all foraging was aerial, and ground-feeding occurred for only a few minutes at a time.

During the middle of each day the pratincole appeared to spend most of its time roosting on the dried mudflats (often beside small pools), although it was not watched continuously. While visiting the lake on 29 March, Ian McVinnie of Oamaru also found that the bird roosted for a long period in the middle of the day, interrupted by a few short periods of ground feeding. Between 28 March and 1 April the lake level gradually rose, flooding the mudflats and perhaps causing the pratincole to leave (some time after 1 April). The bird was photographed by Mr McVinnie and by myself, one photograph later being sent to the OSNZ recording scheme.

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