

## 10. ON THE SIGHTING OF A FLOCK OF CRAB PLOVERS AT KOLHAPUR

On the 27th March 1983 we were at the Rankala Tank (200 ha) on the outskirts of Kolhapur (17° 32' N latitude and 74° 14' E longitude), Maharashtra. At 9 O'clock in the morning we saw a flock of unfamiliar black-and-white birds flying very low over the tank. Our curiosity being aroused, we went across for a closer look, to the opposite bank, over which the birds were persistently circling.

The birds numbered about twentyfour in all and flew swiftly with strong wing-beats in a tight but constantly changing formation. Their flight path seemed to hug the periphery of the tank, making irregular circles over the shallower areas. We watched this wheeling for more than an hour, and they were still in flight when we left. Throughout the morning they had not settled on the ground. Subsequently the birds have not been seen on the tank or anywhere else in the vicinity.

The birds were primarily white, with a black back and greyish black wings. The bill was short, thick and black, and their longish grey legs trailed behind them. The flock was a

beautiful sight and the photographs also confirm that they were indeed Crab Plovers.

The fascinating aspect is the occurrence of these maritime birds so far inland at Kolhapur, which is about 60 miles in a straight line east of the sea, and is separated from it, by the Western Ghats. Crab Plovers are being commonly found only in the coastal areas by and large north of Ratnagiri.

How or why these coastal birds have chosen to move inland is a mystery. However, we have found that tanks such as Mayni in Satara district, which is even further inland do attract birds such as sea gulls and perhaps our Crab Plovers followed them inland. Recently a sea gull was also spotted by one of us at the Mula Mutha Bird Sanctuary in Pune where they have never been seen before.

We feel that increasing sightings of such seaside birds, far away from their usual home, might indeed indicate subtle changes in their coastal habitat which at present may not be overtly visible.

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[Instances of shore birds being found far inland than their usual haunts have been recorded in the *Journal* from time to time. The occurrence at Nasik of a Red Sea Masked Gannet *Sula dactylatra* Lesson was reported in July 1957 (JBNHS 55: 358). Earlier in June/July 1957 large flocks of that rather rare Great Skua *Catharacta skua lonnbergi* Mathews

arrived in Malwan on the Ratnagiri coast.

Nasik is about 70 miles and Kolhapur about 60 inland respectively from the nearest sea coast. Perhaps the fact is there were lesser number of knowledgeable birdwatchers in the country not so long ago resulting in such strays going unnoticed and unrecorded in the past. — Eds]





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