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ANNEXING BY KENTISH PLOVER *CHARADRIUS ALEXANDRINUS*
OF NEST AND EGG OF LITTLE RINGED PLOVER
CHARADRIUS DUBIUS IN LATIUM (CENTRAL ITALY)

The Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* is a declining breeding wader in the European Union (Meininger e Székely 1997) while Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* populations tend to increase (Geister I. 1997). In Italy the populations of Kentish Plover and Little Ringed Plover are both declining (Bricchetti e Fracasso 2004). Different reasons have been suggested to explain this trend and amongst them habitat alteration and disturbances, due mostly to recreational-tourism, are predominant (Biondi *et al.* 2000, Bricchetti e Fracasso 2004).

In the Latium District the two species of Plovers breed mainly utilizing the coastal belt and in a few selected areas in close proximity to one another, usually along sand dunes and often in vicinity of standing or slow-flowing fresh water (Biondi *et al.* 2000, Pietrelli *et al.* 1997).

This paper provides an uncommon record of annexing nest and egg of Little ringed Plover by Kentish Plover on a coastal sandy dune of Central Italy.

The observation was carried out during the breeding season 2007 at Torre Flavia Reserve, Rome-Central Italy (41° 57' 44 N, 12° 02' 42 E), in an area of approx. 4 ha of coastal dry dunes partially protected by an artificial fence (1.2 ha) installed by the Authors in order to prevent human dis-

turbances against Plovers breeding pairs. The 5th of June, during a periodical control of the local breeding pairs, we found a fresh nest with 2 eggs clearly different by shape, colour and dimensions: one of Kentish Plover (measures: 3.44 x 2.32) and one of Little Ringed Plover (measures: 3.05 x 2.24) (plate1). The area, very close to one of the pedestrian access corridor to the beach, showed a marked concentration of Plover footprints around the nest probably due to high levels of human disturbances and/or interspecific territorial competition between the Plovers (active males). On the 7th of June we observed an “anxious” male of Kentish Plover covering the 2 eggs without signs of competition with any Little Ringed Plover individuals. The mixed eggs were then predated or collected between the 9th and the 10th of June meanwhile a new nest of Little Ringed Plover was located 100 m ahead with only 3 eggs on the 12th of June. In 20 years of monitoring studies on the two species of Plover we never experienced such an uncommon record of annexing nest and egg. Consulting the voice “interspecific relations of *Charadrius* Plovers” in current bibliography we found some information about possible interspecific competition recorded, including attempts at territorial exclusion, particularly marked between more closely related *C. dubius* and

C. hiaticula. Possible “mixed broods” and cases of adoption of small chicks are sometimes reported (Cramp e Simmons 1983, Del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). Annexing by *C. hiaticula* of nest and eggs of *C. dubius* have been recorded several times but rare, while annexing by *C. alexandrinus* of nest and eggs of *C. dubius* are reported like “exceptional” (Cramp e Simmons 1983).

We can reasonably presume that the uncommon record was probably due to a strong interspecific competition and high stress caused by human disturbances, with a replacement clutch after egg loss (few days before on the 29th of May a heavy meteorological perturbation crashed the entire coast of Latium with many losses of eggs and chicks of Kentish and Little Ringed Plover).

Riassunto

Annessione da parte di Fratino Charadrius alexandrinus di nido e uovo di Corriere piccolo Charadrius dubius nel Lazio (Italia Centrale).

L’osservazione di questo raro comportamento si è svolta nel giugno 2007 lungo la fascia dunale antistante la Palude di Torre Flavia (RM). Un individuo maschio di Fratino è stato più volte osservato in atteggiamento di cova/protezione nelle ore diurne tra il 6 ed il 7 di giugno. Le due “uova miste” venivano poi predate o raccolte da curiosi pochi giorni dopo (9/10 giugno). Casi simili di annessione di uova e prole sembrerebbero più comuni tra Corriere grosso *Charadrius hiaticula* e Corriere piccolo mentre appaiono rari ed occasionali tra Fratino e Corriere piccolo.

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