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Feeding technique of a White-browed Crake *Porzana cinerea*

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On 29 December 1990 in a marsh area just outside the western border of Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park, Thailand, we (a group of German and Swiss birdwatchers) observed a White-browed Crake *Porzana cinerea* feeding at a distance of 30-50 m. During a period of about ten minutes the bird appeared out of the reeds for about 30 seconds to one minute at a time, before entering the dense vegetation again. It was feeding whilst walking over floating vegetation in a ditch (about 3 m broad) that was covered with the leaves of water-lilies Nymphaeaceae. Scattered stems of bulrush *Typha* gave enough cover for the bird. On several occasions the crake, while standing on a floating leaf, trampled vigorously, alternating from one foot to the other for periods of one to two seconds, causing the leaf to become submerged. After each bout of activity the crake started to pick intensively after prey items that appeared in the swirling water above the submerged leaf. We watched this behaviour several times before the bird was lost to sight.

The foot-trampling movements reminded me of the similar behaviour of Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* and Little Ringed Plover *C. dubius* in sandy or muddy habitats (Glutz von Blotzheim et al. 1975), but I found no reference to it in the literature referring to other *Porzana* species (Glutz von Blotzheim et al. 1973, Cramp 1980, Urban et al. 1986). Referring to *P. cinerea*, Rand and Gilliard (1967) mention that 'S. D. Ripley records seeing birds running freely over water-lily pads and floating lake vegetation almost as easily as jacanas'. Glutz von Blotzheim et al. (1973) admit that there is not much known about the feeding habits of European *Porzana* species.

My explanation for this behaviour is that the rapid foot-movements, which cause the leaves to flood, aid the crake in obtaining more food items from the surface of the water. This feeding method is used as an alternative to feeding from the still water surface between the reed stems. Khobkhet (1984) describes the White-browed Crake as an 'omnivorous feeder, feeding mainly on vegetation and insects'.

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Wedge-billed Wren-Babbler *Sphenocichla humei*: a new species for China

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In the autumn of 1990 I surveyed the avifauna in the Dulong river valley in north-west Yunnan province, China. A bird captured in the undergrowth of evergreen broadleaf forest, at an altitude of 2,010 m, on 12 November, was identified as a Wedge-billed Wren-Babbler *Sphenocichla humei*. According to the literature, this species only occurs in Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and northern Myanmar. This was, therefore, the first record of the species for China.

Measurements of the specimen were as follows:— total length: 179 mm; bill: 27.5 mm; wing: 71 mm; tail: 65 mm; tarsus: 28.3 mm; weight: 35 g.

The bird had a stout, heavy-looking body with powerful legs and feet, and

a pointed, conical bill. Its forehead and crown were dark golden-brown with black fringes to the feathers. The upperparts from nape to tail-coverts were dark golden-brown with white subterminal bars and black fringes to the feathers. The wings and tail were similarly coloured but barred with black. A conspicuous pale stripe behind the eye extended down the side of the neck. The throat and breast were white with black feather shafts and fringes, changing gradually to dark golden-brown on the belly and flanks, the latter being richer in colour. The iris was brownish-red; the upper mandible was blackish-brown and the lower mandible was horn-grey at the tip and blackish-brown at the base.

The species comprises two subspecies (Ali and Ripley 1983): *S. h. humei* in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, and *S. h. roberti* in Nagaland, Manipur and northern Burma. The subspecies differ in the colour of the throat and breast; in the nominate these areas are black with pale feather shafts, whereas in *roberti* they are ashy brown with black margins and white submarginal marks on the feathers. The Chinese specimen could not be assigned positively to either of these subspecies.

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Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus*: a new species for Thailand

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On 15 March 1991 at 17h30 I was walking over a large expanse of dry grazing land at about five metres above sea level near the town of Chanthaburi in south-east Thailand (12°37'N 102°04'E). I was hoping to see some Pacific Golden Plovers *Pluvialis fulva* which I thought may have begun to arrive on their annual spring passage through the area. Oriental Pratincoles *Glareola maldivarum*, Red-throated Pipits *Anthus cervinus* and Oriental Skylarks *Alauda gulgula* were present in some numbers along with the occasional Bluethroat *Erithacus svecicus*. I eventually heard the call of a Pacific Golden Plover and located two birds in non-breeding plumage in a field which recently had been burned leaving short, blackened turf. They were close to a wide hollow still containing some water. Between the two birds was a third which appeared slimmer and slightly smaller. It was facing away from

me and presented brown, unmarked upperparts. When it turned towards me, however, I was amazed to see orange and brown markings on its breast and knew I was looking at a male Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus* in full breeding plumage. The following description was taken: the crown of the head, back and tail were all a uniform brown. The hind nape was pale grey. The facial area, neck and throat were very pale and almost white. The upper breast was yellowish grading to light orange then dark orange. The underparts were pure white, the bill dark and the legs brownish-yellow. On a subsequent visit, a thin off-white wing bar could be seen when the bird was in flight.

The bird was very active when feeding, making quick runs then stopping for a few seconds before moving off again. The nearby Pacific Golden Plovers, on the other hand, remained still the whole time, apparently roosting. Two weeks later, on 29 March, there were six Oriental Plovers present. Five of these were in the plumage of breeding males while the sixth individual was in non-breeding plumage. There were still three birds present on 2 April.

The Oriental Plover is a long distance migrant, breeding in north China and Mongolia, and wintering in Indonesia and northern Australia (Hayman *et al.* 1986). Its migration route follows the eastern seaboard of the Asian continent, although there are records of a single individual collected in the Andaman Islands in the last century (Ali and Ripley 1983) and of birds found in the Coco Islands and Malaya. It is quite possible that Oriental Plovers are annual passage migrants in Thailand but have been overlooked through the lack of observers. There have been unconfirmed reports of sightings in Khao Sam Roi Yot (P. Round *in litt.*) and in Chanthaburi in 1975 (pers. obs.), and this species had been expected to appear in the country before long (Lekagul and Round 1991). This record of the Chanthaburi birds in 1991 is, therefore, the first documented evidence of the Oriental Plover in Thailand.

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