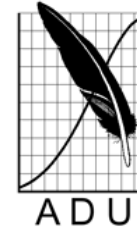


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UNUSUAL FORAGING BEHAVIOUR OF A WHITE-FRONTED PLOVER *CHARADRIUS MARGINATUS*

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Although foraging of plovers is usually considered to be a stereotypical “run-stop-peck” activity (Urban 1986), various other forms of obtaining prey have been recorded. These include probing (Piersma 1996), hawking (Urban 1986) and foot-trembling (Steyn 1966). However, Hayman *et al.* (1991) mentions an interesting foraging strategy for the White-fronted Plover simply described as “... often with very fast runs in which the body seems to drift sideways”. Unfortunately, the authors provide no further details of this foraging strategy. This is the only reference to this foraging strategy I could find in the literature I consulted (Steyn 1966; Urban 1986; Hayman *et al.* 1991; Piersma 1996; Turpie and Tree 2005). Therefore, this foraging strategy is either not as common as suggested by Hayman *et al.* (1991), or it is under- or not reported in the literature.

On 10 October 2008 and again on 1 November 2009 I observed a single White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus* foraging on the floodplain and shore-line of an earth dam at AL3 Farm (23°31'S, 29°19'E) near Mogwadi in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. Its foraging strategy seemed to fit the description provided by Hayman *et al.* (1991) and is described below and shown in Figure 1. The bird would typically walk slowly in a crouched position looking for prey (Fig. 1a). Interestingly, the bird inflated its gular region which resulted in the feathers on its throat appearing fluffed out (Fig. 1b-i). Upon spotting a prey item, the bird crouched even lower (Fig. 1b) and, when approximately 30-40 cm from its prey, it would rapidly charge forward in a curved approach (Fig. 1c-e), striking the prey at an angle (Fig. 1f-i). The final lunge would often be with such vigour that the

bird sometimes ended off its feet and on its chest (Fig. 1i). Note in Fig. 1 that the throat remained inflated throughout the entire charge and strike.

This rather unusual “run-lunge-peck” foraging strategy as opposed to the typical “run-stop-peck” plover foraging strategy raises a couple of questions. Firstly, why and under which circumstances do White-fronted Plovers adopt this foraging strategy? It does not appear to be a prey-specific strategy as I have seen the bird catch both hard-bodied, e.g. earwigs (Dermaptera), and soft-bodied invertebrates, e.g. worms, using this technique. Secondly, what is the purpose of inflating the throat? Does it serve to startle or disorientate prey? Is it an excitement response, or is the bird perhaps making some kind of vocalization? (I certainly did not hear anything).

This foraging strategy and the associated gular inflation appear to be unique amongst the Charadriidae. Despite the extensive body of literature on the Charadriidae and the foraging strategies of different species, this particular strategy seems to be almost unknown. My personal opinion is that this foraging strategy is not as common as Hayman *et al.* (1991) suggests, and that it is only performed under certain conditions. It would be interesting to determine how widespread and common this foraging strategy is across the species' range.

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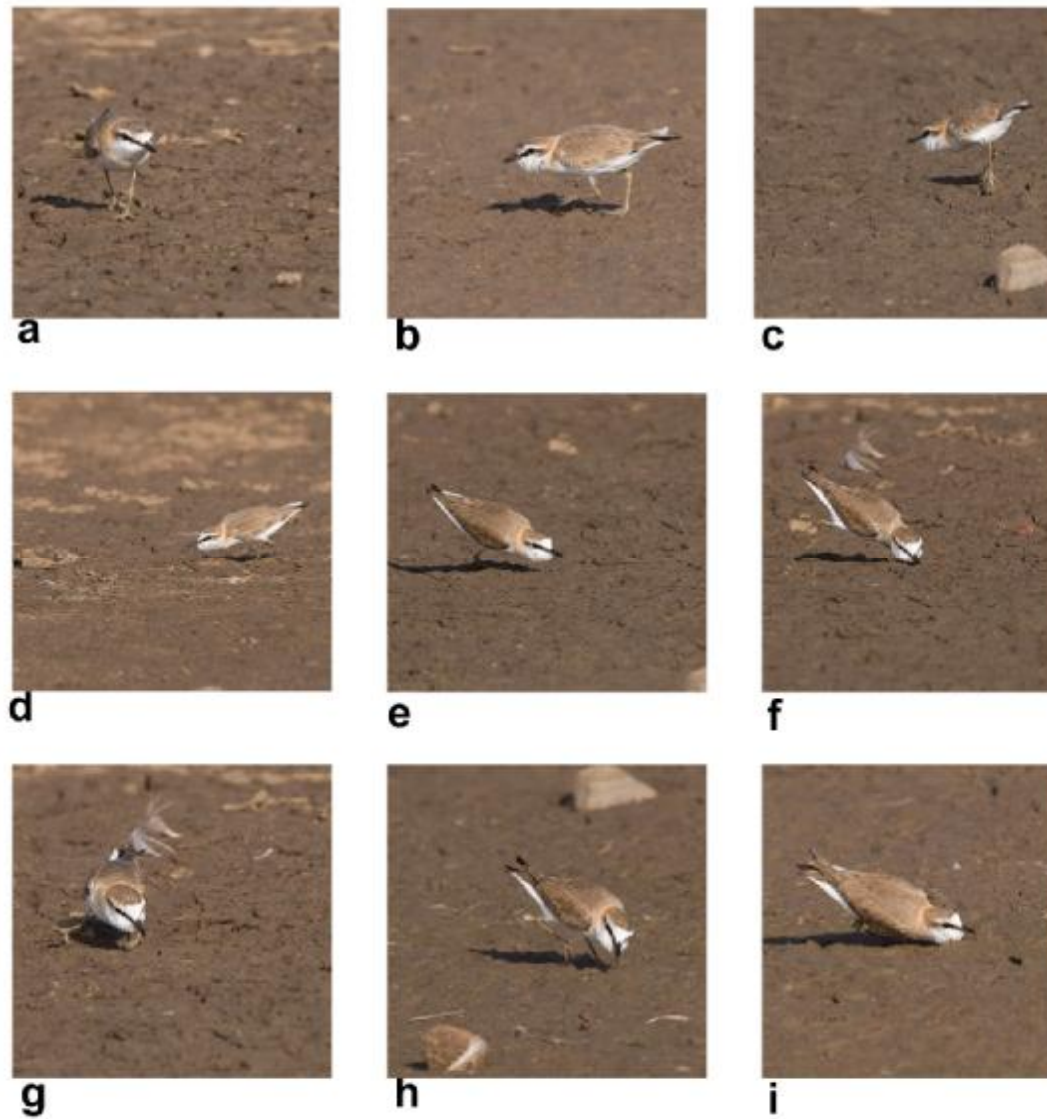


Figure 1 — Sequence of events showing the “run-lunge-peck” foraging style of a White-fronted Plover. See text for description.
Figure 1f-i show variations in the body position during the final strike.



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