

Counts of Madagascar Pratincole *Glareola ocularis* from Bagamoyo, Tanzania, and confirmation of an important non-breeding site on the lower reaches of the Ruvu River

The Madagascar Pratincole *Glareola ocularis* is the rarest of the eight species in the genus with population estimates varying between 5000 and 10000 individuals (Delany & Scott 2006). The population is said to be declining with increasing threats on the breeding grounds along the east and north coasts of Madagascar where it occurs in small colonies. It is poorly known during the breeding season which is between October and December, peaking in November. It is assumed that the entire population winters along the coast of East Africa, in Kenya and Somalia in particular. There are only scattered records from islands in the Malagasy region (Safford 2013), while Britton (1980) gives the following summary for East Africa (references to Tanzanian sites in bold):

*“A Malagasy migrant which winters in dunes north of Malindi, especially at Sabaki where 800 or more are counted regularly between April and late September. Passage birds swell the numbers to thousands in August and early September, and it occurs in smaller numbers on passage elsewhere on the coast from **Mikindani** to Lamu, mainly in September. Sabaki counts seldom exceed 2500, and 9000 or more on 17 August 1978 is unprecedented. Hundreds at Kendu Bay on Lake Victoria on 21–22 August 1920, six at **Sinya** in **N Tanzania** on 23 May 1973, three at **Kidugallo** in **E Tanzania** on 25 September 1952, and regular small flocks at Garsen and inland sites near Malindi are the only records away from the coast.”*

While the date is appropriate, the 1920 record for Lake Victoria has been questioned (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996), although there is a recent record of five birds photographed at Bologonga, Serengeti NP on 23 June 2019 (C. Shipper, pers. comm.), that confirms some wandering of this species west of the Rift Valley. Meanwhile, Harvey (1973, 1974) provides a series of records for Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: 1) eight on 7 April and 60 on 12 April 1971, 2) two on 14 April and four on 22 April 1973, and 3) two on 20 August and six on 28 August 1973. Baker & Baker (2002) provide two additional records for Dar es Salaam: 2000 birds in March 1982 over Jangwani Salt Pans and 72 birds in September 1992 from the same site.

Ad hoc records in the literature suggest that the lower reaches of the Ruvu River and its small delta might be important for the Madagascar Pratincole. However, during the compilation of records for the Important Bird Areas of Tanzania (Baker & Baker 2002) there were insufficient data to include this site. During a period of regular visits to Dar es Salaam since, a concerted effort was made by the author and other birdwatchers based in Dar es Salaam to count waders and other waterbirds at this location, especially when high tides forced birds to roost in the adjacent salt works. This note presents count data collected on several repeat visits to the site from August 2011 to May 2016, together with a literature review for context. The Bagamoyo Saltworks is mentioned in Safford (2013) as N.E. Baker (pers. comm.), and this note serves to formally add these more recent records to the literature.

The records (Table 1; from data archived for the Tanzania Bird Atlas) were made at Bagamoyo, 60 km north of Dar es Salaam, where the species congregates at high tides to roost on the bunds in the Stanley Salt Works (6°25'14" S, 38°53'37" E). Earliest and latest dates of occurrence were found to be 2 April and 17 September, and the higher counts coincided with periods of high tide as expected (though visits were not always specifically timed to high tides).

Table 1. Survey counts of Madagascar Pratincole *Glareola ocularis* at the Bagamoyo Salt Works on the Ruvu River, northeast Tanzania, from August 2011 to May 2016. Bold indicates counts exceeding the estimated 1% global Important Bird Area (IBA) population threshold limit. *Half of this total counted at the Ruvu River causeway 12 km from Bagamoyo.

Date	Count
2 August 2011	627
4 September 2011	90
3 June 2012	59
16 June 2013	200
20 April 2014	3
25 May 2014	27
1 June 2014	48
15 June 2014	86
6 July 2014	88
2 April 2015	12
24 May 2015	60
27 May 2015	40*
14 June 2015	141
5 July 2015	115
11 July 2015	81
6 September 2015	16
15 May 2016	2

Madagascar Pratincoles occur widely and breed in small colonies while in Madagascar, and therefore accurate population estimates are difficult (Safford 2013). Delany *et al.* (2009) provide a global population estimate of 5000 to 10 000 birds with a 1% threshold of 75 birds and a decreasing population. Mundkur & Nagy (2012) provide a similar estimate of 5000 to 10 000 birds with a 1% threshold of 70 birds. The only key site for Tanzania identified by Delany *et al.* (2009) is the salt pans at Jangwani, based on the record of 2000 passage birds in March 1982 (Baker & Baker 2002). However, despite regular visits to Jangwani by local Dar es Salaam birdwatchers this is the only significant count from this site and it may not be as important for this species as initially perceived. By contrast, the maximum count of 627 birds at Bagamoyo is close to 10% of the estimated global population, and to date, eight counts have exceeded the 1% threshold required to designate this location as a shadow Ramsar site.

Clearly, the Bagamoyo salt works and adjacent areas on the lower Ruvu River support important non-breeding and passage habitat for this species, and may be considered a regular non-breeding site. It provides a safe roost for birds seeking to feed over the nearby Ruvu Estuary and the floodplain of the Ruvu River, and this wider area may support additional non-breeding Madagascar Pratincoles (although access difficulties have prevented surveys to date). Regular visits to the salt pans on the southern bank of the nearby Wami River and the huge salt pans in Saadani NP may also increase our knowledge of this species on the north Tanzania coast.

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