

Feeding ecology of Crab Plovers *Dromas ardeola* in the Gulf of Kachchh, India

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We studied the feeding ecology of Crab Plovers wintering on Narara Island and at Rozybunder on the southern coast of the Gulf of Kachchh, India, during 5 Jan to 25 Feb 1993 and 21 Dec 1993 to 28 Feb 1994. The birds fed throughout diurnal low tide cycles (no observations were made at night). They maintained an average inter-bird distance of 12 m, and usually did not come closer to one another than 4–7 m. While searching they walked or stood still; more time (44.9 s/min) was spent standing than walking (11.4 s/min). Smaller crabs were swallowed whole whereas larger crabs were stabbed with the heavy bill, dismembered and then eaten piecemeal. The limbs and chelae of large crabs were also eaten. Similarly the carapace was broken up and consumed; normally nothing was left behind. Most crabs taken were of small to medium size. On average 3.2 s/min of foraging was spent on successful handling. More than half of handling times took 6.1–10.0 s and they ranged from 2 to 49 s. Crabs constituted the major proportion of items found in 50 regurgitated pellets (87.6%). The remains of up to six of the crabs *Platypodia cristata* and *Etisus laevimanus* were found in a single pellet. The only non-crab remains in the pellets were those of the mollusc *Architectonia* sp. Most were found in just one pellet.