

## Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* catching fish in association with Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* in Rajasthan

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Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* feeding in association with Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*. Photo: Harkirat Singh Sangha

Chhatrasagar (26°06'38"N 74°01'15"E) is an ephemeral lake at Nimaj, Pali district, Rajasthan. On 6 March 2009 we were watching birds from its high embankment. There were not many birds in the drying waterbody but c. 350 Great White Pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus* resting on the edge of the lake attracted our attention. Around 1400 hrs c. 30 pelicans entered water and started hunting fish in the lake. Soon afterwards eight Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* were noticed swimming around these pelicans. They were moving with the pelicans either on one side or behind them. A few times they were observed swimming ahead of the pelicans and once or twice in their midst. While the pelicans were in a compact flock most of the time, the sandpipers were loosely scattered around them.

Swimming confidently, with head and neck almost immersed in water, the redshanks appeared to be working in a coordinated manner, perhaps hunting fish and/or invertebrates disturbed by the concerted action of the pelicans. We observed them for more than 20 mins. When not able to match the speed of the swimming pelicans, they took off two or three times and landed near the hunting pelicans to resume foraging.

While feeding behaviour of Spotted Redshank is typical of the genus, greater attenuation of form and bill gives added delicacy to all actions and it is able to forage in deeper water than any other *Tringa* species (Cramp & Simmons 1983; Colston & Burton 1988). Although their feet are not webbed, many waders can swim and several habitually do so (Hammond & Pearson 1994). Probably no other *Tringa* species swims as frequently, while foraging, as does Spotted Redshank, and virtually all of its foraging is done while standing or swimming in water rather than on muddy or sandy substrates (Johnsgard 1981).

The large *Tringa* sandpipers such as Spotted Redshank, Common Greenshank *T. nebularia*, and Marsh Sandpiper *T. stagnatilis* feed on small invertebrates, but during migration, and on wintering grounds they are prone to operate in large flocks that make fairly synchronised movements to drive together, and feed on schools of small fish in shallow water (del Hoyo *et al* 1996).

While Common Redshanks *T. totanus* periodically take a few small fishes measuring 2.5–4.0 cm in length (Nethersole-Thompson & Nethersole-Thompson 1986), Spotted Redshank is known to eat fishes up to 6–7 cm long (del Hoyo *et al*. 1996; van de Kam *et al*. 2004).

Spotted Redshank is known to forage socially in dense flocks of conspecifics, or mixed with other tringines, e.g., Common Greenshank, and may appear to be working in a co-ordinated way (del Hoyo *et al* 1996). In the Indian Subcontinent the species has been observed feeding in fairly deep open water and freely up-ending like ducks to reach the bottom mud (Ali & Ripley 1980). At Ghauspur (Pakistan) a closely packed flock was observed feeding in shallow water (Roberts 1991). Inglis (1903) recorded one bird with its 'gullet full of small fish' in Madhubani, Darbhanga district, Bihar.

Although feeding association with Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* has been recorded (Cramp & Simmons 1983), we have not found any reference to their feeding association with Great White Pelican. This association appears to be an example of facultative commensalism.

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