



ORNITHOLOGY

A new breeding site of Collared Pratincole in Southern France in 2025

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Collared Pratincole, Spain, May 2010 (© Christian Aussaguel¹)

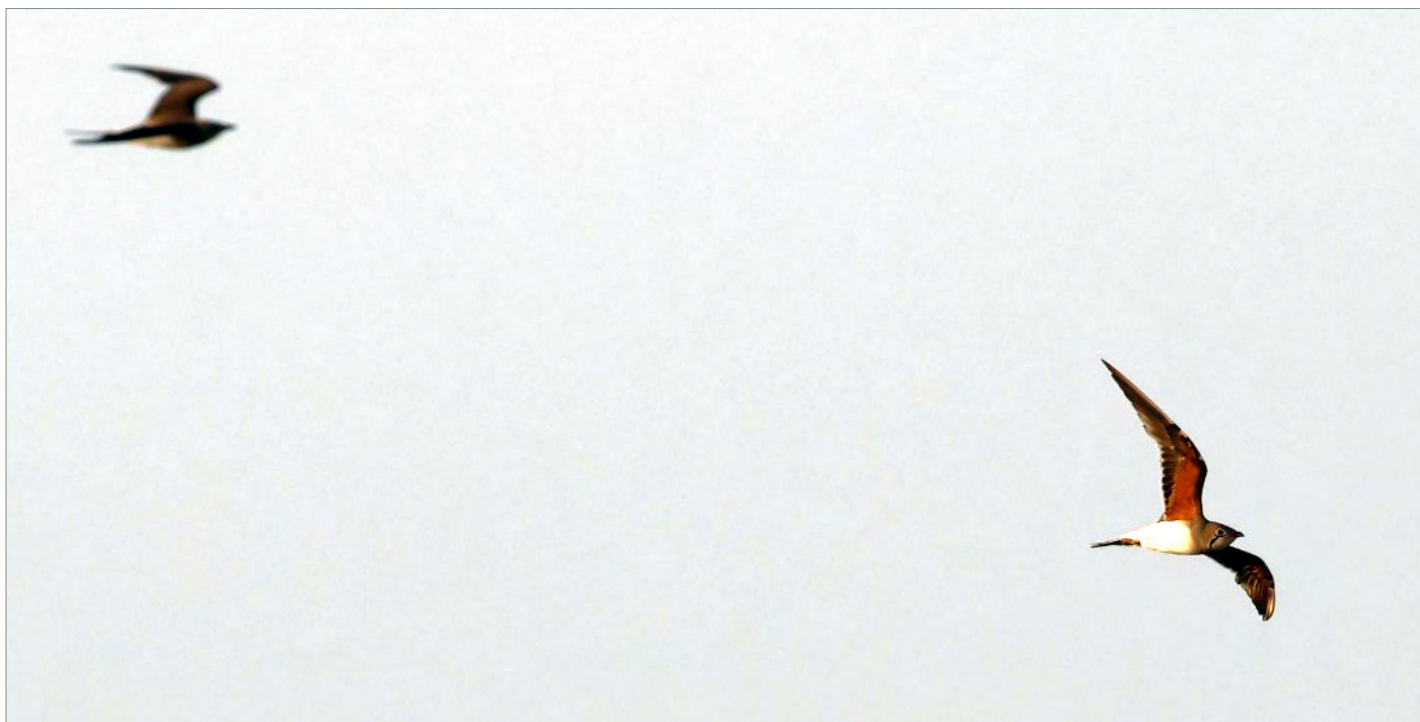
During the summer of 2025, a pair of Collared Pratincoles bred on Gruissan beach in the Aude department, far from the Camargue colonies. This is the first confirmed case of reproduction (breeding codes 11 and 16) for this department in Languedoc region.

I - Observations

- **1 July** (with *C. Clairotte*) - We conduct a survey of Kentish Plovers on Vieille Nouvelle beach south of Gruissan (Aude), a beach that has finally been closed to motor vehicles after many years of campaigning to enforce the law. After discovering a few pairs, some brooding and others accompanied by chicks, we decided to continue on to Grau de la Vieille Nouvelle to complete our inventory.



Breeding site of the Collared Pratincole in Gruissan, Aude, July 2025 (© Dominique Clément)



Pair of Collared Pratincoles, Gruissan, Aude, July 2025 (© Claude Borrel)

We take the opportunity to check out a beautiful botanical station of sea daffodil when a bird flies overhead, quite high up, uttering cries that are familiar to me, but whose name does not immediately come to mind. Raising my binoculars, I realise that it is a Collared Pratincole. Its presence here is surprising at this time of year, especially as the bird is clearly alarming. We continue on our way when a second bird flies overhead, also alarming.

The two pratincoles land on the sand a little further away and one holds its wings outstretched, a classic posture for a wader with a nest or young nearby, seeking to divert the attention of a potential predator (breeding code 11). We keep our distance while the two birds stand motionless on the sand. After watching them from afar for about thirty minutes, we decide to leave.



Collared Pratincole, alarm posture, Gruissan, July 2025 (© Jean-Luc Guillemenet)



Collared Pratincole, alarm posture, Gruissan, July 2025 (© Claude Borrel)

- **4 July** (with J.-L. Guillemenet, C. Borrel and C. Clairotte) – Early in the morning, we observe two adult Collared Pratincoles alarming and landing near the site where we saw the species three days earlier.
- **13 July** – Two Collared Pratincoles landed on the Little Tern breeding islet in the former Campagnol salt marsh before flying off to a nearby manade. The location is 5 km as the crow flies from the Vieille Nouvelle beach.
- **18 July** – The pair is present : the male flies and lands in the open, while the female stays in another area, alarming more discreetly.
- **20 July** – An alarming adult is reported by a visiting birdwatcher.

- **22 July** - An individual is observed hunting above the western marsh of Campagnol Pond.
- **23 July** - The pair alarms for a long time in the southern part of the vegetation islet.
- **31 July** - An adult pratincole alarms and follows me wherever I go, landing and taking off again as soon as I move.
- **7 August** - At dawn, the two adults fly over us and land around us as they have done on previous days. We note that one of the two individuals has a less contrasting head pattern.
- **12 August** (with J.-L. Guillemenet) - Early in the morning, an adult flies over the site, landing several times in the vegetation before flying off again. On two occasions, flying very high, it captured an insect and descended to the same spot in the vegetation (nesting code 16), then remained there, while the other adult perched away on the sand. When a kestrel flew by, the bird that was perched in the vegetation took off in alarm and briefly pursued the raptor before resting in the same spot.
- **15 August** (with J.-L. Guillemenet and C. Borrel) - An adult with contrasting plumage takes off from the same area. On a patch of ground devoid of vegetation, we find paw prints of different sizes... an adult and its young ?



Collared Pratincole, Gruissan, July 2025 (© Jean-Luc Guillemenet)



Paw prints of Collared Pratincole, Gruissan, July 2025 (© Dominique Clément)

- **20 August** (J.-L. Guillemenet) - No birds present on the site.
- **4 September** - With André Wiertz, we observe four Collared Pratincoles at Roc de Conilhac, 6 km north-west of Vieille Nouvelle beach.

II - Discussion

The nominal subspecies of the Collared Pratincole breeds sporadically from the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa to Kazakhstan and Pakistan ; it winters in sub-Saharan Africa (Maclean & Kirwan 2020).

In France, Mayaud (1936) reported it breeding in the Gard and Camargue regions. It was probably present in most Mediterranean departments before the 1950s, with confirmed breeding in the Vaucluse, Hérault and Pyrénées-Orientales departments (Birard 2019). According to Rocamora & Yeatman-Berthelot (1999), it bred in Crau and the Gulf of Fos in the 1970s.

Since the end of the 20th century, most of the French population of the Collared Pratincole has bred in the Camargue, where its numbers were around 30-50 pairs until the 1970s, falling to 6 pairs in 1997 before rising to 71 pairs in 2004, while the species also became established in the Camargue region of the Gard department (Dubois *et al.* 2008). Similarly, it has been breeding regularly in the Hérault department, on the edge of the Étang de l'Or, since 2009 (Birard 2019); with 3 pairs recorded there in 2022 (Kayser & Champagnon 2024). The national population has averaged 85 breeding pairs since 2010, with a maximum of 130 in 2022 (Kayser & Champagnon *op. cit.*).

In the Aude department, the Collared Pratincole can be seen during both migrations, mainly on the coast. Most sightings occur in spring, from early April to late May, with a record flock of nine birds in April 2005. The autumn migration, which mainly takes place from August to early September, is much less conspicuous, with a maximum of 12 individuals recorded in August 2008 (Rousseau *et al.* 2015).

In 2018, a pair accompanied by two fledglings begging for food had already been observed near the Petit Tournebelle manade in Gruissan, less than 6 km from Vieille Nouvelle beach, suggesting local reproduction (one to four birds had been observed between 16 April and 26 August), but this could not be proven.

Will the nesting of a pair in Gruissan in 2025 remain without consequence or does it reflect the slow expansion of the species to the west of the Camargue ? The answer will come in the spring of 2026...



Collared Pratincole, Greece, May 2023 (© Odysseas Froilán Papageorgiou)

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