

MIGRATION OF DOTTERELS (*EUDROMIAS MORINELLUS* L., 1758) IN THE HORTOBÁGY

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Introduction

First occurrence of Dotterel in Hungary has been reported by *István Sterbetz* (1959). In his study he details and evaluates the domestic data mentioning the species occurrences in the Hortobágy with reference to *Sátori* (1943) and *Radó* (1957). In 1965 and 1972 *Sterbetz* again published the previous data including the Hortobágy observations between 1964 and 1965 and 1966 and 1969, resp., together with additional data on the dotterel.

The main migration routes through the Hortobágy were studied by *L. V. Szabó* between 1971 and 1978 (*Szabó*, 1976; *Horváth-Szabó*, 1981).

I have been studying the occurrence of Dotterels since 1974. Results of the observations conducted in the Hortobágy are available here in more details. The part results have already been published elsewhere (*Kovács*, 1979; 1980a; 1980b; *Kovács-Konyhás*, 1986).

During my research I attempted to reveal the reason for the regular occurrence of this rare bird species in the Hortobágy. Role of the heat-plant associations and vegetation cover with the grazing animals was evident. Yet, several part questions with replies still unconfirmed arose during the period of a more than one-and-a-half-decade-long observation.

Materials and methods

Migration events and behavioural patterns of the birds staying here should be started with listing the data series for 17 years. The observation data are presented according to year indicating location and type of habitat. Besides my data I also refer to personal or written communications of my colleagues indicating the initial letters of their names: *Zoltán Ecsedi* (Z. E.), *István Fintha* (I. F.), *Sándor Konyhás* (S. K.), *Zsolt Végvári* (Zs. V.).

László Vilmos Szabó's personal communications I used for analysing the data between 1974 and 1979 which I refer to in the text. I would like to thank to all of my colleagues for their data and help. I have *Sándor Konyhás* to thank for his active and fruitful participation in observations at the Kecskés, Szelencés and Angyalháza puszta and for the large number of data, that I could access with his assistance.

Besides the Hortobágy I could watch Dotterels in Bihar as well on one occasion, that I present here.

My observations between 1974 and 1986 have been detailed in my previous papers (Kovács, 1986; 1988).

Results

The year of 1987 was rather dry, however, I could not observe a considerable rate of migration. The first flock of Dotterel arrived very early on 16th of August, but even their greatest flock contained less than 20 specimens.

16th Aug. Szelencés	4 overflying (S. K.)
18th Aug. Angyalháza	1 overflying (S. K.)
18th Aug. Szelencés	3 overflying (S. K.)
20th Aug. Szelencés	2 at herd yard
24th Aug. Kunmadaras	2 at Bogárzó herd yard
26th Aug. Kunmadaras	6 at Bogárzó herd yard
16th Oct. Nagyiván	14 at Mérges-hát herd yard
18th Oct. Angyalháza	9 bare sheep-run (S. K.)
18th Oct. Szelencés	6 herd yard (S. K.)
25th Oct. Szelencés	17 herd yard (S. K.)
30th Oct. Szelencés	4 herd yard (S. K.)
31st Oct. Kunmadaras	1 overflying

In 1988 the summer was somewhat drier and migration was slightly more intense.

22nd Aug. Kunmadaras	1 Gyúrókút herd yard
23rd Aug. Kunmadaras	3 Grazed sheep-run
28th Aug. Kunmadaras	1 _x overflying
22nd Sept. Szelencés	12 herd yard
4th Oct. Szelencés	41 herd yard and sheep-run
13th Oct. Kunmadaras	1 overflying
22nd Oct. Szelencés	30 herd yard

In 1989 the summer was fairly rainy: 327 mm of rain were recorded between 1st June and 31st Aug. Migration of Dotterels seemed to fail since their favourite migration places were covered by grass of 10–20 cm, the livestock could not cope with grazing it! (As in 1980!)

24th Aug. Kunmadaras	1 overflying
25th Aug. Szelencés	8 herd yard
3rd Sept. Szelencés	3 herd yard
27th Sept. Szelencés	5 herd yard

In 1990 the drought was extreme! In summer as few as 93 mm of rain were recorded. All the migration sites were grazed bare and the grass disappeared

in some places, e. g. in the Kunmadaras puszta (sheep-walk around Füveshalom) until the autumn rainfall.

Volume of migration approximated to and even surpassed that of 1986. Angyalháza became a stable migratory place (surroundings of the Vadállókút and Dórógát) where *Sándor Konyhás* had already observed their scattered and occasional appearances in the previous years.

Two unusual sites of occurrence were also recorded in the Máta-puszta (Zs. *Végyári's* observation, Pers. comm.) and in the Kondás fish-pond of 460 ha where I observed one specimen probably wandered from those occurring at Máta. Not even hard frosts could force the Dotterels to remigrate.

Also of interest is that spring occurrence was recorded even at two sites in the same year. One of the birds, watched by *Sándor Konyhás* at Angyalháza on 17th of May, had nuptial plumage.

11th May Kunmadaras	1 in a sheep-run nearby the Luca-spring
17th May Angyalháza	1 Vadállókút sheep-run (S. K.)
22nd Aug. Angyalháza	6 „Várostantya” (Z. E.)
24th Aug. Kunmadaras	2 Bogárzó herd yard
25th Aug. Szelencés	16 herd yard
2nd Sept. Szelencés	22 herd yard
3rd Sept. Máta	8 pasture nibbled off (Zs. V.)
5th Sept. Szelencés	15 herd yard
10th Sept. Szelencés	16 herd yard
11th Sept. Kunmadaras	3 Bogárzó
14th Sept. Szelencés	12 herd yard
16th Sept. Kunmadaras	18 Bogárzó
17th Sept. H. Fish-pond	1 Kondás-tó 1–2 draigned
18th Sept. Kunmadaras	1 overflying
18th Sept. Szelencés	51 Bare grass nearby Nagyágér
19th Sept. Kunmadaras	13 Benched sodic grass
20th Sept. Kunmadaras	20 Bogárzó
21st Sept. Kunmadaras	19 Bogárzó
23rd Sept. Szelencés	7 herd yard, Szúnyog-kút
25th Sept. Kunmadaras	21 Bare sodic grass (Puccinellietum)
27th Sept. Kunmadaras	18 Bogárzó herd yard
28th Sept. Kunmadaras	14 Bogárzó herd yard
28th Sept. Angyalháza	85 Vadállókút, bare benched sodic area
29th Sept. Kunmadaras	6 Bogárzó
30th Sept. Szelencés	32 herd yard and surroundings
30th Sept. Angyalháza	30 Bare area nearby Dórógát
4th Oct. Angyalháza	11 Bare area nearby Dórógát
7th Oct. Angyalháza	15 Ásottér-telek, sheep-run
9th Oct. Angyalháza	46 Vadállókút, grass nibbled
9th Oct. Szelencés	76 herd yard and surroundings

11th Oct. Szelencés	50 herd yard and surroundings
11th Oct. Angyalháza	41 Sheep-hold, sheep-run
17th Oct. Angyalháza	17 Boggy dry grass
17th Oct. Szelencés	67 herd yard
20th Oct. Kunmadaras	17 Kómocsin-gerinc, loess grass nibbled
24th Oct. Angyalháza	39 Dóró-gát
24th Oct. Szelencés	42 herd yard
25th Oct. Angyalháza	68 Surroundings of Dóró-gát (S. K.)
26th Oct. Kunmadaras	3 Pemetés-fertő, benched sodic area
30th Oct. Angyalháza	78 Grassy areas surrounding Vadálló-kút

Spring migration

The data serie presented before contains spring occurrences in a very limited number. According to Radó (1957), Sterbetz (1972), Fintha (*in litt.*) Sándor Konyhás (*Pers. comm.*) and my personal observations Dotterels migrate over here between 8th of March and 24th of May. The migration takes place in far shorter a period than the two-month-long interval would actually make it possible: onset of migration shows great annual variation. Besides, migration takes place in a relatively short time and majority of the birds fly across the Hortobágy without landing. Dotterels flying down single or in smaller groups stay in our puszta areas for maximum 3–12 days. Another possible explanation is that birds may use another route at spring migration.

If the spring migration were more regular and longer it would have been certainly recorded from 1977 on since I recorded the arrivals of the Dotterels between February and May walking on the observing routes, day to day.

Autumn migration

A most conspicuous ornithological feature of some arid sodic areas of the Hortobágy is the regular migration of Dotterels occurring approximately in the same sites between August and October. Unlike spring movements the autumn migration involves rather long residence here: the earliest datum of arrival is 16th August (S. K., 1987), the latest occurrence recorded in autumn is 19th November (1979).

According to my observations, duration of migration and number of Dotterels staying here are considerably affected by the amount of precipitation or degree of aridity in the previous 3–4 months. In case of rainy weather the dense grassy vegetation of the puszta is grazed by livestock (mainly sheep) only half-third. A 15–30 cm high grass is less preferred by Dotterels since it makes difficult their running-feeding habit. Thus, after rainy summers their migration is rather scanty or might even fail (e. g., in 1978,

1980, 1989), while in dry years, particularly of drought summer, the migration is more abundant and Dotterels occur in higher number in the sodic grass-plots nibbled bare (1979, 1986, 1990).

Sites of occurrence in the Hortobágy

1. *Pentezug*

It was known as the most stable migration place in the Hortobágy between 1966 and 1976. The birds frequented a Festucetum grass-plot of 30–40 ha, nibbled almost to ground by sheep, surrounded by the so called Ördögárok-Ártézikút-Kincses-lapos. They frequently appeared on the bare dirt roads acrossing the puszta and occasionally appeared at the herd stand and its surroundings 1 km southwards. No considerable migration has been noted in this puszta since 1981.

2. *Szelencés*

This is a very dry area, ca. 6 air kilometres from the previous migration site. In 1973 *László Vilmos Szabó* could watch 130 Dotterels here, the highest number ever recorded in the Hortobágy.

This area has been the most stable migration place in subsequent years, too. Till 1980 the southern part of the puszta, a Festucetum and Puccinellietum grass-plot of ca. 100 ha, nibbled heavily by sheep, bordered by the Ágeri-halom, Deszkás-hodály, Sebesér and Kenéz-kút, had been their most favourite migration place. From 1981 Dotterels have mainly frequented the livestock yards, heavily treaded and covered by droppings, laying rather northwards in a cattle-pasture between Nagyágér and Tekeszarvhalom as well as the abandoned sodic rice fields.

2. *Kunmadaras-puszta*

Their first occurrence was recorded by *László Vilmos Szabó* in 1971 (*Pers. comm.*). Between 1971 and 1981 the most frequent sites of occurrence were the cattle-pasture and itself the herd yard heavily manured and treaded, surrounded by Gyúrókút, Tippan-hát, Halas-fenek, Csőszház and Forrás-fenek. Occasional presence of Dotterels were seen in sheep-runs nearby Döghalom, Luca-ér and Füveshalom. Since 1981 the migration has moved to a part of puszta of ca. 150 ha. heavily benched, extending between the Bogárzó herd yard and Füveshalom.

4. *Angyalháza*

Before 1986 I could observe some occasional birds only at the southern border of the puszta, nearby Szelencés. Angyalháza has been frequented as migration place since 1986. This has mainly been suggested by *Sándor Konyhá's* data. First we have thought of Angyalháza as a changing area of the Szelencés migration place, being only 2–3 kilometres away, but in 1990 it was proved that crowded Dotterel flocks were staying simultaneously on both sites.

The Vadálló-kút, Szárnyékos sheep-hold, Szalonnás flat and surroundings of the Dóró-gát as sites of high priority have become their favourite

places where the ground is bare, heavily benched and sodic. Occasionally, they have appeared in farer places, e. g., at Ásottér-telek and in sheep-runs nearby Fúrott-kút, in the „sheep-powder” spots accumulated around the sheep-holds. An interesting observation was recorded on 30th of October, 1990. We were walking in the area in rainy and stormy windy weather and could watch Dotterels even in spike-rush-bent-grassy boggy areas covered by semi-high grass. It was highly unusual for the birds, which probably hid here against the raw weather.

5. Other sites of occurrence

According to previous findings, publications and some recent observations Dotterels occur besides their regular migration places in the northern part of the Hortobágy (Darassa, Máta, Halastó), in the southeast (Álomzug) and central (Nyírólapos) parts and in the southern area (Borzas, Nagyiván, Zám). My 1975 record in Bihar (Sándoros) suggests that Dotterels may occasionally appear for a short time at any sites in the territory east of the river Tisza.

Topography and vegetation of the migrating places

Dotterels prefer most the dry sodic puszta area covered by the shortest grass, where the predominant plant association is composed of *Artemisio-Festucetum pseudovinae* and *Puccinellietum limosae artemisietosum*.

In warm weather Dotterels hide in spike-rush-bent-grassy (*Eleochari-Agrostidetum stoloniferae*) vegetation of sodic runlets, swamps, heavily treaded and grazed short by the livestock. The birds may visit the blank sodic spots covered with *Camphorosma annua* or *Spergularia salina* when it is not too warm. At noontime Dotterels can hardly tolerate the warm of around 25–30 °C and shelter in shadow. The characteristic place of noonday rest at Szelencés was a shadow offered by *Juncus conglomeratus*, but hoof-prints, wheels-tracks and a handful of shadow provided by larger clods or droplets do for them, as well. They are attracted by roads and paths acrossing the puszta and their withdrawal to the smaller-larger sodic berms or to the small Festuca-rush-beds is not unusual either Dotterel is rarely seen in arable lands (the only record is: 14th of September, 1985) and rare visitor in burnt down grassy areas, too. It steers clear of the high weeds covering the abandoned livestock yards, too.

Behaviour, associate species

Dotterels are friendly and even tame birds. When feeding they take short runnings and abruptly pickling about. Members of the actively feeding flocks take 8–12 runnings and 14–17 picklings per minute. They are closely related to one another, the individual straggling behind makes permanently its deep monosilable call flying here and there untill the „reply” of the flock as if calling down their lost fellow.

Larger flocks are sometimes split up to smaller groups of 4–20 specimens even for several days. Diurnal rhythm of birds is significantly affected by temperature, precipitation and wind conditions. In August–September warm days of 28–30 °C are not unusual in the Hortobágy. Our northern guests are slumbering over the hot hours of the day and having a noonday rest as described above. When a refreshing wind arises the Dotterels stand up turn against the breeze lifting half outright their wings and cool themselves.

In windless canicular days I often saw as the birds suffering from hot were slaving. In such days they are only active at early morning and late-afternoon at sunset. Their overall diurnal rhythm can be described as follows:

– Before sunrise they become lively, sing a lot, sometimes fly up. Then, Dotterels are actively feeding over 3–4 hours.

– Around 9–10 hours with warming up they are getting weaker and weaker. The birds are standing about a lot, begin to plume then, at adequate place (traded by animals, varied by wheel-tracks or clods) the whole flock seats down, nearly all at once.

– Noonday rest lasts to 3.00–4.00 hours p.m. meanwhile Dotterels are sleeping or only sitting and lying about suffering from hot. Occasionally, one of them give a thin complaining alarm and the whole flock stands up; they take some steps, plume and stretch themselves then, sit down again. After the elapse of the noonday rest a long period of pluming begins, the birds are dropping, running and occasionally jumping up fluttering. After some shorter flyings and circlings the afternoon feeding begins which lasts until sunset.

– When there is a bright moonlight the birds are also active during night sing a lot and fly, too.

Under cool, windy and rainy weather conditions the above rhythm turns completely over. The birds are active from morning till sunset they rest more, sometimes for 5–6 minutes occasionally for one and a half hour. During hot days Dotterels are rather tame (I could approach them to 1,5 m, once even to 60 cm), whilst in hard wind, especially in cold weather, they are much wilder and less confidential.

Frequent quarrelling, pursuit and short single fights can mainly be observed in cool weather. The attacker makes a rash, with head drooped almost crouching down, at its rival, but the driving has never surpassed 1–2 m. The fighting birds chirped sharply and halting. This voice differed considerably from the thin and soft whistling of anxiety, from the mono-syllable and slightly scarp alarm and from the calling whistle of the bird strayed.

Among other avian species Dotterels form occasionally loose feeding community with Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*), Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*), Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*), Lapland Bunting (*Calcarius lapponicus*), Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), Stone Curlew (*Burhinus oedicnemus*), Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) written in order of frequency (Kovács, 1980; 1983; 1986).

However, Dotterels tend to avoid the „outsider” species even, driving them away e. g., Starlings, Skylarks and Lapland Bunting.

They are afraid of the Corvidae and particularly of the predators. Of the latter Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) disturbs them most frequently. The occasionally occurring Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) more dangerous for Dotterels: in 1976, for example, a north Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus calidus*) had caught one specimen in the Kunmadaras-puszta. In September Red-footed Falcons (*Falco vespertinus*) assembling for remigration sometimes occupy en mass certain parts of puszta, even the migration places used by Dotterels. This flock of predators may considerably disturb the Dotterels which may even abandon their usual place.

Moulting, age structure

In August and early September coloured or slightly moulting specimens may still be seen in quite a great number. Their moulting takes place here. Onset and duration of moulting show great variations, some are in nuptial plumage still at late-September, but the majority of Dotterels wear already winter plumage.

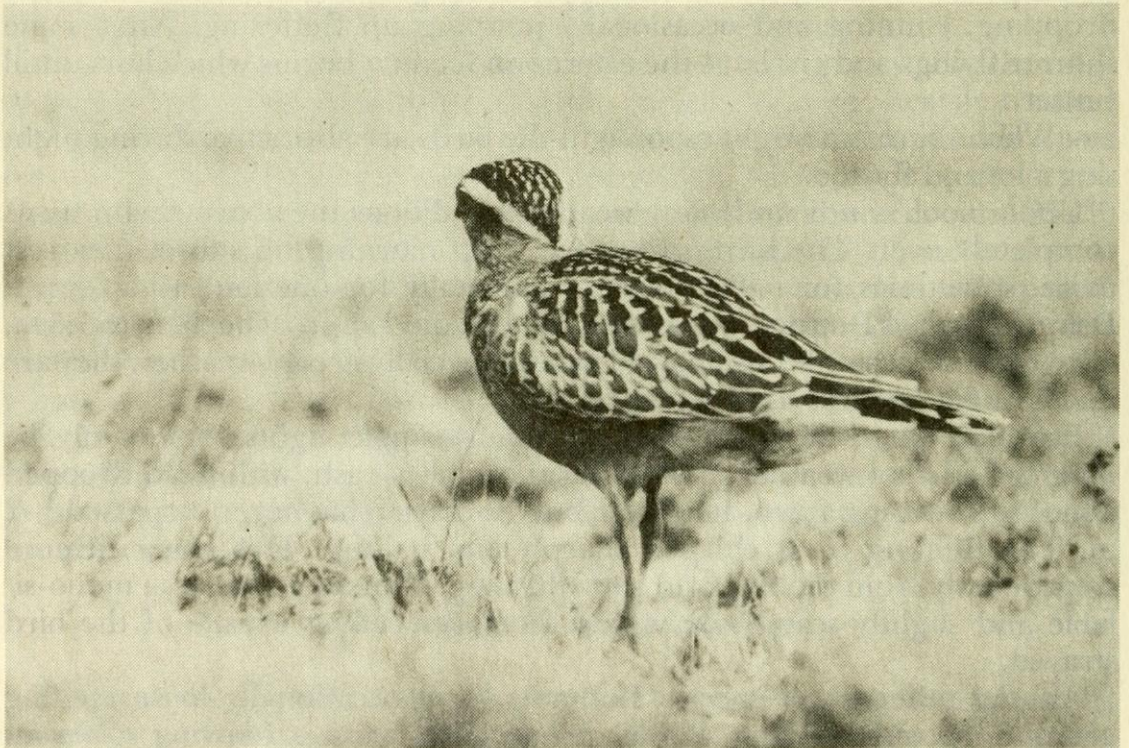


Fig. 1. Characteristic occiput markings of an old Dotterel after moulting
1. ábra Vedlett, öreg havasi lile jellegzetes tarkómintázata

Fotó: Dr. G. Kovács

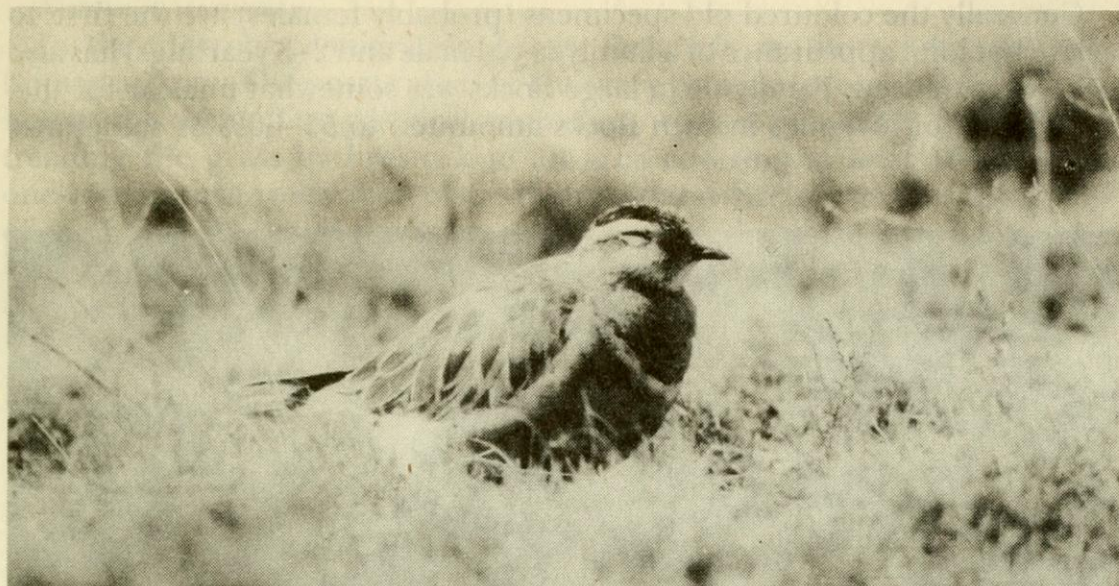


Fig. 2.
2. ábra

*An old Dotterel specimen is sleeping
in standing position at the beginning of moulting*
Vedlés kezdetén levő öreg madár állva alszik

Fotó: Dr. G. Kovács

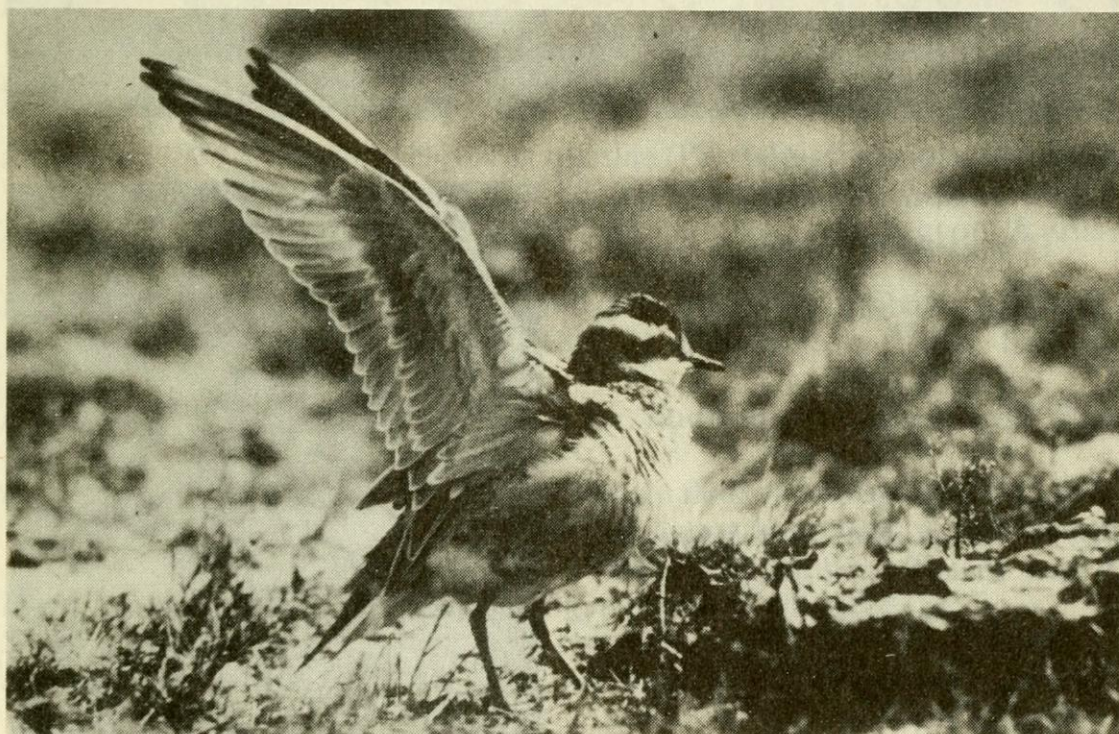


Fig. 3. *The Dotterel cools itself with wings lifted wings against noonday hot*
3. ábra *A déli forróságban szárnyát felemelve hűsíti magát a havasi lile*

Fotó: Dr. G. Kovács

Generally the coloured old specimens (probably females) are the first, to arrive but joint appearance of a family (1 old male and 2–3 yearlings) has also been experienced. Family tie in large flocks was somewhat unclear for me. Proportion of juveniles in such flocks amounted to 55–60% or sometimes more.

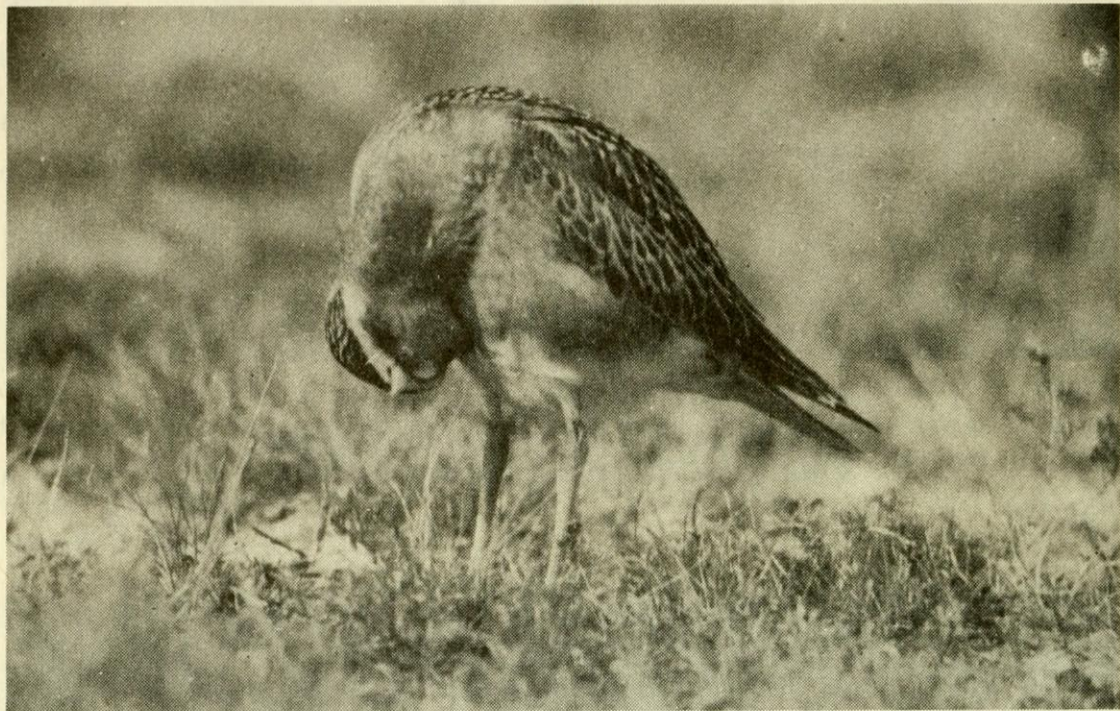
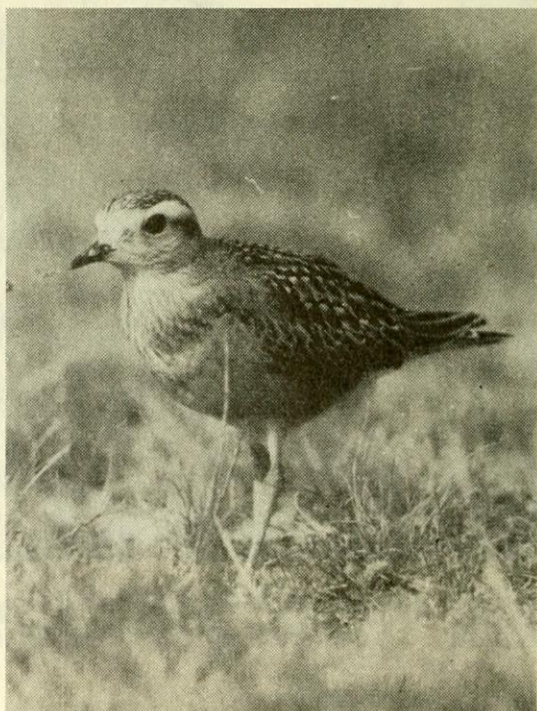


Fig. 4. A preening Dotterel
4. ábra Tollázkodó havasi lile

Fotó: Dr. G. Kovács

Fig. 5. A Dotterel in juvenile plumage
5. ábra Fiatalkori tollruhás havasi lile

Fotó: Dr. G. Kovács



Nature conservation

In the Hortobágy migration places Dotterels are not endangered by human activity. The puszta areas of Hungary provide favourable temporary homes for them. The practical protection work may include grazing and treading the grass by livestock in an area covering at least 10–15 ha in one-two favourite migration places (Kunmadaras, Szelencés) thus the period of their migration and stay here can be extended and their population be increased even in unfavourable years. Since Dotterels are not disturbed by the grazing livestock no restrictions of grazing are needed.

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A HAVASI LILE (*EUDROMIAS MORINELLUS* L. 1758.) HORTOBÁGYI VONULÁSA

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1974 és 1990 között a szerző több mint 200 alkalommal figyelte meg a Magyarországon ritkának számító havasi lilét. A Hortobágy négy területén alakultak ki rendszeresnek mondható átvonulólhelyek, melyeken (az erősen csapadékos évek kivételével) minden esztendőben előfordultak ezek a madarak.

Átvonulólhelyek a Hortobágyon

1. *Pentezug*: főleg a 70-es években jelentek meg itt feltűnő rendszerességgel. 1981 óta viszont megszűnt az itteni vonulás.
2. *Szelencés*: a legstabilabb vonulólhely, ahol kedvező években 120–130 példány is megjelenik. 1980-ig a kopár juhlegelőket, 1981 óta inkább a gulyajárást látogatják.
3. *Kunmadarasi-pusztá*: több pontját is használják. Egy stabil hely mellett „tartalék” helyeket is felkeresnek. Létszámuk kedvező években a 40 példányt is meghaladta.
4. *Angyalháza*: 1986-ban *Konyhás Sándor* észlelte a havasi lilék itteni megjelenését, kopár birkajáráson. 1990-ben kiderült, hogy ez a hely nem a közeli Szelencés „váltó” területe, hanem külön vonulólhely, ahol a létszám a 80 példányt is meghaladta.
5. *Egyéb, alkalmi előfordulási helyek*: Darassa, Máta, Halastó, Álomzug, Kecskés, Nyírólapos, Borzas, Nagyiván, Zám. 1975-ben még a bihari Sándorosnál is előfordult.

Az átvonulólhelyek felszíni formái, növényzete: rövid fűvű szikes pusztai asszociációk erősen legelt és taposott változatait kedveli. Vonzódik a patanyomokkal, keréknyomokkal, trágyalepényekkel tarkított jószágállásokhoz. Szántókon igen ritka.

Tavaszi átvonulás

Ritkán fordul elő. Az adatsorban ismertetett néhány eset, ill. *Radó* (1957), *Sterbetz* (1972) és *Fintha* (in litt) szerint márc. 8. és máj. 24. között vonulnak át, de valószínűleg a zömük leszállás nélkül repüli keresztül a Hortobágyot.

Őszi vonulás

Legkorábbi adatunk: augusztus 16. (1987, *Konyhás Sándor megfigyelése*), legkésőbbi előfordulás: november 19. (1979.) Meghatározó tényező a vonulást megelőző nyár csapadékosága vagy aszályos volta. Igazán nagy számban csak száraz években érkeznek.

Viselkedés, társuló fajok

Jámbor, bizalmas madár. A terepen a táplálkozó csapatot könnyű észrevenni, mert rövid nekifutásokkal és megtorpanásokkal egy irányba haladva szedegetnek, percenként 8–12 megiramodást és 14–17 csippentést végezve. A társaitól elmaradt egyed folyton hallatja egytagú, mély hívogató hangját, miközben ide-oda repülve keresi a csapatot. A többiek a földről válaszolva „lehívják” az ilyen kóborlót.

Napi ritmusuk az időjárás függvénye. Meleg időben sokat szunyókálnak, árnyékos helyekre húzódva. Ez a „delelés” akár 5 órán át is eltarthat. Szeles, hideg vagy esős időben rövid pihenési szakaszok váltakoznak tollázkodásokkal, ill. táplálkozási szakaszokkal. Holdas éjszakákon, főleg meleg időben nagyon aktívak, repülnek és bizonyára táplálkoznak is.

Főként a hűvös időben gyakori, hogy a csapat egyes tagjai összeverekszenek, de az ilyen párbajok nagyon rövidek, 1–2 méteres kergetőzésből, szárnyverdeső felugrásból és szaggatott csipogásból állnak. Más fajok jelenlétét nem keresik, de eltűrik a bíbic, aranylile, seregély, sárga billegető, ujjaslile, sarkantyús sármány, pacsirta, ugartyúk, nagy póling jelenlétét. Esetenként a kisebb madarakat (seregély, pacsirta, sarkantyús sármány) elűzik maguk közül, más esetekben egy-egy pacsirta vagy sármány órákon át együtt mozog a lilékkal, sőt, azok elülése, szunyókálása esetén sem hagyja ott a csapatot. (1990. október, Kunmadarasi-pusztá.) A varjaktól és a ragadozó madaraktól erősen tartanak. A kabasólyom időnként rájuk támad, de eredményesen csak a vándorsólyom vadászik rájuk. A Hortobágyon olyan gyakori kék vércsék pusztai jelenlétét is nehezen viselik el.

Vedlés, az öreg és fiatal egyedek aránya

A kiszínezett, még vedletlen öreg példányok (tojók?) érkeznek elsőként, majd a kissé vedlett (hím?) egyedek, a fiatalokkal, mintegy családonként. Teljes átvedlésük a hortobágyi vonulóhelyeken zajlik, általában szeptember közepéig-végéig. Nagyobb csapatokban a fiatalok mennyisége elérte, néha meghaladta az 55–60%-ot.

Természetvédelmi feladatok

A Hortobágy ideális körülményeket biztosít a havasi lile vonulásához. Csupán esős éveken válhat szükségessé egy-egy kedvenc helyükön a túllegeltetés, hogy a rövidfüves állapot kialakuljon.