



# Manual of good conservation practices for the Kentish Plover on the Canary Island coastline

# Acknowledgements



*This participative Kentish plover conservation campaign is brokered by the European Union under the European Regional Development Fund (PO FEDER Canarias 2014-2020).*

**Publication:**

Gobierno de Canarias (Canary Islands Government)

**Edition:**

SEO/BirdLife

**Texts and photos:**

The texts are partly an adaptation by Elena Ramos Jiménez and Juan Antonio Lorenzo (SEO/BirdLife) of the dossier of the Proyecto Piloto para la creación de una red de playas naturalizadas para la conservación del chorlito patinegro en la Comunidad Valenciana (Pilot scheme for setting up a network of naturalised beaches for conservation of the Kentish plover in Valencia Region), drawn up by that region's SEO/BirdLife office.

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# Hábitat

## Home of the Kentish plover under threat

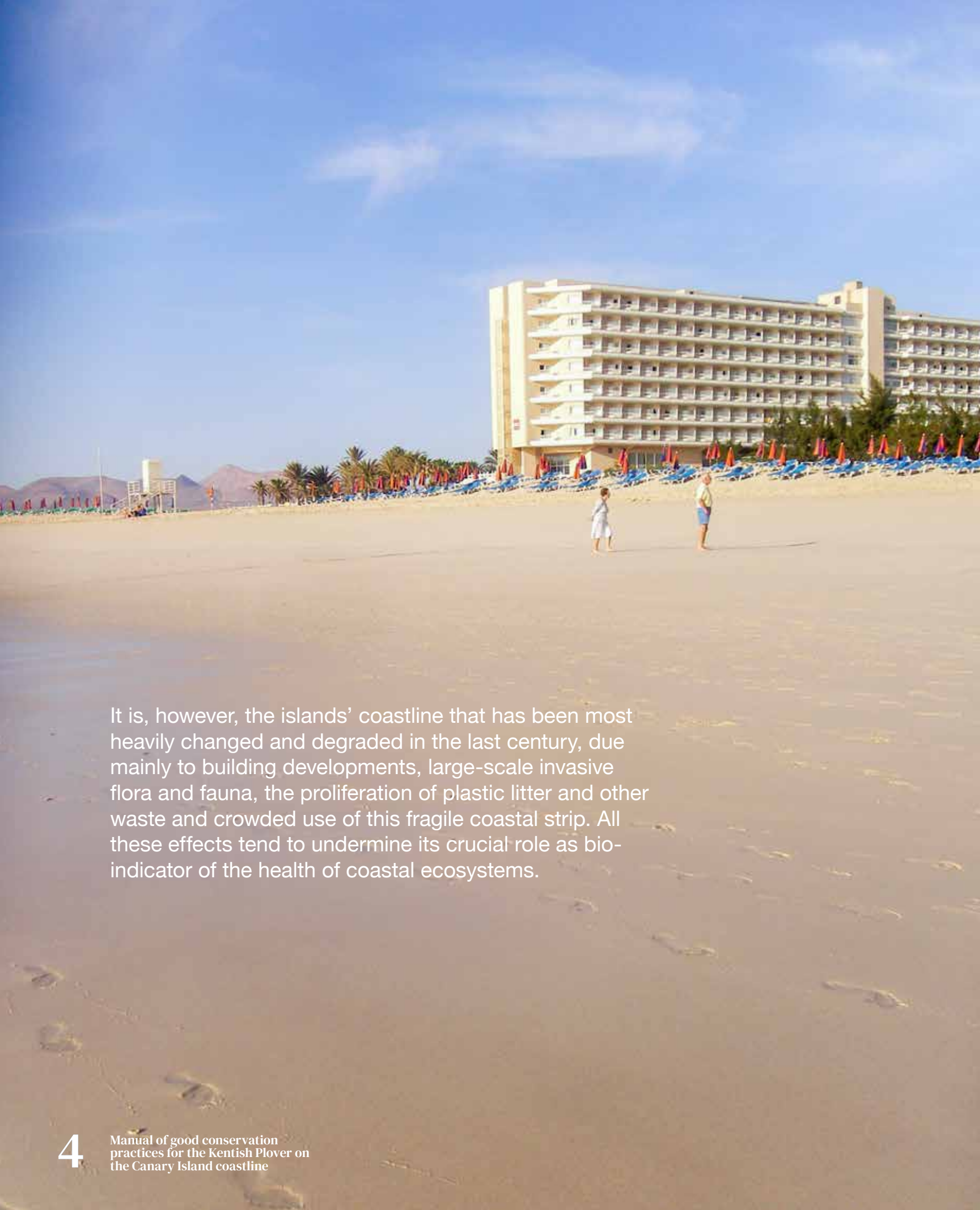
The most valuable ecosystems for conservation of the Kentish plover in the Canary Islands, on the strength of their rich biodiversity, are sandy beaches, coastal dune systems, saltpans, saltmarshes, natural coastal basins, the man-made rain-collecting basins known in the Canary Islands as “maretas” and gully runoffs into the sea.

These spots serve as refuge, stopover and feeding areas for migratory and breeding birds such as the common tern (*Sterna hirundo*), little ringed plover (*Charadrius dubius*) and, especially, the Kentish plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*).

As well as their importance for conservation of biodiversity these areas also tend to be popular sites for many different human activities such as sun-and-sea tourism, fishery and shellfish harvesting, fresh-air classrooms, leisure spots and artistic milieu. They also help to offset climate change and mitigate extreme weather events like storms and floods.







It is, however, the islands' coastline that has been most heavily changed and degraded in the last century, due mainly to building developments, large-scale invasive flora and fauna, the proliferation of plastic litter and other waste and crowded use of this fragile coastal strip. All these effects tend to undermine its crucial role as bio-indicator of the health of coastal ecosystems.

# Why should this species be protected?

Birds in general are deemed to be tell-tale indicators of the health of ecosystems and are frequently used to gauge their state of conservation.

This is where the Kentish plover comes into its own. It needs sandy beaches and shallows with a rich community of invertebrates along the edges and a dune system in excellent condition; it therefore tells us a lot about the state of these habitats.

The conservation of the Kentish plover can therefore have a very positive knock-on effect on the conservation of beaches, dunes and, in general, the islands' coastline. Sadly, a decline in the species is being recorded not only in the Canaries but also along a great part of Spain's coastline.



# Range

This species has a wide-ranging almost cosmopolitan distribution, taking in North America, South America, Asia and Europe, where it breeds mainly around the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Several subspecies have been recorded and recognised; alexandrinus is the subspecies present in Eurasia and North Africa.

In Spain it is scattered along the whole Mediterranean coastline, the Atlantic coast of Andalusia and some points of the Galician coast, as well as in the Balearic and Canary Islands. It is currently on a sharp downward trend in the whole national territory.



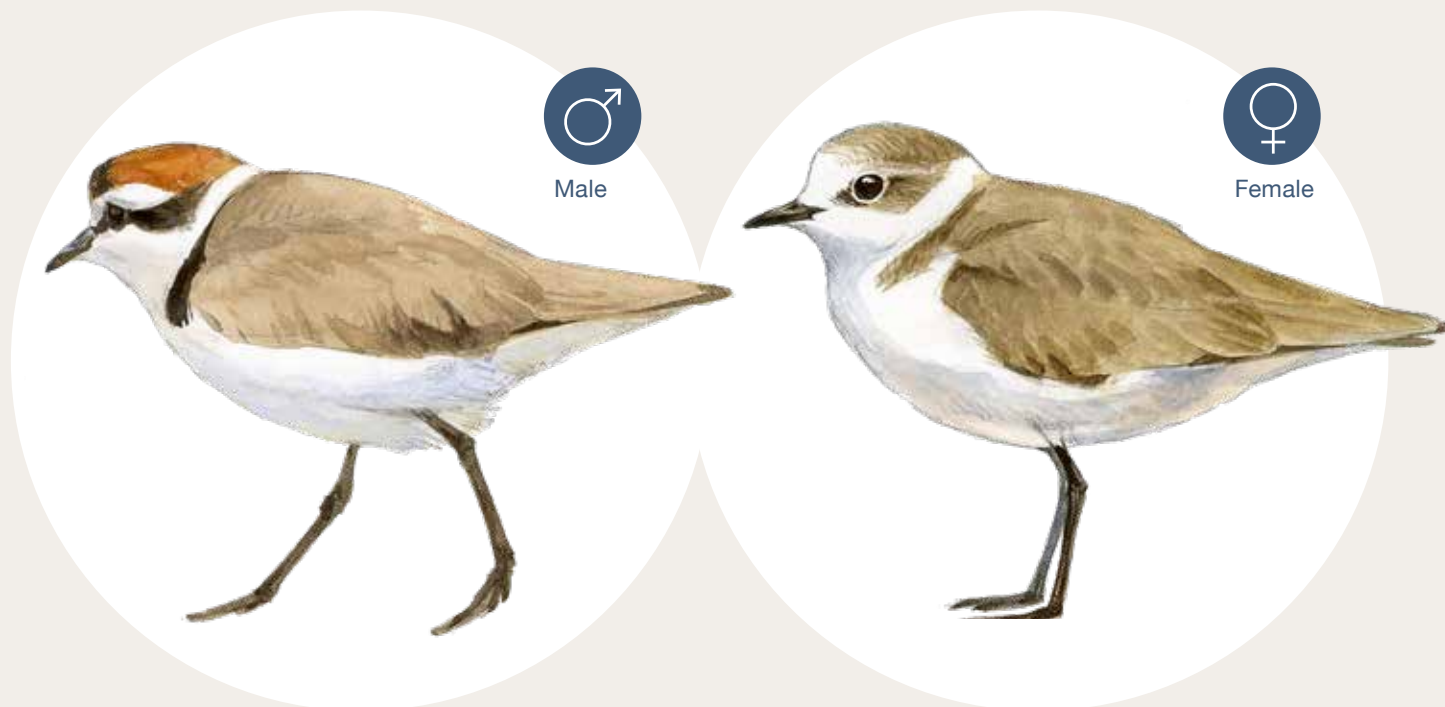
- Breeder
- Past breeder; today only occasional
- Non-breeder with occasional presence

Canary Island Kentish plover range map.  
Source: SEO/BirdLife.



# Identification

Learn to recognise the Kentish plover



It's a small, very dark-legged, relatively short-beaked shorebird with quick, highly-strung movements. As it runs about the beach it probes with this pointed beak to catch tiny insects, crustaceans and molluscs. It has a characteristic, stop-start hunting method, standing stock still to spot the prey and then darting towards it.

In the Canary Islands it breeds from January to June, sometimes with a second or even third brood up to August when conditions are very favourable.

It tends to prefer pure sandy beaches to a mixture of pebbles and sand though it may sometimes take to rockier coasts including pools and reservoirs and even saltpans and lime kilns. It nests on the ground in a scrape outlined by pebbles, shell fragments or seaweed. The female usually lays three speckled eggs designed to blend in with the surroundings to make it hard for predators to spot them. The incubation period is 24-27 days.





## Learn to tell it apart from similar species



### Ringed plover

*Charadrius hiaticula*

Length: 18-20 cm.

Beak: Mainly orange with black tip.

Legs: Orange.

Eye-ring: Pale grey, almost imperceptible.

Crown: Brown with black band at the front.

Forehead pattern: White patch stretching almost to eyes.

Breast-band: Black, unbroken.

Flight pattern: Bold white wing bar.



### Little ringed plover

*Charadrius dubius*

Length: 14-17 cm.

Beak: All black with tiny white patch below.

Legs: Yellow.

Eye-ring: Bright yellow.

Crown: Brown with a thin white stripe at the front over the black head band.

Forehead pattern: White, stretching almost to eyes.

Breast-band: Black, unbroken.



### Kentish plover

*Charadrius alexandrinus*

Length: 15-17 cm.

Beak: Wholly black.

Legs: Blackish or dark brown.

Eye-ring: None.

Crown: A russet tinge of varying intensity at the back of the crown grading into the black head band.

Forehead pattern: White, extending back into a full eye-stripe.

Breast-band: Black, reduced to only two side spurs.

# Threats

Habitat degradation,  
destruction or fragmentation

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People and vehicles straying off the  
tracks and trampling nests

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Public use of beaches during  
the breeding season

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Certain sporting activities  
(kitesurfing, quadbikes, motocross,  
cross-country running, etc.)

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Invasive species and uncontrolled pets disturbing or preying on the birds, their chicks and eggs  
(unleashed dogs, feral cats and rats)

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Illicit camping

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Mechanical beach cleaning, removing all the organic material deposited by the tide

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With fewer and fewer natural beaches to inhabit, the Kentish plover population has plunged by **70% in Spain in the last 30 years. In the particular case of the Canary Islands its range has shrunk by 42% in the last decade; it has ceased to breed in Tenerife and is tottering on the verge of extinction in Gran Canaria.**

For this reason the Kentish plover has been downgraded to the status of “Vulnerable” in the national and regional catalogues of threatened species and looks to be heading for the even more worrying status of “In Danger of Extinction”.



# Good practices for conservation of the Kentish plover



1

Remove only solid urban waste and plastic litter from the beaches

Beach cleaning should be restricted to picking up plastic litter, solid urban waste, thrown-away belongings and cigarette butts. Hygiene permitting, the remains of seaweed, plants and other organic matter, all with an important ecological role to play on the coastline, should never be taken away.

2

Keep off the dune systems

Dunes are very fragile and sensitive ecosystems that are often home to threatened species like the Kentish plover itself. Particular damage is caused by trampling dune vegetation that serves as refuge and cover.



### 3 Obey signs and instructions; stay out of restricted areas

Birds themselves don't understand barriers but we are duty bound to guarantee them spaces where they can breed free of nuisance and disturbance.



### 4 Avoid disturbance to birds that are feeding or resting

The chances of breeding success depend heavily on proper rest and feeding.

### 5 Keep to marked paths

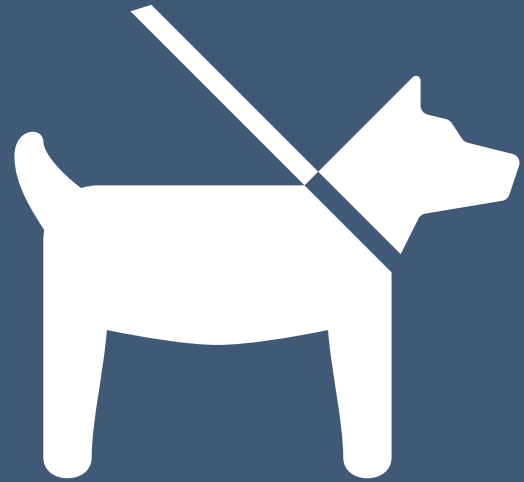
Straying off paths erodes and compacts the soil, damages plantlife and might even cause breeding birds to desert their nests, with the concomitant loss of eggs or death of the chicks. Eggs and chicks, don't forget, are cryptically coloured to blend into the ground so it's all too easy to trample them unawares.



# 6

## Keep dogs on a leash and under control at all times

Current legislation calls for dogs to be kept under control in all the islands' nature sites; apart from law abidance, however, this practice is also favourable to the conservation of biodiversity.



## Report any nests or chicks that are in danger

Should you learn of any nest or chicks that are in some sort of danger and therefore stand in need of protection, don't hesitate to report it immediately to the competent authority for the appropriate measures to be taken.



We urge all competent authorities, and especially any local authorities whose territory holds populations of this threatened species, to implement the necessary measures to guarantee conservation of the species.

Find out more about this species in particular or the conservation of birds and their habitats in general at:



[seo.org](http://seo.org)



[biodiversidadcanarias.es](http://biodiversidadcanarias.es)



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de Canarias



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