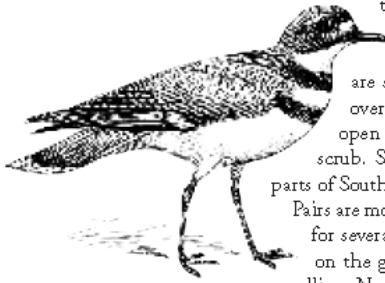


Killdeer (Kd)

What a strange name for such a wonderful ground bird. Kd's belong to the plover family but, unlike their cousins, are not seen at water's edge. The loud piping call seems to be the origin for the common name. This 10.5-inch-high bird (with a 24-inch wingspan) is most frequently seen running along the ground or taking short, low flights between bushes. Adults have brown backs (sometimes with rufous color), a white belly, a brown head with a white line above the eye, a black bill, yellow legs, and an eye-catching black band around the neck attached to a lower black band on the neck. In flight, the tail is long and the rump is rufous color; the upper wings show a distinct white stripe. Males and females are similar. They are found all year over most of the southern U.S., in open areas, farmland, parks and dry scrub. Some birds migrate to northern parts of South America.



Pairs are monogamous and may stay together for several years. Males display to females on the ground and in the air with loud calling. Nest building is done by the males.

However, nests are minimal, sometimes just a scraped

indentation in the ground on hard dirt, with a few rocks at nest's edge. Occasionally grasses are used to line a scraped nest. However, the spotted eggs and the colors on a sitting bird blend into the environment and are an effective camouflage.

Both male and female incubate three or four eggs for 24 to 28 days. Hatchlings are precocial (covered with down, have open eyes, and are capable of leaving the nest in a few hours), and follow the parents as soon as all are hatched and dry. Approximately 25 days after hatching, young can fly. The young cannot maintain body temperature for the first two weeks, however, and so stay close to a parent who will gather them underneath the breast and wings to keep them warm.

Since nests are vulnerable to ground predation, Kd's adopt a drooped-wing injury posture and run away from the nest to protect their eggs. They also give a distress call and run from the nest. During hot weather, Kd's wet their belly feathers to keep the nest site cool. Their food consists mostly of insects, followed by invertebrates and some seeds. They rely on eyesight to find food and have significantly larger optic brain lobes than tactile-feeding birds.

These lovely, lively birds seem to be on the decline due to agriculture and other land uses. A group of killdeers are collectively known as a "season" of killdeers.

—Pam Henline