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## First Discovery of a Four-Egg Clutch for Mountain Plover (*Charadrius montanus*) in Nebraska

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(*Charadrius montanus*) in Nebraska

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Mountain Plovers (*Charadrius montanus*) are currently classified as highly imperiled by the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan (Brown et al. 2001; USSCP 2004). Mountain Plovers routinely nest in sparsely vegetated areas with a high percentage of bare soil in the dry tablelands and shortgrass prairie of the western Great Plains (Knopf and Wunder 2006), a trait that often leads them to nest in dryland crop fields in Nebraska (Bly et al 2008). Because Mountain Plover is a Tier 1 state-threatened species (Schneider et al. 2005) that breeds in only three counties of southwestern Nebraska, in 2001 the Nebraska Prairie Partners (a cooperative



Figure 1. Mountain Plover (*Charadrius montanus*) nest with four eggs located on 27 May 2010 in Kimball County, Nebraska (Photo by Megan DeMory).

partnership between the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission) began studying and conserving Mountain Plover nests (Bly et al. 2008) in the southwest Panhandle. Since 2001, Nebraska Prairie Partners have located a total of 606 Mountain Plover nests in Kimball, southern Banner, and western Cheyenne Counties.

On 27 May 2010, the first documented Mountain Plover nest to contain a clutch of four eggs was documented in a fallow strip of a dryland crop field in southern Kimball County (Figure 1). The nest was checked every 2 - 4 days through 7 June, when the eggs were within a few days of hatching, and on that date we found the eggs missing. No pipping chips were located in the nest scrape, no adult bird was observed near the area, and coyote (*Canis latrans*) tracks were scattered all around, suggesting the nest had failed due to predation. In 2010 72% of nests hatched at least one egg, and most failures were the result of predation or weather.

Mountain Plover typically have a clutch size of 3 eggs, though clutches with 1 and 2 eggs are observed in ~15% of nesting attempts (Knopf and Wunder 2006). Clutches with 4 eggs are rare and have been reported to occur in less than 1% of the population (Knopf and Wunder 2006). Five 4-egg clutches have been reported in Colorado and one in Montana (see Knopf and Wunder 2006 for details), but this was the first 4-egg clutch reported in Nebraska, and it was located after 11 years of intensive study in which a total of 598 Mountain Plover nests were located.

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