

FEATURED PHOTO

FIRST DOCUMENTED RECORD OF A COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*CHARADRIUS HIATICULA*) FOR CALIFORNIA

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On 19 August 2011, Easterla discovered a second-year male Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) in alternate plumage—a species that had never been fully documented in California. While scanning for shorebirds on a large mudflat at the Davis Wetlands, about 7.5 km northeast of the center of Davis in Yolo County, California, he noticed a plover, slightly larger than nearby Semipalmated Plovers (*C. semipalmatus*), with a wide, black ring across its chest, no visible eyering, a white “Nike swoosh” above its eye, and the black lores extending to the gape. It was in full alternate plumage, but because of its worn greater wing coverts, it appeared to be in its second year (P. Pyle pers. comm.). Eventually the bird called—a whistled, mournful “too-li” that was very distinct from the call of the Semipalmated Plover. On the basis of his prior experience with this species in Russia, and with many Semipalmated Plovers, Easterla felt confident this bird was a Common Ringed Plover. He phoned Sterling and e-mailed him photographs so that Jon Dunn, Bob Gill, Dan Gibson, Guy McCaskie, and others were able to confirm the identification while attending the Western Field Ornithologists’ meeting in Sierra Vista, Arizona. Over the ensuing week, hundreds of birders observed and photographed the plover. A local television news crew recorded its calls during an interview in the field with Easterla. The record has been accepted by the California Bird Records Committee as record 2011-118 (www.californiabirds.org).

With good light, close observation (to ~3 m), and the two similar species together, we were able to observe and photograph subtle differences. Though difficult to assess in the field, one character critical to distinguishing the Common Ringed Plover from the Semipalmated Plover is the former’s lack of vestigial webbing or palmation between the inner and middle toes (Prater et al. 1977, Hayman et al. 1986, O’Brien et al. 2006)—visible in photographs of the Common Ringed Plover at Davis taken at close range (see lower image on this issue’s back cover). Another important field mark is the bold white stripe (“Nike swoosh”) above the auriculars of the Common Ringed Plover; the Semipalmated Plover lacks or has a greatly reduced white spot above the auriculars (O’Brien et al. 2006).

Other identifying field marks discussed by Dunn (1993), observed on the bird at Davis and consistent with its being an adult Common Ringed Plover in alternate plumage, include (1) lack of a noticeable eyering (the Semipalmated Plover has a distinct yellow-orange eyering), (2) bill longer and thinner than that of the Semipalmated Plover, (3) broader wingbars, visible in flight, (4) paler back, heightening the contrast with the black on the auriculars, (5) thicker black breast band, consistently much thicker than the breast band of nearby Semipalmated Plovers regardless of the effects of posture, and (6) larger size, by at least 10% overall.

Dunn (1993) suggested that the width of the black ring on the hindneck and the black feathering of the lores meeting the base of the bill (a pattern rare or lacking in the Semipalmated Plover) may prove useful in identifying adult Common Ringed Plovers. On the Common Ringed Plover at Davis, the black lores extended down to the gape, a pattern evident in photographs such as the upper image on this issue’s

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outside back cover and consistently distinct from the loreal pattern on the adjacent Semipalmated Plovers. The black visible on the hindneck varied greatly with the bird's posture, but at some instances it appeared much wider than we have seen on Semipalmated Plovers.

What may prove most useful in distinguishing the species is the difference in calls. We heard the distinctive call of the Common Ringed Plover on several occasions. On the final day of the bird's visit on 26 August, Easterla was several miles away from the original observation site, heard the Common Ringed Plover call in a rice field, and observed the bird on the ground and then in flight as it flew south, never to be seen again.

In western North America, most confirmed records of the Common Ringed Plover are from western Alaska, including St. Lawrence Island (of breeding as well as of migrants), the Pribilof and Aleutian islands, and the Seward Peninsula (Sealy et al. 1971, Kessel and Gibson 1978, Byrd et al. 1978, Lehman 2005, Gibson and Byrd 2007). There is an unconfirmed report of the species breeding on St. Matthew Island (Winker et al. 2002). Farther south along the Pacific Coast, an immature was well described and sketched at Port Susan Bay, Washington, on 23 September 2006 by Jessie Barry and Cameron Cox, a record accepted by the Washington Bird Records Committee (B. Waggoner pers. comm.). A single-observer report from Point Reyes, California, on 9 September 1996 was not accepted by the California Bird Records Committee because of the lack of photographic documentation or voice recording. The Common Ringed Plover's primary breeding range stretches across the Palearctic Region, including Greenland, and west into the Nearctic Region on Ellesmere, Bylot, and eastern Baffin islands. The species winters primarily in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (Hayman et al. 1986, AOU 1998). In western North America, it is a vagrant anywhere away from St. Lawrence Island (AOU 1998).

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