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FIRST NORTH AMERICAN RECORD OF A KENTISH PLOVER (*ANARHYNCHUS ALEXANDRINUS*)

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ABSTRACT: On 29 May 2023, Pohlen discovered an adult male Kentish Plover (*Anarhynchus alexandrinus*) at Eareckson Air Station, Shemya Island, Aleutian Islands, Alaska—a first record for North America. Features identifying the bird as a Kentish Plover and distinguishing it from the similar Snowy Plover (*A. nivosus*) include the rufous or tawny tinge to the crown, solidly black lores, and limited black auricular patch. The weather patterns leading up to the discovery were conducive to drift vagrancy from Asia.

On 29 May 2023, along South Beach on Shemya Island, the island's most extensive sandy beach, Pohlen found a plover associating with a single Gray-tailed Tattler (*Tringa brevipes*). Both birds flushed shortly after discovery, but the plover remained nearby on the beach, allowing Pohlen to study it for over an hour before it eventually flew off. The plover was noticeably smaller than the Gray-tailed Tattler and had clean white underparts and sandy brown upperparts with a white collar that extended around the hindneck and distinct black spurs on the sides of the upper breast. The head was noticeably patterned, with a distinct black patch behind and below the eye. A black loreal stripe extending from the bill to the eye was nearly as thick as the bill. A black forecrown bar contrasted with the white forehead and eyebrow and a rufous-tinged crown that extended to the white collar on the hindneck. The rufous of the crown was visible at all angles and contrasted with the sandy brown back. It seemed most vibrant above the white collar, eyebrow, and forecrown, and became slightly less vibrant closer to the top of the head. The legs were dark (Figure 1A). The feathering around the lores on the right side of the bird appeared wet and disheveled, giving the appearance of even wider dark lores (Figure 1B). The feathering on the left side of the face appeared normal (Figure 1A). In flight, the plover showed overall sandy brown wings and back, with a slightly darker tail and white outer tail feathers. The flight feathers had white bases, narrower in the secondaries and broader in the inner primaries, giving the bird a distinctive, nearly complete, white bar across the upperwing (Figure 1C). After being flushed initially, the plover seemed unsettled on the beach and flushed three additional times over the next hour of observation. It vocalized just once, when it gave three clear “dip...dip...dip” calls in flight, somewhat reminiscent of a Sanderling (*Calidris alba*).

The black spurs on the upper breast, white collar on the hind neck, and rufous-tinged crown eliminate most similar looking plovers and leave four candidate species: the White-faced (*Anarhynchus dealbatus*), Malaysian (*A. peronii*), Kentish (*A. alexandrinus*), and Snowy (*A. nivosus*). The White-faced, Malaysian, and Kentish Plovers have not been previously recorded in North America (Chesser et al. 2024).

The Malaysian Plover is nonmigratory and unlikely to be found north of southeast Asia and the Philippines. The uniform sandy brown back from the white collar to the tail observed on the Shemya plover is inconsistent with the Malaysian Plover, which has pale fringes to the mantle feathers in all plumages and a black

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FIGURE 1. Kentish Plover at Shemya Island, Alaska, 29 May 2023. (A, macaulaylibrary.org/asset/584795781), left side; (B) right side, and (C, macaulaylibrary.org/asset/584797021) in flight.

Photos by Zachary M. Pohlen

collar below the white collar on the hind neck (Hayman et al. 1986, Bakewell et al. 2023). The migratory White-faced Plover breeds in China, winters in southeast Asia, and lacks the distinct black eyeline, bold black forecrown, black spur on the upper breast, and the black ear-patch evident on the Shemya plover (Kennerly et al. 2008, Limparungpatthanakij and Pyle 2023). The final two species, the Kentish Plover and Snowy Plover, are closely related and have been considered conspecific. Cassin first described the Snowy Plover as a species distinct from the Kentish Plover in 1858, but Oberholser (1922) merged the two, given their similarities in adult plumage. Various authorities maintained this opinion, while others suggested they be regarded as allospecies (Snow 1978, Sibley and Monroe 1990). The American Ornithologists' Union (1944) followed Oberholser (1922) and treated them as conspecific until Chesser et al. (2011) reversed this decision. This split was based on Küpper et al. (2009), who found significant morphological and genetic differences between the

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two, with the Kentish Plover more closely related to the White-fronted Plover (*A. marginatus*) than to the Snowy Plover.

Because of their disjunct ranges, however, analysis of the phenotypic characteristics distinguishing the Kentish and Snowy Plovers is limited. While plumage features can overlap (Oberholser 1922), the published material on the species' field identification focuses on the extensiveness and vibrancy of the rufous on the crown, the presence and thickness of the black lores, and the size and shape of the auricular patch of alternate-plumaged males (Hayman et al. 1986, Pyle et al. 2024). The Shemya plover was an alternate-plumaged male by its rufous crown, black forecrown, and black chest spurs. Adult male Snowy Plovers can show a rufous wash to the crown at the beginning of the breeding season, but it is less vibrant and less extensive than shown by adult male Kentish Plovers (and the Shemya plover). Uncommonly, some adult male Snowy Plovers can also show dark lores, but the dark patch is usually less uniform, narrows as it approaches the eye, does not extend below the eye, and/or is not completely black, as seen on the Shemya plover and adult male Kentish Plovers. Also as in the Shemya plover, the Kentish Plover's black auricular patch is more restricted, does not wrap around the posterior end of the supercilium, or extend onto the nape as in the Snowy Plover (Pyle et al. 2024). All these differences can be subtle, however, and there is overlap. Because of this, some birds may best be left unidentified without genetic or morphometric analysis (wings and tarsi longer on average in the Kentish Plover, although extremes overlap; Küpper et al. 2009, Almalki et al. 2016, Eberhart-Phillips et al. 2020, Page et al. 2023). In the case of the Shemya plover, the lack of conflict in any characteristic supports the bird's identification as a Kentish Plover.

Shemya Island is in the Near Island group of the western Aleutian Islands (Figure 2A). It is a well-known location for migratory birds of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (Gibson 1981, Schwitters 2015). The Kentish Plover is widely distributed in the Old World with resident and migratory populations that breed across the temperate and subtropical zones of Africa, Europe, and Asia. The breeding Kentish Plovers closest to Shemya occur on Sakhalin Island and in the southern Kuril Islands (del Hoyo et al. 2023, Birdlife International 2024; Figure 2A).

With some records of vagrants, it may be informative to explore the mechanisms that led to the extralimital occurrence. On Shemya Island, this may also be helpful when evaluating whether a bird arrived from Asia (e.g., a Kentish Plover) or from North America (e.g., a Snowy Plover), given the weather patterns in the days leading up to the discovery. In the case of the Shemya plover, winds were favorable for Asiatic drift vagrants to the western Aleutians (Figure 2B). Beginning on 26 May, southwest winds from northern Honshu and Hokkaido, Japan, began blowing northeast through the Kuril Islands and to the east of the Kamchatka Peninsula (Figure 2B, 67 hours before Pohlen's observation). These southwest winds continued for 24 hours, through 27 May, off the eastern shore of the Kamchatka Peninsula (Figure 2B, -39 hours). Shemya Island continued to experience southwest winds through 28 May, but winds shifted to south just south of the Kamchatka Peninsula (Figure 2B, -16 hours). Winds calmed on Shemya on 29 May, the day the plover was discovered (Figure 2B, +8 hours).

The plumage characteristics point to the identification of the Shemya plover as an adult male Kentish Plover, presumably *A. a. nihonensis* (Deignan, 1941), given that subspecies' breeding range on Sakhalin Island and in the southern Kuril Islands (del Hoyo et al. 2023). The location of the sighting in the western Aleutian Islands and weather patterns leading up to the sighting also favored the likelihood of a Kentish Plover over the Snowy Plover. In July 2023, the Alaska Checklist Committee accepted this observation as the first record of Kentish Plover in Alaska (see University of Alaska Museum Department of Ornithology <https://universityofalaskamuseumbirds.org/bird-collection/>), and the American

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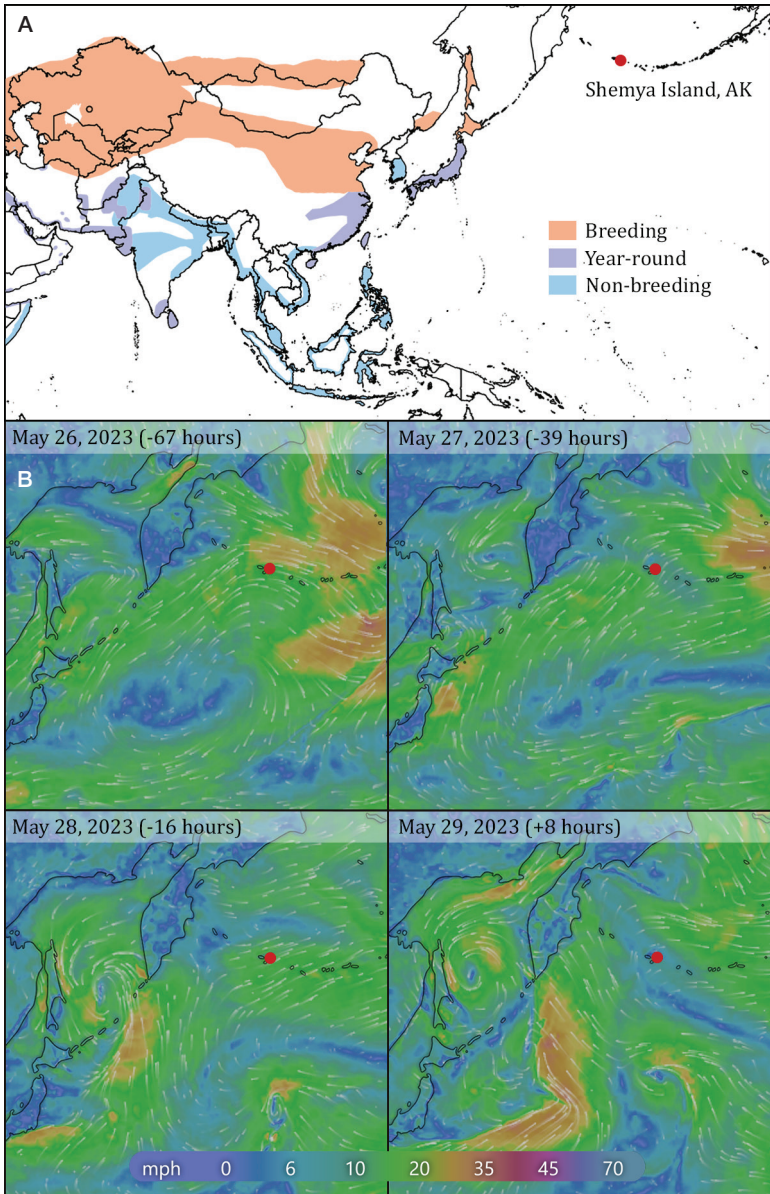


FIGURE 2. (A) The eastern range of Kentish Plover in relation to Shemya Island, Alaska (BirdLife International and Handbook of the Birds of the World 2024). (B) Surface wind directions between Japan and Shemya Island (red dot) on 26 May (67 hr before discovery), 27 May (39 hr before discovery), 28 May (16 hr before discovery), and 29 May (8 hr after discovery; windy.com).

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Birding Association Checklist Committee accepted it as the first Kentish Plover for its checklist area (Pyle et al. 2024).

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