

The First Record of Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin. Submitted: April 15, 2019.

Introduction and Distribution

The Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) is a widespread Old World shorebird species that is found breeding in the Arctic and subarctic regions from Greenland, Europe, east to Siberia (O'Brien *et al.* 2006). In North America, this species breeds on Baffin Island, eastern Ellesmere Island (Godfrey 1986). The Common Ringed Plover winters primarily from Western Europe, the Mediterranean Basin, throughout Africa, including Madagascar, and the Middle East (Hayman *et al.* 1986, O'Brien *et al.* 2006, Brazil 2009).

There are three recognized subspecies of the Common Ringed Plover (Thies *et al.* 2018). Distinction between the subspecies is based on moult; with features changing clinally North to South, rather than East to West, making it impossible to draw a dividing line in Northwestern Europe (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996, Snow and Perrins 1998). The nominate subspecies of Common Ringed Plover is (*C. h. hiaticula*) which breeds from southern Scandinavia to Great Britain, and northwestern France (Wiersma *et al.* 2019). This subspecies winters from Great Britain, south into Africa (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996, Snow and Perrins 1998). The second subspecies of the Common Ringed Plover is (*C. h. tundrae*) which is found breeding from northern Scandinavia, and northern Russia east to the Chukotskiy Peninsula, and is a casual breeder also in the northern Bering Sea region of Alaska on St Lawrence Island (Wiersma *et al.* 2019). This subspecies winters in the Caspian Sea region, and from Southwest Asia, south and east to South Africa (Wiersma *et al.* 2019). The third subspecies of the Common Ringed Plover is (*C. h. psammodromus*) which is found breeding on Ellesmere and Baffin Islands of Northeastern Arctic Canada through Greenland to Svalbard, Iceland and the Faeroes. This subspecies winters from southwestern Europe to western Africa (Godfrey 1986, Wiersma *et al.* 2019). The three main subspecies are supported by genetic data (Thies *et al.* 2018). There is no genetic evidence for a putative subspecies (*C. h. kolymensis*) subspecies from Chukotka, in Siberia (Thies *et al.* 2018).

The Common Ringed Plover breeds primarily on sand or shingle beaches either along the Arctic coast (Hayman *et al.* 1986, del Hoyo *et al.* 1996, Snow and Perrins 1998) or around coastal tundra pools or lakes (Johnsgard 1981). In the southern part of its range it may also breed inland on the Arctic tundra (Hayman *et al.* 1986, del Hoyo *et al.* 1996) on muddy plains with stones or pebbles (Johnsgard 1981), on shores and sandbars of inland rivers, lakes, gravel pits or reservoirs (Hayman *et al.* 1986, del Hoyo *et al.* 1996, Snow and Perrins 1998), or on short grassland, farmland (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996, Snow and Perrins 1998) and other well-drained sites (Snow and Perrins 1998).

Outside of the breeding season the Common Ringed Plover inhabits muddy, sandy or pebbly coasts in the tropics and subtropics (Johnsgard 1981); including estuaries (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996), tidal mudflats, sandflats and exposed coral reefs (Urban *et al.* 1986). It also frequents mud banks or sandbanks along rivers and lakes (Urban *et al.* 1986), lagoons, saltmarshes, short grassland, farmland, flooded fields, gravel pits, reservoirs (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996), sewage works and salt pans during this season (Hockey *et al.* 2005). The diet of the Common Ringed Plover is varied and consists of small crustaceans, molluscs, polychaete worms, isopods, amphipods, insects (such as: ants, beetles, flies and fly larvae) and millipedes (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996).

The Common Ringed Plover is highly migratory and moves a great distance between its wintering grounds and breeding grounds. Adults in the spring leave the wintering grounds in early to mid-April arriving in northern regions of Eurasia and Arctic Canada from mid-late May into early June (O'Brien *et al.* 2006). Adult birds in the fall depart their breeding areas by early August, migrating to the wintering grounds between mid-August and mid-September (O'Brien *et al.* 2006). Failed breeders will move south earlier. Juvenile peak passage in the fall is from mid-September to October (O'Brien *et al.* 2006).

On the East Coast of North America, the Common Ringed Plover is a casual to accidental vagrant from Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, Ontario, Illinois, the Maritimes, New England south to at least North Carolina (e-bird 2019). This species is accidental on Guadeloupe Island with 2 recent records; 1 a well photographed juvenile from September 3-13, 2018, and a well photographed adult on January 18, 2019 (e-bird 2019). It has also been recorded as an accidental vagrant in Barbados (Hayman *et al.* 1986).

This species is generally scarce in migration in East Asia and only accidental in Northeast China, it is a vagrant in Korea and Taiwan, and is a scarce migrant in Japan mostly from April into May and August and September, but occasionally occurs in the winter (Brazil 2009).

On the West Coast, the only region that the Common Ringed Plover is found with any regular frequency is in Alaska where it is a rare, but regular Spring migrant and casual breeder at Gambel on St. Lawrence Island, and a very rare migrant in the fall (Gibson and Withrow 2015, West 2008). This species is an accidental migrant on St. Paul Island and at Wales (West 2008). The Common Ringed Plover is a casual migrant in the western and central Aleutian Islands (Kessel and Gibson 1978, Gibson and Withrow 2015). It is an accidental migrant vagrant in the Gulf of Alaska, on Middleton Island, on August 25, 2013 (DeCicco *et al.* 2017).

South of Alaska, the Common Ringed Plover is an accidental vagrant. There is one accepted record for California by the California Bird Records Committee which was found at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, near Davis, in Yolo County from August 19-26, 2011 (Tietz and McCaskie 2018). There is also a recent well photographed record from the Point Reyes National Seashore, in Marin County, from October 8-15, 2018 that has not yet been reviewed by the California Bird Records Committee (e-bird 2019). If accepted, this will represent the second record for the state. There are no records for Oregon (OFO 2016). There is a single accepted record for Washington State by the Washington Bird Records Committee of an immature found and photographed at Port Susan Bay, Snohomish County, September 23, 2006 (Aanerud 2011). This species is a recent new addition to the bird avifauna of British Columbia with a record from Vancouver Island from early September 2019 (Toochin *et al.* 2018)

Identification and Similar Species

The Common Ringed Plover is shown in all standard North American field guides. This species is a small plover measuring 18-20 cm in length, with a wingspan of 48-57 cm, and weighing 42-78 grams (Sibley 2000, Paulson 2005, Brazil 2009, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). European birds are slightly larger than Siberian birds (Paulson 2005). This species is remarkably similar in appearance to the Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) which measures 17-19 cm in length, has a wingspan of 43-52 cm, and weighs 28-69 grams (Sibley 2000, Paulson 2005, Brazil 2009). The Semipalmated Plover is a common migrant in coastal British Columbia and breeds throughout the northern regions of the province (Campbell *et al.* 1990b). Separation of the 2 species requires careful observation and whenever possible good photographs.

The following description is taken mostly from Hayman *et al.* (1986), unless otherwise stated.

Adults hold their breeding plumage from March to September (Sibley 2000). Adult males have a broad black breast-band, obvious white supercilium behind the eye, white forehead, black forecrown, gray-brown crown and white collar from the chin to the nape (Brazil 2009). The bill is thick at the base, narrowing towards the tip and is orange-yellow with a black tip (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The ear-coverts are black and extend from the base of the bill to well behind the eye. Below the bold black breast band, the belly to the undertail coverts is white. The legs and feet are orange with a tiny web only between the middle and outer toes (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The mantle to the uppertail, scapulars, wing coverts, and tertials are plain brown. The greater coverts are white tipped; rest of wing-coverts may show narrow whitish fringes when feathers are fresh. The primaries and secondaries are blackish with white on the shafts and the webs forming a strong wing bar. Underwing axillaries are white (Brazil 2009). The tail is brown at the base, but with a strong black subterminal bar and a white tip to most feathers; the central pair lacks a white tip, and the outer pair is virtually

white. Adult females are very similar to adult males, but the breast band is less prominent in the center than on the male, with a slight brown tinge to the side of the breast. The ear-coverts are more brownish. Adults in basic plumage, which is held during the winter months, are similar to breeding birds, but the black is replaced by dusky-brown and the brown-tinged supercilium is usually contiguous with a pale forehead. The bare parts are duller and the bill is sometimes all black (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). On some individuals, the breast-band is broken in the center.

Juvenile birds hold this plumage from August into October (Sibley 2000). Similar to adults in basic plumage, but upperpart feathers show dark submarginal lines and extensive buff fringes. This makes birds at this age look slightly scaly (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The breast band is slightly reduced in the center, and is sometimes broken. The bill is mostly black and the legs are dull yellow (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009).

The Common Ringed Plover makes a highly distinctive mellow whistle with a rising inflection “*too-li*”. It can also make a higher, sharper “*tooe*” or “*wip*” call note (Brazil 2009, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009).

The Semipalmated Plover is very similar at all ages to the Common Ringed Plover, but is on average slightly smaller in size, and all front toes are obviously webbed (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The bill averages shorter and thicker-based, but this can vary (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). In all plumages the Semipalmated Plover has a thin pale orbital ring that is lacking on most adult male Common Ringed Plovers. Some juvenile Common Ringed Plovers have a suggestion of an eye-ring or crescent in front of or below the eye (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009), but most lack an eye-ring (Brazil 2009). The dark breast band on Semipalmated Plover is narrow, often strikingly thin, lacking side bulges found on the Common Ringed Plover (Paulson 2005, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The adult male Semipalmated Plover usually lacks a white supercilium behind the eye that is found on the Common Ringed Plover (Paulson 2005, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). This feature is always present on adult Common Ringed Plovers (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009).

Juvenile Semipalmated Plovers often have a narrow white gape over base of the bill that is black in juvenile Common Ringed Plovers (Brazil 2009, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009).

The Semipalmated Plover makes a quick, hoarse, rising whistled “*chu-wee*”, that has less stress put on the second syllable (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Occurrence and Documentation

The Common Ringed Plover is an accidental vagrant to British Columbia with a recent adult bird that was found by Mark Wynja, Guy Monty and independently by Vibeke Pedersen at Oyster Bay on Vancouver Island from September 5-6, 2018. The bird was originally thought to be a Semipalmated Plover, but later review of photographs revealed that the bird was in fact a Common Ringed Plover (D. Cecile Pers. Comm.). Photographs of the bird can be viewed at <http://bcbirdalert.blogspot.com/2018/09/rba-common-ringed-plover-in-campbell.html#comment-form>. The timing of the Oyster Bay bird fits perfectly with when the Common Ringed Plover is on migration in Eurasia. It is possible that the adult bird photographed at the Point Reyes National Seashore, in Marin County, from October 8-15, 2018 was the same bird considering its scarcity along the west coast south of Alaska (D. Cecile Pers. Comm.).

The Common Ringed Plover is a species that could easily turn up again in British Columbia. Keen observers should carefully scrutinize migrating plover flocks anywhere along the west coast of the province from Haida Gwaii, Vancouver Island, and the mudflats of Boundary Bay Delta. As with all rarities, it can't be stressed enough that good quality photographs be taken of any reported Common Ringed Plover observations in the future.

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