

on. It was certainly as large as a Fulmar but with proportionally longer and narrower wings and with a much slimmer head and body. The tail was short and with a straight-edged tip. The bill was not seen clearly enough to assess its exact proportions but it was not particularly large or prominent. The overall impression in flight was reminiscent of a large and powerful Manx Shearwater. **Bare parts:** The bill was certainly dark, although the exact colouration was impossible to assess. The legs were not clearly seen. **Upperparts:** Crown dark blackish, contrasting with white of underparts and collar. The bottom edge of the crown appeared to run approximately through the eye. The wings and rump appeared a fairly uniform dark grey-brown – not as dark as the crown but still very contrasting with the underparts. Very noticeable was a broad white crescent on the uppertail coverts. This contrasted with the blackish uppertail. **Underparts:** Predominantly, clean white, extending into a collar. The underwing was edged dark blackish although the exact extent and pattern of this was not fully ascertained. The dark belly patch was looked for on the brief occasions when the underside was clearly in view but was not discernible.

Andrew Whitehouse

American Golden Plover on Eden Estuary, 28th–30th September 2003 - first record for mainland Fife

On 28th September 2003 I received a text message from Tom Moodie stating that there was an American Golden Plover on the Eden Estuary “Seen by Eck and George”. George being George Evans, the same individual who found the Yellow Warbler on Bardsey many years ago and the Eck being Eck Watt who staffs the Eden Centre on a daily basis. I knew then that the find had some substance and tried to call Tom, to no avail. I passed the news to the local recorder, Davy Ogilvie, and left immediately for the Eden Centre where presumably the bird had been seen from. It was now 1300 hrs. I arrived at approximately 1340 hrs with the tide flowing and masses of Eurasian Golden Plovers motionless and wary on the exposed mud. Fortunately several observers had by now arrived including Nick Mutch and he guided me to the area the bird was in. I could see nothing out of the ordinary and despite looking through his telescope could not locate the bird. I was fully expecting a drab bird in winter plumage and was panning using my own telescope when suddenly it became apparent that the bird was a superb moulting adult - very obvious indeed! I knew time was limited due to the incoming tide whereby the plovers would move off to the surrounding fields. Peregrines too were a ‘threat’ to the viewing time as high tide normally produced at least one of these, resulting in a scattering of all waders from the area. I took mental notes, talking also to Julian Sykes and George Evans about the possibility of Pacific Golden Plover, but GE knew these well from the far-east and had clinched the identification within a short space of time after Tom Ross had found the bird in the flock. I took notes as follows:

Size and structure: The bird was similar to but daintier and smaller than Eurasian Golden Plover, perhaps two-thirds the size of this, recalling a small Grey Plover. **Upperparts:** The head was smaller than accompanying (Eurasian) Golden Plovers with a dark crown, very white supercilia that met over the bill, dark ear-coverts and chin. The supercilia extended around the

ear-coverts in a semi-circle and merged into the upper breast sides. The mantle, back and wing coverts were mixed black and gold, the classic spangling of golden plovers, very bright, not dull. The rump was not seen. The tail colour was not discernible but fell short of the folded dark greyish wings by about 25–30 mm. This was an obvious feature and was naturally checked several times throughout the period of observation. **Underparts:** The chin was darkish, probably grey, upper breast side white. Upper breast mottled black and white, primarily black and this extended to the lower breast and belly areas. The flanks and vent were similar but whiter and the undertail coverts were white with very dark barring. The underwing colour was not noted. Even as the birds flushed it was difficult to see this feature. **Bare Parts:** The bill was small and fine and appeared black throughout its length, noticeably less robust than the accompanying Golden Plovers. The legs and feet were a dark slaty grey. The legs were proportionately longer than Golden Plover, especially the tarsus, which were roughly twice the length of the thighs. Eye appeared dark.

General

The bird was observed for one hour and ten minutes before a Peregrine flushed the entire flock of waders. The birds returned quickly to the same area on the mud, a little closer than they were, before being flushed again and this time the plovers did not return immediately, so I left the area with hope that it may return on the next tide. The bird was seen next day early in the morning and subsequently in the afternoon when it was seen flying west upstream. It was apparently seen the following day (30th) in Balgove Bay on the outer estuary but the observer remains unknown.

This was the first American Golden Plover for mainland Fife and tied in well with a British and Irish influx of 14 birds (as yet unconfirmed records – *Birding World*). Indeed throughout September 2003, UK birders were treated to a grand total of 150 Pectoral Sandpipers, 9 Semipalmated Sandpipers, 6 White-rumped Sandpipers, 5 Baird's Sandpipers, 11 Buff-breasted Sandpipers, 6 Lesser Yellowlegs and 4 Long-billed Dowitchers, (all unconfirmed records). Only the fifth species of Nearctic wader to visit Fife, it was a very welcome and long-awaited addition to the ever expanding list.

References:

Birding World Vol. 16: 9

Dougie Dickson



American Golden Plover

by Stuart L. Rivers