

## Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*



**Folk Name:** Chuckle-head, Bull-head Plover

**Status:** Migrant

**Abundance:** Very Rare

**Habitat:** Mudflats, lake edge

The Black-bellied Plover is a common bird at Carolina beaches. At 11 ½ inches, it is the largest of our plovers, and, therefore, it is conspicuous as it stands amongst the Sanderlings and sandpipers at the edge of the surf. This plover is seldom found inland in the Carolinas.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, shorebirds were being hunted relentlessly for sale at commercial markets, or for sport:

“But of all the important families of game birds none is vanishing faster than the plover and snipe, popularly known as shore birds, bay birds and by other names.”

—T.G. Pearson, Greensboro, 1906

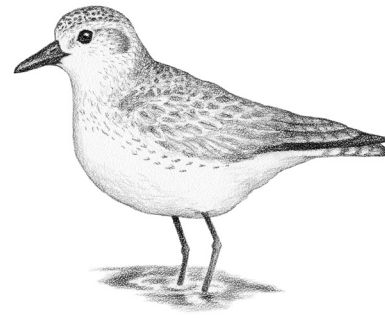
The Black-bellied Plover population was impacted, but it was not decimated to the degree of some other shorebird species—possibly due to one unique trait. At times, the Black-bellied Plover acts as a shorebird “sentinel”—standing apart and giving a rapid series of alarm calls to warn other birds at the approach of danger. This trait may have allowed it to flee to safety just in the nick of time.

The passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 afforded year-round protection from hunting for most kinds of shorebirds. However, the seasonal hunting of Black-bellied Plover, American Golden-Plover, both Yellowlegs, Snipe, and Woodcock, was still permitted in many states. Announcements like this were sent out to North Carolina hunters:

“Greater and lesser yellowlegs and black-bellied plover are reported plentiful this year, and excellent shooting should be found at many places on the Atlantic coast and along inland rivers, and bays throughout their range, where good feeding grounds are located. ... The open season for hunting black-bellied and golden plovers and greater and lesser yellowlegs... in North Carolina... is September 1.” —*The Beaufort News*, August 24, 1922

A new law in 1928 finally succeeded in providing full federal protection for all shorebirds except Snipe and Woodcock, which still remain classified as game birds today.

A total of seven reports of Black-bellied Plover have been recorded in our region. Each of these sightings is of a single bird. The first one appeared near Statesville. Lois Goforth found it while assisting with the Iredell County



Spring Bird Count held on May 13, 1973. The second bird was discovered by Taylor Piephoff when he visited the drying beds of the McAlpine WWTP in the Town of Pineville on August 21, 1986. David Wright observed the third one on the edge of the observation ponds at Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge on October 16, 1988. This bird remained until at least 19 October. The fourth bird, seen by local Audubon members, was also found at the drying beds of a wastewater treatment plant, this time along Irwin Creek in Charlotte, in late September 1988. It was associating with an American Golden-Plover.

Joe Norwood found a Black-bellied Plover while conducting the Charlotte Spring Bird Count on May 6, 1989, providing the first record of this species on a Charlotte count and the fifth sighting in the Central Carolina region. The bird was photographed by David Wright and seen by several observers. The sixth record is of another Black-bellied Plover that showed up at the observation ponds at Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge. This bird was seen by Taylor Piephoff on September 19, 1991. The seventh and most recent record is a bird photographed by Bill Archer at the Clariant-EPA Superfund site near Mount Holly. The bird was observed from October 24 to November 1, 2012.



*Black-bellied Plover in Mecklenburg County. (Bill Archer)*