

American Golden-Plover *Pluvialis dominica*



Folk Name: Squealer, Maggot-eater, (before taxonomic split: Lesser Golden-Plover)

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Very Rare

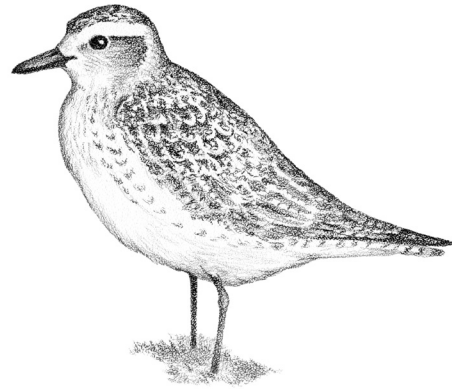
Habitat: Mudflats, lake edge

Surprisingly, it is the American Golden-Plover that played perhaps the most pivotal role of any bird in the development of America's rich ornithological heritage. On March 16, 1821, John James Audubon joined a large group of French hunters on a large-scale, day-long plover hunt in New Orleans. At the end of that day, he calculated a staggering 48,000 Golden-Plovers had been shot. Audubon was greatly affected by what he had witnessed. Upon later reflection, and after a life devoted "to the study of birds he believed were doomed to extinction," Audubon reported that he believed he had found his life's calling that day while watching the spring migration of tens of thousands of these golden-tinged shorebirds flying over New Orleans' Bayou Saint John.

The American Golden-Plover and the Pacific Golden-Plover were once considered races of a single species, called simply the Golden Plover, but the two are now believed to be entirely distinct birds. They each make one of the longest annual migrations of any bird species in the world. They both breed in the High Arctic, and the American Golden-Plover leaves its breeding grounds in August, flies through central and eastern North America, and continues south to spend the winter in Argentina. Most have moved out of the southeastern United States by November. The story of these birds' migration has long fascinated people worldwide. *The Gastonia Gazette* ran a piece about this phenomenon in May 1906 titled "Bird's Long Journey" describing the Golden Plover's "four thousand mile" migration as "an extraordinary proceeding."

The American Golden-Plover is much less common along the coast of the Carolinas than the Black-bellied Plover. Small numbers move through the Carolinas in the spring, many more migrate through in the fall. All but one of our records of this plover are from the fall season, and all have been reported from the Catawba River corridor.

We have three records before the 1980s. Leverett Loomis collected a specimen of an American Golden-Plover (then called simply Golden Plover) on September 19, 1877, in Chester County. Bill and Flo Cobey observed a flock of 17 American Golden-Plovers at Creech's Pond on the York-Mecklenburg county line on November 1, 1970. This is the highest number we have on record. David Wright and his brother Jeff found an American Golden-Plover moving through Mecklenburg County



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during spring migration on March 10, 1973. This bird may have lingered as the date is listed as 18 March in Elizabeth Clarkson's county checklist.

We have nine records from the 1980s. David Wright watched an American Golden-Plover in Lincoln County at the Cowan's Ford Dam on Lake Norman from September 11–15, 1983. He found another in northern York County on 22 September. American Golden-Plovers were seen in the region at three different locations in September 1984: the Town of Pineville, on Lake Norman, and in northern York County. The birds were present between 10 September and 21 September. Heathy Walker observed two American Golden-Plovers that arrived at the Irwin Creek WWTP in Charlotte on September 20, 1988. The birds stayed until 4 October. Taylor Piephoff found another one that fall in northern Mecklenburg County from 16 to 19 October. David Wright spotted one at Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge on September 19, 1989.

Two reports were received in the 1990s. David Wright spotted an American Golden-Plover in the mudflats on the edge of a pond at Wallace Dairy Farm on September 15, 1991, and another, possibly the same bird, was there 4 days later. Mike Turner found one near Heath Springs in Lancaster County on September 20, 1998.

American Golden-Plover has been reported twice since the turn of the twenty-first century. Brad and Pat Carlson spied two at Lake Don T. Howell on August 29, 2001. Monroe Pannell discovered an American Golden-Plover on some mudflats with a flock of other shorebirds at Mountain Creek on Lake Norman in Catawba County on September 18, 2011. The bird remained there for several days.

The American Golden-Plover is currently listed on the Yellow Watch List of birds of the continental United States. It is a species with both "troubling" population declines and "high threats." It is in need of conservation action.