

Philadelphia Larus



the newsletter of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club

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July in Bombay Hook

Golden Plover Possibilities

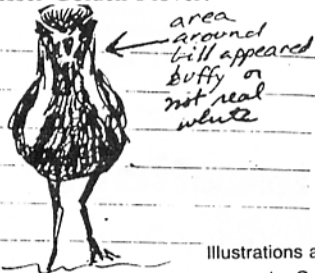
by ALAN BRADY

On July 25, 1989, while endeavoring to photograph a White-winged Tern at Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge, Bill Clark, initiator of the hawk watches in Cape May, N.J., and Eilat, Israel, alerted me to an unusual golden plover that he, Daphne Gemmil, Robert Hilton and several others were watching.

It was about 11 a.m. on an extremely hot, bright and hazy day, and the bird was about 150 to 175 yards west of the dike at Sheariness Pool. The image through my camera lens was so soft and mushy that photos were impossible. The resolution through spotting scopes was, however, pretty good.

The bird appeared as described by others — a perfect image of a Greater Golden Plover, *Pluvialis apricaria*, as pictured in the field guides.

There are no previously accepted records of this Eurasian species in the continental United States, although an influx of Greater Golden Plovers was noted last year in Newfoundland. The only golden plover that reasonably could be expected in Delaware is the Lesser Golden Plover, *Pluvialis dominica*. There are no East Coast records of the Pacific Golden Plover, *Pluvialis fulva*, which is still regarded by some as a race of Lesser Golden Plover.



Illustrations and field notes by Gail Mackiernan



There was no indication of molt on this Delaware bird, or if there was, it was not noticeable to me. The black on head and breast was not broken with white flecks, nor was the white at the rear of the belly and undertail dappled with black as it would have been if it had been molting.

The demarcation between black belly and white undertail and vent area was sharp and clean. At times, the cap seemed so rich in color that it gave a reddish-golden glow and appeared darker than the back.

The wing tips met evenly with the tip of the tail. I watched the plover for several hours through a scope, and although it occasionally stretched and raised its wings, it only showed them sideways to me twice.

The first time, the underwing appeared white or close to white; the second time, at about 1 p.m., the underwing appeared a uniform light gray.

I was concentrating on the axillar, and it was the same light tone as the rest of the underwing. It is possible that the hazy noonday light may have shaded the underwing.

The next morning, the bird was studied in excellent light at around 8:30 or 9 a.m. Two Questars and several other scopes were trained on it when it raised its wings. Hart Rufe, one of the observers, said he saw "snowy white" on the underwing. The others in his group agreed.

Hart also took a Super 8mm movie of the plover through his Questar. Although the bird didn't raise its wings during the filming, the movie shows the color pattern, its shape and actions, the clear white undertail and white-lined sides, as well as the wing-to-tail ratio.

Comparing this bird to that of a slide I had of a *fulva*, taken in June on Attu by Jim Parnell, I note a distinct similarity, but *fulva*'s wings extend noticeably beyond the tail and there are some vertical black bars on the white sides under the folded wings. The very rear of the belly and undertail are white in both birds.

It appears to me that more persons who are familiar with all three golden plovers should be advised as to this bird before a decision is made on its ID, but at the moment, its unique plumage gives it the appearance of a Greater Golden Plover.

Among others observing the plover on July 26 who noticed the white underwing are Robert Rufe, Bob Schutsky, Frank Buehl, Kirk Moulton, Lois Moulton and Paul Dumont. I do not know the feelings of any other observers that day regarding the bird's identity.

PROGRAMS

Meetings are held the first and third Thursdays of the month at the Academy of Natural Sciences, 19th St. and Benjamin Franklin Parkway, unless otherwise noted. Check with the guard for room location.

OCT. 5 — ARMAS HILL: "DVOC, the Down Venezuela Ornithological Club." Get the real story on what Armas does when he visits South America.

OCT. 12 — CENTENNIAL PLANNING MEETING. Time to get moving. Everyone is welcome and needed. Meet in Academy cafeteria at 8 p.m.

OCT. 19 — OPEN HOUSE in the Bird Department: The Academy's ornithologists will host this program. Check your skins at the door. Appropriate dress: Arsenic and old lace.

NOV. 2 — PETE BACINSKI of the New Jersey Audubon Society: "The New Jersey Highlands: The Greenway to Our Future."

NOV. 16 — ANNUAL BANQUET

DEC. 7 — STEPHEN HOFFMAN, president of the Western Foundation for Raptor Conservation: "Birds of Prey: Indicators of Environmental Change."

DEC. 21 — PHIL STREET, et al.: India and Nepal. Phil and other DVOC members will report on last year's travels.

JAN. 4 — 100th ANNUAL MEETING. Election of officers, followed by Christmas Bird Count reports and refreshments.

FIELD TRIPS

Sept. 23-24: Barnegat to Cape May weekend.

Saturday, Oct. 14: Island Beach State Park. Should be good for late warblers and on-time sparrows. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot just outside the entrance gate in Seaside Heights, N.J. For information, call field trip leader Paul Guris, 215-278-0497 (home) or 215-362-0966 (work).

Sunday, Nov. 5: Bake Oven Knob. Catch the late hawk flight in Pennsylvania. Meet in parking lot at 9 a.m. For information, call trip leader Chris Dooley, 215-788-7143.

Friday and Saturday, May 25-26, 1990: Pelagic Trip to Hudson Canyon. Leaving from Barnegat Light, Friday night, 8:30 p.m. \$65. Send checks, payable to DVOC, to Alan Brady, Box 103, Wycombe, Pa. 18980. For information, call Alan, 215-598-7856 (home) or 215-968-2833 (work).

For information, call field trip leader Don Jones, 609-859-0281 (home) or 609-785-8010.

Philadelphia Larus

Send information you would like considered for publication in Philadelphia Larus to:

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912 North St.
Collingdale, Pa. 19023
215-237-6814 (home)
215-893-5739 (work)

HAPPINESS IS . . .

Fantasies by ALAN BRADY*

- Getting excellent photos of Eskimo Curlew, Bachman's Warbler and Ivory-billed Woodpecker the day after the AOU declares them extinct.
- Having Claudia Wilds and Peter Grant say, "Yes, that Delaware bird was *definitely* a Greater Golden Plover."
- Having the Cape May Bird Observatory's owl bander chased out of the banding lanes by a pair of Great Horned Owls.
- Hearing Debbie Shearwater say, "Oh, the sea birding is *much* better back East."
- Imagining John LaVia, Rick Mellon and Brian Moscatello all lined up along the *Miss Barnegat Light* rail at the same time.
- Having the DVOC team beat out the No. 2 runner-up in the Biggest Day by a robin, mistakenly counted twice by Pete Dunne's team.
- Having Roger T. saying that he wished he could become a member of DVOC, but he was unable to find a second sponsor.
- Seeing a cartoon caricature of Ed Fingerhood printed in *American Birds* larger than that of Pete Myers.
- Hearing David Sibley say, "Yes, you're correct, I was wrong. The bird is an Antarctic Petrel."
- Watching Paul Guris tell a clean joke to a silent audience.
- Barb Haas announcing a \$500,000 computer mistake in DVOC funds, making everyone a life member.
- After a heated discussion with some other birders, having Bob Ridgely come forward and say, "You are all wrong. Alan is absolutely correct."
- Hearing Al Kronschnabel say, "You're a *much* better cook than I am. You cook, I'll clean up!"
- Having Armas Hill miss his flight to Brazil and be stranded in Hoboken for a week with no birds to report.
- Watching John Danzenbaker's face when he hears that all penguins are being lumped.
- Having a speaker say to Sid Lipshutz after a bird lecture, "That's a stupid question, and I wish you hadn't asked it!"

*All of the above really enjoy my respect — or I would not have used their names.

You are cordially invited to the DVOC Annual Dinner

Thursday, November 16, 1989

Place: New Woodbine Inn
Route 73 at Remington Ave.
Pennsauken, N.J.
Cash Bar: 6 p.m.
Dinner: 7:30 p.m.

Indicate choice: Veal piccante/capon with wild rice
For information, call Rick Mellon, 215-493-0697

Mail checks to:
Rick Mellon
1305 Big Oak Rd.
Yardley, Pa. 19067
Cost: \$18.50

IMPORTANT!

Centennial Committee meeting:

Thursday, Oct. 12, at 8 p.m., in the Academy of Natural Sciences cafeteria

The Lore of Venezuela

by ARMAS HILL

We were in the area of Venezuela known as the *llanos*, a vast, generally flat expanse of land and water. During half of the year, the area is mostly land; the other half, it's mostly water.

We were there in between, at the beginning of the rainy season. The relative coolness and the advent of the breeding season make the *llanos*, without exaggeration, one of the birdiest habitats on earth.

At about 8 in the morning, beneath a clear sky, our group was quietly and smoothly floating downstream in a boat. The engine was off. Our speed was slow, as our guides paddled.

As we rounded a bend, with Hoatzins and Tiger-herons behind us, we all looked ahead to the 17 Orinoco Geese along the riverbank. We were soon to see a half-dozen or so Sunbitterns along the same stretch.

But what was it that all of us were seeing directly ahead at the edge of the river by the geese? Our eyes saw, but our minds couldn't believe, at first. We continued to look with our binoculars to be sure. There were three of them: call them pumas, cougars, mountain lions or panthers. They got up as we approached, and one after another, the elusive creatures, remaining low to the ground, disappeared into the nearby brush.

We got out and walked along the bank to get a better look at the Sunbitterns and their beautiful wings as they flew across the river.

We saw a Tamandua, or Arboreal Anteater, at rest in a tree. Orinocan Saltators were nesting across the stream. A Zone-tailed Hawk flew overhead, and then Scarlet Macaws. Back in the boat, we headed back to the ranch for breakfast.

I've just described one hour of one morning in Venezuela experienced by our group of DVOC members: Alan Brady, Erica Brendel, Ed Fingerhood, Harry Franzen, Armas Hill, Jay LaVia, John LaVia, Vern LaVia, John Miller, Bill and Naomi Murphy, Gene Stern and Phil Street.

From June 14 to 25, 1989, we were a lucky group of 13, with all of the good birds and good times we had. During 10 full days and parts of two others, we collectively saw 414 species of birds. Everyone had lots of lifers, even those who had been to Venezuela before. And there was not just quantity, but, without a doubt, quality as well.

The Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock was a lifer for all 13 of us, and it got the most votes for "No. 1 species" — five of the 13 participants — in a list of favorites compiled on our flight home from Caracas to New York.

But the bird that was put on the lists by the most people was the wonderful, almost incredible Bearded Helmetcrest, the *chivito del paramo*, or "the little goat of the high country." That special hummer hovers very low to the ground, giving the appearance of

walking on it. The distinctive bird made it onto 12 of the 13 lists.

Besides these two, the remaining top 10 favorites on the cumulative trip list, in descending order, were Handsome Fruiteater, Wire-tailed Manakin, Long-tailed Sylph, Andean Pygmy-Owl, Torrent Duck, Azure Gallinule, Streaked Tuftedcheek and Orinoco Goose.

The good times we had were made possible not only by the good birds, but by the good people, too — including our excellent Venezuelan guide, Victor Galdo. Victor was always on top of whatever had to be done, and he contributed a lot to our camaraderie.

Our good times were had in four very different areas of Venezuela: the level *llanos*; the lofty Andes; the remote "Valley of the Hidden Jaguar," a mixture of *selva* and *sabana* (jungle and tropical plain); and the coastal range, or Cordilleras, in the area of the Henri Pittier National Park and Colonia Tovar, the German village high in the hills.

Most organized groups visit fewer habitats in more days. But we never felt rushed since we had our own chartered plane to fly us directly to our destinations in the interior: the ranch, or *hato*, El Cedral, an oasis of cabanas and big, old trees on the vast Lower Llanos. We traveled in our bus in the Andes, then flew back to Caracas for the final few days of birding in the Cordilleras.

Ours was the first North American birding group to visit the "Valley of the Hidden Jaguar" — the place where we all saw the Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock and other nice birds such as King Vultures, close to our cabins; Jabirus in the sky; Swallow-tailed Kites at a huge evening roost; Plumbeous Kites; Blue-throated Piping-Guans; raucous Red-and-Green Macaws, calling as they flew, usually in pairs; and other parrots and parakeets, toucans and aracarís, jacamars, puffbirds, trogons and caciques.

We also had an assortment of nightjars by day in an open area with large rocks: Lesser Nighthawk, Blackish Nightjar and White-tailed Nightjar.

The *llanos* is a wide open, flat land of cowboys and cattle. Besides numerous capybaras and caimans, we found cormorants, Anhingas, herons and seven species of ibis — more than anywhere else in the world, including the specialty, Sharp-tailed Ibis.

We saw three species of whistling-duck, as well as Comb Duck, Brazilian Teal and Orinoco Goose, Azure and Purple gallinules, Limpkin, Sunbittern, three species of storks — including the Great Jabiru — and, conversely, the Dwarf Cuckoo.

Among our raptors were Savannah,

Black-collared, Great Black and Crane Hawk, Laughing Falcon and Aplomado Falcon.

Birding didn't stop when the sun went down. One evening, we took a fabulous ride on an open truck, where we experienced Nacunda, Band-tailed and Lesser Night-hawks, White-tailed Nightjar and both Great and Common potoos.

There were so many nightjars flying around us that one literally flew between the legs of one of us standing on the truck and hit another group member on the head.

What a contrast between the Lower Llanos and the high Andes! Besides the earlier-mentioned Bearded Helmetcrest, the hummingbirds included such beauties as Sparkling Violetear, Tyrian Metaltail and Orange-throated Sunangel.

We watched an Andean Pygmy-Owl calling above the beautiful Andean Valley, and we heard the White-throated Screech Owl calling across a small pond, nestled high in the mountains.

Along rushing mountain streams, there were Torrent Ducks, Torrent Tyrannulets and White-capped Dippers.

The northern Cordilleras are not as high as the Andes, but they are very birdy. Henri Pittier Park, two hours west of Caracas in these mountains, has the longest list of birds species of any national park in the world. Among the birds we enjoyed there are toucanets and trogons, White-tipped Quetzal, guans in the trees and antbirds, notably Antthrushes on the ground. The Handsome Fruiteater was more than just handsome — it was spectacular, with its brilliant coloration.

Also spectacular and colorful was the vast assortment of tanagers, including the seemingly tame Swallow Tanager. Among the array of hummingbirds were two striking species: the Long-tailed Sylph, seen and enjoyed by all, and the Booted Racquet-tail, only seen by one of the group.

Just after lunching at Colonia Tovar, a diving Short-tailed Hawk put on a great show for us by plummeting with its wings folded from high in the sky into the valley.

Near the town there was excellent birding, too: Scythebill, Plush-capped Finch and Tiny Rufous-shafted Woodstar. A lot bigger than the hummingbirds were the overwhelming beetles with an affinity for bamboo. They flew in a similar manner to hummingbirds, but noisily — and sometimes right at people. They were three to four inches long and ugly, with orange wings and horns!

Among many other non-avian creatures we observed were a Giant Anteater, huge Anacondas, a Boa Constrictor and a Red Howler Monkey.

All in all, it was a wonderful trip for wildlife.

Gripped off any twitchers lately?

by COLIN CAMPBELL

"I had the icky but dipped on the two Sibes."

"He really gripped me off, but the record was stringy anyway."

Mystified? You wouldn't be if you were into British birding. As a public service to DVOC members, I shall attempt to elucidate this picturesque mode of communication. For those intending to bird in Britain, when armed with this knowledge you will not only comprehend sentences such as those above, but you also will be able to try out your own and be instantly recognized as a twitcher rather than a dude.

Hence, what follows is an abbreviated field guide to British birding terminology.

Twit: To chase rare birds without regard to time, weather, speeding restrictions or personal hygiene. One who twitches, then, is a *twitcher*.

Dude: A non-serious birder, usually recognized by flat cap, green rubber boots and binoculars in a leather case (permanently).

To have a bird: Usual term for a successful twitch, as in "I'd love to have a shag [Editor's note: cormorant]."

Tick: The aim of twitching — having a bird for the first time — be it for your life list, country list, year list or whatever. Hence, *ticklist* — or checklist.

Megat: A really good tick — like having a drake duck species for the first time rather than the female.

Crippler: An outstanding tick, a real rarity, usually in excellent plumage.

Blocker: A bird that just seems to avoid you no matter how hard you try to have it. It's like having 700 on your North American lifelist and no Spruce Grouse.

Unblocking: The orgasmic euphoria felt when the blocker finally falls to you.

Flogging or thrashing: To delicately coax a secretive bird from some scrub.

Stoning: To delicately coax a secretive bird from a marsh.

Duff gen: Faulty information, either on identification of a rare bird or directions on how to get to it or when it was there or . . . you get the picture.

Stringy: A case of misidentification but vehemently supported by the finder, despite no one else's belief. Hence, *to string* and *the stringer*.

Dip (out): A feeling of remorse due to not having the bird you twitched for. "I was off work for a week 'cause I dipped out on the Pallas' gropper [Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler]."

To be gripped off: To experience a feeling of intense nausea and biliousness with suicidal overtones due to others having the bird when you did not.

To grip off: To experience a feeling of intense elation and ecstasy at having had a non-stringy rarity whereas your buddy (now your ex-buddy), whose list was longer than yours, dipped out.

Sibe: A rare Siberian migrant.

Yank: A rare Nearctic migrant.

Junk: A common British species posing as a Sibe or Yank.

There are in addition, of course, many familiar terms for specific birds (as in *icky*, for Icterine Warbler, or the previously mentioned gropper) or confusing pairs (*comic tern* for Common or Arctic Tern; *willchaff* for Willow Warbler or Chiffchaff).

An excellent, very humorous book on all aspects of hard birding is *Bill Oddie's Little Black Bird Book*, by, yes, Bill Oddie, published by Eyre Methuen (London), 1980.

I am surprised that American birders have not developed a bird lingo of their own. Nearly every other sport here has its own specialized vocabulary. If anyone has such a list, I'd be interested in seeing it. Please send examples of innovative, all-American birding expressions to me at 1206 Quincy Drive, Wilmington, Del. 19803.

Colin Campbell was born in England and lived in Scotland for 14 years before coming to the United States last year to twitch. He has 20 years' experience gripping off and being gripped off in Europe and Israel.

LOCAL NOTES

CBC SEA CHANGE: The Glenolden Christmas Bird Count will have a new compiler this year as **Frank and Barb Haas** have left their paradise in Ridley Creek State Park for a new home near Morgantown. While he remains a park supervisor for the Pennsylvania Bureau of State Parks, Frank will now be working out of Harrisburg as the head honcho of the bureau's computer system. Barb will continue her job at Elwyn, Inc., in Delaware until she can set up her own hearing-aid distributorship. They still intend to be active in the club. Anyone who owes dues or has manuscripts for *Cassinia* can contact Barb, as treasurer, or Frank, as *Cassinia* editor, at 2469 Hammertown Rd., Narvon, Pa. 17555. . . . In Cape May, CBC compiler **Keith Seager** is shopping around for a new place to turn in the tallies and warms one's toes, as the Middle Diner on Route 9 was torn down early this year.

Also passing on a baton is **Jim Meritt**, who, after 25 years, has retired as regional editor of *Records of New Jersey Birds*. Taking over is **Ward Dasey**, who can be contacted with South Jersey sightings at 609-953-1685. . . . **Dave Ward** is taking a break from his Avalon seawatch this fall. He'll be visiting Brazil in October.

CENTENNIAL MEMORIES: With an eye toward a Centennial collection, **George Reynard** has requested that anyone with tape recordings of the voices of present or past members of DVOC contact him at 105 Midway St., Riverton, N.J. 08077, 609-829-1421.

WHAT A TRAVELING BAND! Sightings of DVOC members this summer continue worldwide. After an earlier trip to Hawaii, **Howard Brokaw** camped at the confluence of the Noatak and Kelly rivers along the Arctic Circle for a look at a Siberian Tit. **Chris Dooley** camped in Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, where he had both Connecticut and Mourning warblers, as well as bull moose and flying squirrel! **Michael Drake** and **Pete Dunne** went west, young men, and came back with tall tales of Spruce Grouse and

Laysan Albatross, respectively. **John LaVia** went to Italy this summer to get some culture and **Gene Stern** took in Kenya and Tanzania. And **Bill Stocku** and his wife, **Joyce**, met **Cindy LaFrance**, now living back in Missouri, for a round of Monterey pelagics earlier in September.

The Bucks County Audubon Arizona trip, led by **Hart Rufe** and attended by seven other DVOC members, crossed paths with a couple familiar names. After hearing about White-eared Hummingbirds at the bed-and-breakfast in Ramsey Canyon, Hart called Mile-High Preserve to try to change the group's feeder reservations to that afternoon. The Nature Conservancy student intern who answered the phone was **Brian Logan**, now a college student in Arizona. Brian is the son of the late club member **Ron Logan**. Also spotted at the feeders was former DVOC member **Bob Ornstein**, now working in State College, Pa.

BIRD CLUB KUDOS: To **Al Guarente**, who, with Jim Lockyer, has gotten the Tyler Arboretum Birding Club off the ground in Delaware County. . . . **Dale Twining**, a DVOC member since 1937, and his wife, **Jeanette**, will be honored with the Wyncote Audubon Society's Parry Award at the group's annual dinner Nov. 3. . . . **Jim Brett** has returned to Hawk Mountain Sanctuary from his nine-month sabbatical. . . . Very accidentally left on the last Larus' list of 50-year club members was **Fred Ulmer**, who joined in 1939. Fred, former curator of mammals at the Philadelphia Zoo, recently was the subject of a nice article by the Associated Press.

Our sympathies go to another 50-year member, **Bob Sehl**, whose wife, **Rachel**, passed away this summer after a long illness. Also, life member **John Cadbury** died Feb. 13.

DVOC WELCOMES new members in 1989: **Dorothy Tucker**, **Michael Drake**, **Randy Pullen**, **Dave Wiedner**, **Paul Kerlinger**, **Freda Rappaport**, **Dick Williams** and **Thomas Wilson**.