

Napa-Solano Audubon's Rare Bird Alert #8 - Pacific Golden Plover 2-9-21

Greetings Napa Solano Audubon Members, Family & Friends:

Location: Periodically, we will send out Rare Birding Alerts of uncommon or rare species that have been seen in our area. This weekend, Lucas, his friend Connor Cochrane, and I found a continuing, small flock of Pacific Golden Plovers at Point Reyes National Seashore. The flock was feeding, across from the RCA Heritage Site and Cypress Tree Tunnel on the outer point, with more than 50 Black-bellied Plovers when a Prairie Falcon flushed them. The Black-bellied Plovers flew off toward the coast, but the small flock of 7 Pacific Golden Plovers returned to the newly harrowed fields across from the RCA driveway. We walked out into the fields and were able to approach close enough without flushing them for some relatively nice photos. Pacific Golden Plovers nest from the tundra along the Western Coast of Alaska to the Northern Coast of Russia. They are very similar to American Golden Plovers that share much of their breeding range along the Bering Straights. They have an extensive transcontinental and transoceanic migration that includes Southeast Asia, Australia, and Hawaii and the Western coast of the U.S. Small numbers overwinter along the California Coast. American Golden Plovers nest in the North American tundra in Northern Alaska and Canada and migrate predominantly down the eastern coast, wintering in South America.

Identification: The rich golden hues of the back and face, and the black breast and belly of the Pacific Golden Plover's breeding plumage, disappear in winter, leaving behind subtle golden tones on the face, neck, and back and a mottled gray belly. Their light supercilium sets apart their darker golden crown. They have a stout bill, smaller than a Black-bellied Plover, but slightly longer and thicker than an American Golden Plover. The large, distinct black spots on the back are thickly ringed with golden colors, making them appear to have golden spots.

All three plovers, the Black-bellied, Pacific and American Golden are extremely similar in appearance. In comparison Black-bellied Plovers are the largest measuring 11.5 inches in length, while Americans are approximately 10.5 inches, and Pacific are 10.25 inches long. The Black-bellied is easily identified by their much grayer mottled back and larger size, especially their bills. However, Pacific and Americans are more similar and much more challenging to identify. On average the Pacific appears more golden on the face and neck, while Americans appear grayer on the face, neck, and even on the back. The American is ever so slightly bigger than the Pacific, but the Pacific is longer legged which makes size difficult to use for comparison unless they are standing side-by-side. The best way to distinguish these two look-alikes is to have a close view of the wing's primary projection past the tail. The Pacific Golden Plover has a slight projection past the end of the tail and the American is considerably longer. In flight both the Pacific and the American have a pale underwing compared with the Black-bellied's black axillaries on the underwing. For more photos and information see our eBird report located at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S80556103> and Cornell's "Birds of the World" found at <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/pagplo/cur/introduction> .



