

MOUNTAIN PLOVER OBSERVATION NEAR VAL MARIE, SASKATCHEWAN

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On 22 September, 1977, the authors were hiking in the proposed Grassland National Park area near Val Marie, Saskatchewan. During our visit we positively identified eight Mountain Plovers, just east of the monument at the main prairie dog colony. At that time we did not realize the rarity of the species in Canada and hence the significance of our observations. P. S. Taylor, Canadian Wildlife Service, Saskatoon, suggested this note be written.

There are few records of Mountain Plover in Canada and all authentic reports are within the last 40 years. Bent wrote in 1928 that "this bird is unknown from Canada".¹ Godfrey terms the bird "a rare summer visitor" and gives two sightings, one at Bracken, Saskatchewan, on 5 June 1939, approximately 30 kilometres west of our observation.² Salt and Salt list only two sightings of this bird for Alberta.³ A breeding pair of Mountain Plover was located on the Milk River, Alberta, in May 1979 by Norbert Kondla.⁴

John and I had sat down in the prairie dog colony for lunch and had observed these eight birds for 10 minutes from about 250 metres, first thinking they were Horned Larks. As we finished lunch, we looked at them through binoculars, noticed they were too pale for Horned Larks and walked toward them. At about 100 metres, we studied them for 10 more minutes and were convinced they

were Mountain Plovers. The longer legs and slightly smaller size than a Horned Lark and the lighter colour than a Killdeer were evident. No definite dark markings other than the dark line from bill to eye and paler white-tipped tail feathers confirmed the sighting for us.

The Mountain Plover is a bird of the native grasslands and has been forced by man into the more remote regions of the plains. Although a more common bird in the prairie areas of the United States, its numbers have been greatly reduced due to loss of habitat. To John and I the sightings of these eight birds reinforces the need to preserve intact large areas of native grassland. To quote Godfrey: "a bird of the dry short-grass plains of the United States, it is expected in Canada only in the southern parts of the Prairie Provinces".

¹BENT, A. C. 1929. Life histories of North American shore birds. Part II. Smiths. Inst. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull. 142 (1962 Dover edition).

²GODFREY, W. E. 1966. The birds of Canada. Nat. Mus. Canada, Bull. 203.

³SALT, W. R. and J. R. SALT. 1976. The birds of Alberta. Hurtig, Edmonton.

⁴GOLLOP, J. B. 1979. Prairie Provinces Region (Spring migration). American Birds 33(5):781-782.