

MOUNTAIN PLOVER SIGHTING NEAR REGINA

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About 4:00 p.m. on 1 October 1990, a fine, sunny day, Marjie and I were driving westwards on the north side of Monica Farm's slough (see Map 3, p. 27).¹ I stopped to scan the water and the south shore through my binoculars when I noticed a plover feeding at the water's edge. It was not a Killdeer so I put my telescope on it and discovered a Mountain Plover. I was familiar with the species from observations in Montana. The bird had no trace of black anywhere, and the white forehead, eyebrow and throat were prominent. There was some buff on the breast, and as I watched, it raised one wing to its limit so that the white lining could be plainly seen. I watched it for several minutes while it fed in the shallow water, then with its plain brown back to me it flew up, calling, and joined four others which swept in low from the west end of the slough, giving the same call. For an instant I had all five in my telescope as they flew off southwards - all were exactly the same. Scott notes that the species is gregarious in migration so I suppose five birds together are not unusual.¹⁰

When Wayne Harris saw a Mountain Plover near Val Marie, Saskatchewan, on 14 May 1987, it was only the fifth record for Saskatchewan, but his momentous find of a pair with three young on 31 July 1987, in a Prairie Dog colony, also near Val Marie, was the first known successful breeding in Saskatchewan.^{3,4} All six records occurred in extreme southwestern Saskatchewan so our sighting at Monica Slough, near Richardson, would be the first reported

at considerable distance from there; Val Marie is about 266 km southwest of Richardson.

Where shorebirds are concerned it is always pleasing and interesting to read what Matthiessen has to say.⁵ Regarding migration, he observes:

"In one of the most rigid and least explicable of all migrations, this plover travels southwest six hundred miles from its breeding grounds on the Great Plains across the Rockies and the Coast Ranges of California; many of the arrivals in California then proceed south into northern Mexico, a region reached easily from the Great Plains without the trouble of negotiating two north-south ranges of high mountains. (Despite its name which was given it only because the first specimen was taken in the Rocky Mountain foothills, this bird is not partial to mountains: it is a bird of short-grass country and would be better named the plains plover.) So fixed is it in its habits that though it breeds in Montana and Wyoming, it has never been recorded in the adjoining state of Idaho, nor in Nevada, nor in Oregon" (p. 144).⁵

Important occurrences of birds sent to *American Birds* are usually reported in bold face type, and such are indexed annually, but the designation is the responsibility of the authors, so an important observation not designated in bold face is not indexed. I scanned the indexes back to

1967 and found the following:

Oregon – two Mountain Plovers near Corvallis Airport, 2 Jan. 1967²; a Mountain Plover at Tillamook Bay jetty, 16-26 Nov. 1977⁶; one near Lincoln City in Feb. 1983, provided the fifth record for Oregon⁷; two Mountain Plovers reported, without details, south of Bandon, Oregon 6 Dec. 1989, would be Oregon's fifth (*sic*) records.¹¹

Idaho – possibly the second sighting occurred on 29 May 1977 about 35 mi. north of Arco.⁹

Nevada – nothing indexed.

I thought that my five birds were wildly off course but the indexes reveal that they have been reported in Mississippi (one in winter 1988/89), Virginia (one on 16 Oct. 1976); Alabama (one on 6 Jan. 1973; one in spring 1984); Michigan (one on 13 May 1976); Florida (one on 2 March 1981 – fifth record, first in spring); and eastern Washington (one on 6 May 1968 – first record).

Mountain Plovers are birds of the short-grass prairie so I was surprised to find them foraging in water, yet the indexes reveal that McCaskie reported one on the beach north of Morro Bay in southern California on 22 October 1989; he observed it was frequenting unusual habitat for this species.⁸ Initially, I was concerned that as one of my birds was feeding in water it could cast doubt on

my identification, so it was good to find that its feeding mode, while unusual, was not unique. The indexes also record several coastal occurrences.

1. ADAM, C.I.G., B. RIFFEL, A. LUTERBACH, and H. KREBA. 1985. A birdfinding guide to the Regina area. Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc. Spec. Publ. 16, Regina.
2. CROWELL, JR., B. 1967. Audobon field notes 21:450.
3. GOLLOP, J.B. 1987. Prairie Provinces region. *Am. Birds* 41:448-450.
4. GOLLOP, J.B. 1987. Prairie Provinces region. *Am. Birds* 41:1451-1453.
5. MATTHIESSEN, PETER. 1973. The wind birds. Viking Press, New York.
6. MATTOCKS, JR., W. and E.S. HUNN. 1978. Northern Pacific Coast Region. *Am. Birds* 32:245-250.
7. MATTOCKS, JR., W. and E.S. HUNN. 1983. Northern Pacific Coast Region. *Am. Birds* 37:329-332.
8. McCASKIE, GUY. 1990. Southern Pacific Coast Region. *Am. Birds* 44:160-165.
9. ROGERS, H. 1977. Northern Rocky Mountains – Intermountain Region. *Am. Birds* 31:1162-1166.
10. SCOTT, L. 1987. Field guide to the birds of North America. Nat. Geog. Soc., Washington, D.C.
11. TWEIT, BILL, and JIM JOHNSON. 1990. Oregon/Washington Region. *Am. Birds* 44:317-321.



The average flowering date for the Crocus of Pasque-flower is 11 April at Winnipeg, 18 April at Saskatoon, and 25 April at Edmonton. R.C. Russell. 1962. *Canada Plant Disease Survey* 42:162-166.