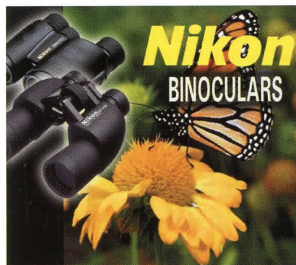


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The plumage, shape, proportions and relatively short, thick bill together indicate that this is a non-breeding plumaged *Pluvialis* plover. While only two species, the American Golden-Plover (*P. dominica*) and Black-bellied Plover (*P. squatarola*) are known to have occurred in Ontario, two others are possible—European Golden-Plover (*P. apricaria*), and Pacific Golden-Plover (*P. fulva*). Both of these latter two species have occurred in recent years in northeastern North America.

These plovers frequently occur in mixed flocks, thus allowing direct comparison of their differences. A single bird, perhaps our first of the season, can present identification difficulties. However, careful exam-

ination of both plumage features and physical structure will lead us to the correct identification.


The plain plumage here, without black underparts, clearly indicates that this is a juvenile or adult basic (winter-plumaged) bird. Since all upperpart feathers are crisp with neat spotting and no wear or fraying, this is a juvenile bird, hatched but a few weeks earlier in the same year. On a sunny fall day, the upper parts look rather bright. In fact, there is a yellowish tinge to the back and feather edges. So, is it a Golden-Plover? This bird is quite bulky and bull-necked, with a full breast and belly. Golden-Plovers are relatively slim with tapered necks. So our impression is that it is not a Golden-Plover. Overall shape and proportions are very helpful in bird identification. British birders refer to this as the “jizz”. This term derives from WWII plane spotters who used “general impression size and shape” to identify airplanes.

Let's examine the head. Bill proportions can be quite tricky in the absence of direct comparisons. The bill here is fairly thick at the base and not particularly slimmer throughout. The head is rather large. The entire effect is of a bigger headed, and bigger billed bird than is the case with Golden-Plovers. There is a strong off-white supercilium, but the crown is not particularly dark, being streaked with white. The dark blotch behind the eye is not very bold. In Golden-Plovers, the crown appears as a dark cap set



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off by a strong eye stripe, dark auricular and loreal spots. The finer bill together with these plumage features creates what might be called a “pin-headed” look. Our bird does not appear to be a Golden-Plover.

Our bird is not particularly attenuated. This lack of tapering is a function of its bulky shape and relatively short primary length. In fact, three primary tips are visible beyond the folded tertials. American Golden-Plover, among the World’s greatest long-distance bird migrants, has four primary tips visible. Based on wing length and primary extension, our bird cannot be an American Golden-Plover.

Another excellent feature for distinguishing Black-bellied from Golden-Plovers is evident on the underparts. The vague blotching and barring on the breast and belly extend well beyond the legs towards the undertail. On Black-bellied, the area from the legs to undertail is clear unmarked white. The resulting contrast is quite different from Golden-Plover and can be seen from a considerable distance.

Among the Golden-Plovers, the Pacific and European both have

shorter wings with only three primary tips visible beyond the tertials. In this feature, they are like the Black-bellied Plover. However, the already noted differences in shape, bulk and plumage between American Golden-Plover and Black-bellied Plover apply to these two as well. Moreover, both these species are distinctly more yellow on the breast and upper parts than our bird.

The finer points of distinction among the three Golden-Plovers have not been discussed here, but careful birders should be aware of these differences when they are in the field. An excellent analysis of the three Golden-Plovers can be found in the December 1996 *Birding*, Volume 28, pages 504–505, in an article by Edward Brinkley entitled, “Answers to the October Photo Quiz”. Read this carefully and you will be ready to discover the first Ontario Pacific Golden-Plover!

The juvenile **Black-bellied Plover** in our Quiz was photographed by Barry Cheriére at Toll Gate Ponds, Hamilton Harbour, on 25 September 1999.

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