

Wilson's Plover at Windermere Basin

by

Kevin McLaughlin

At about 1025h on Saturday 26 May 1990 I had the good fortune of discovering a female-type Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*) in the extreme southeast corner of Windermere Basin at the east end of Hamilton Harbour. The bird lingered for about one week, usually being seen on the same drying mudflat enclosure where I found it. It was seen by scores of birders from throughout the province, but frustrated others who travelled to see it, as it would vanish for hours before reappearing briefly.

Circumstances

I was observing various shorebirds, gulls, and terns from Eastport Drive, the service road which parallels the QEW. Having seen a first-summer Little Gull (*Larus minutus*) among 20-odd Bonaparte's Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*) on the far side of the newly-created cell, I decided to go over to the south side for a closer view. Upon arriving there, I scanned the flats with my 22x Bushnell Spacemaster, looking on both sides of the Red Hill Creek channel. Among the birds feeding and resting were two Semipalmated

Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*), many Killdeer (*C. vociferus*), four Ruddy Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*), 30 Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*), one White-rumped Sandpiper (*C. fuscicollis*), 30 Semipalmated Sandpipers (*C. pusilla*), and an adult Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*) with mixed Common (*S. hirundo*) and Caspian terns (*C. caspia*).

Suddenly as I was taking a second sweep with the scope across the smaller, partly-dried muddy cell, this veritable caricature of a plover sprang into view. With excellent mid-morning lighting in my favour, the sun being behind me, and having the bird only about 250 feet away, identification was instantaneous. Though in the state of shock and near panic typical of a lone birder chancing upon a megarrarity, I was able to assimilate all of the key features of the standing bird before driving the short distance home to make a few phone calls.

Description

The distinctive "jizz" was most evident, a relatively long-legged plover having a rather short body and wings, with a big head and

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long, thick bill. A top-heavy look was created by the bird's square-headed appearance, having a steep forehead and a rather flat crown. Accentuating this was the disproportionately long, thick black bill, seemingly three-quarters of the length of the head. At one point, a Killdeer was standing in front of the Wilson's, allowing the structural difference of the bill to be studied. It was at least the same length or slightly longer than the Killdeer's bill and literally twice as thick. Thus the mien presented was striking, to say the least. The blackness of the bill also contrasted vividly with the plumage tone.

The eye was dark, fairly large, and stood out quite well, being obviously darker than the surrounding dark areas on the head.

The crown, nape, auricular, and loreal areas were medium pale brown, with a broad white area above the bill which narrowed to a thin eyebrow, terminating just behind the eye.

The entire underparts, consisting of the mantle, scapulars, coverts, and tertials, were identical to the dark areas on the head, a dull pale brown, not as warmly coloured as a Killdeer.

The underparts were white from the chin to the undertail coverts, except for the single breastband. This band was the same colour as the upperparts, although a bit darker brown along the top edge at the side. The band was thin at the base, thickening at the side of the

breast, then becoming thin across the centre. The white of the throat extended as a thin collar, going around the back of the neck, creating a white division between the head and the back.

The legs were thin and relatively long compared to the short body. Their colour was difficult to discern at first, but eventually appeared to be a dull grayish-flesh.

In flight, a dark tail with a thin white outer border was noted, as well as a thin white wing stripe.

The body size compared to nearby waders was slightly larger than Semipalmated Sandpiper, a bit smaller than Dunlin, and perhaps closest to Semipalmated Plover.

The plover fed in typical fashion, running forwards quickly, then stopping abruptly to pick at a food item or to look about. It was seen to occasionally bob its body up and down. It was also observed sleeping periodically, with its head tucked into the right scapulars.

Breeding range and extralimital status

Wilson's Plover breeds on the Pacific coast from Baja California to Peru, and along the Atlantic and Caribbean coasts from Maryland to Guyana (Farrand 1983). In winter it is rarely found north of Florida. A number of strays have occurred in southern California and in the Maritimes.

The species is a very rare vagrant inland. I have been able to locate only six prior records in the Great Lakes region. Three records are

listed for Gull Point, Presque Isle State Park, Pennsylvania: 4 May 1968, 29 May 1971, and 10 September 1976 (Stull *et al.* 1985). One was at Duluth, Minnesota, on 4 July 1981 (Tessen 1981). Amazingly, another individual, or possibly the same bird, appeared at Duluth from 15-20 May 1982 (Eckert 1982).

In Ontario, the only definite occurrence was of one which remained from 17-20 May 1966 at the Burlington Beach Canal (R. Curry, pers. comm.). It was discovered by the late George W. North, and was also seen by a number of local observers. Regrettably, documentation for this highly reliable sighting, which included a sketch, went missing years ago. Thus the record has never been reviewed by the Ontario Bird Records Committee, making the Windermere bird the first

documented record for the province of Ontario.

(Note: This report has been submitted to the Ontario Bird Records Committee and has been accepted.)

Acknowledgements

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Literature cited

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Palm Warblers Use Upland Cutovers as Nesting Habitat in Northwestern Ontario

by
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Introduction

The Palm Warbler (*Dendroica palmarum*) nests across much the boreal forest of Canada. The western race (*D.p. palmarum*) ranges from Alberta to eastern

Ontario, and the eastern race (*D.p. hypochrysea*) is found from eastern Ontario to the maritimes and Newfoundland (Godfrey 1986).

In Ontario, this species is widespread in the northern part of

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