

December's "At A Glance" bird is obviously a shorebird, and its short bill with swollen tip and its erect posture indicate that it is a member of the plover family, Charadriidae. The lack of horizontal breast bands and the strongly patterned back at once narrow the field to one of the larger plovers of the genus *Pluvialis* (Black-bellied Plover and Lesser Golden-Plover). The fact that the individual pictured shows no extensive dark coloration on the underparts means that the bird is either a juvenile or an adult in basic (winter) plumage.

Having thus narrowed the identification to one of two species, the final determination becomes more straightforward. Features to focus on are the head pattern of the bird, its bill size, and the appearance of the underparts. *The head appears relatively small, and the bill is correspondingly slender, not giving a thick, stout appearance. Additionally, there is a broad, pale eyebrow stripe that is highlighted by a contrasting dark crown. The underparts exhibit a distinctive marbled appearance that is not vertically streaked with fine pencil stripes.* The back pattern is prominently checkered, and the impression is of a generally darkish tone. A color photograph of the mystery bird would reveal golden yellow spots against a blackish background. A final clue, although not a definitive character, is the prominent dusky, postocular spot on the head.

Collectively, these field marks point to Lesser Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*). The Black-bellied Plover in corresponding plumage would normally appear paler in overall coloration, would have a more bullheaded aspect with a less clearly defined dusky cap, would show only a suggestion of an eyebrow stripe, and would have a longer and heavier bill. The underparts of a Blackbelly would also display fine, but obvious, vertical streaks extending at least to the lower breast. The plover in the picture is in juvenal plumage and was photographed in September at Monomoy Island.

Wayne R. Petersen



Lesser Golden-Plover

Photo by Wayne R. Petersen

At a Glance . . .

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Can you identify this bird? Identification will be discussed in next issue's *At a Glance*.



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