

FIRST RECORD OF GREATER SAND-PLOVER (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) FOR FLORIDA, AND SECOND RECORD FOR THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

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At 0930 hours DST on 14 May 2009, we discovered and photographed a Greater Sand-Plover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*; Figs. 1 and 2) at Huguenot Memorial Park, northeastern Duval County, Florida (30°24'43.42"N, 81°24'31.48"W). The bird was first sighted on a broad wash flat extending along the eastern side of the park's inner basin. Through the following two weeks, including a period of severe weather, the sand-plover frequented the same general area of the park and was viewed, studied, and photographed by scores of observers until the last known sighting at ca. 1200 EST on 26 May 2009 (L. McCullagh in litt.).

OBSERVATIONS

The Greater Sand-Plover was first sighted on a wash flat ca. 30 m from a sparse patch of cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*). The overall dimensions of the mixed-sediment, intertidal flat varied from 0 to >75 ha depending on tidal phase, moon cycle, and weather conditions. The greatest extent occurred on ebbing spring tides when the basin's water line receded ca. 300 m from the dune line.

Description.—The Greater Sand-Plover initially gave the general impression of a slim, pale, long-legged Wilson's Plover with a black face mask and rufous markings (Figs. 1 and 2). The sand-plover was in fresh alternate plumage, was much taller than Semipalmated Plovers (*C. semipalmatus*) and was slightly taller than Wilson's Plovers (*C. wilsonia*), thus putting it outside the size range of the smaller Lesser Sand-Plover (*C. mongolus*; O'Brien et. al. 2006). The larger overall size, longer black bill, longer legs, narrower and paler rufous breast-band, and paler gray-brown upperparts with faint rufous highlights also ruled out the Lesser Sand-Plover (O'Brien et. al. 2006). The Greater Sand-Plover's bill was similar in proportion to the Wilson's, but less deep, and its legs were thinner and longer with a greenish tint. Its



Figure 1. Greater Sand-Plover (right) and Wilson's Plover at Huguenot Memorial Park, Duval County, Florida, May 2009.



Figure 2. Greater Sand-Plover at Huguenot Memorial Park, Duval County, Florida, May 2009.

body form was similar to a Wilson's but leaner in profile and its chestnut-washed dorsal coloration was much closer in hue to the wash flat's substrate, so close in fact, that the bird sometimes seemed cryptic and disappeared "in plain view" when standing stationary in bright sunlight. The Greater Sand-Plover's black face mask was distinct and showed the bird to be a male (O'Brien et al. 2006). The mask extended from the lores as a narrow line, thence broadened to surround the dark eye, then tapered again through the ear-coverts forming a "wedge-like" mask in profile. A narrow black line ran between the eyes and was separated by a white supraloral from the black lores and the black base of the upper mandible, giving the bird a distinct and unique appearance when viewed head-on. The entire ventral surface was white except for the solid, pale cinnamon breast band that blended into the nape and rear-most edge of the supercilium. A pale rufous wash suffused the pale gray crown, lower mantle in bright light.

Behavior.—During the two-week observation period at Huguenot Park, the sand-plover's behavior varied between foraging for, capturing, and processing fiddler crabs (*Uca pugnator*), occasional interactions with Wilson's Plovers and Semipalmated Plovers, short flights across the flat, and roosting periods. Its foraging behavior closely matched that of Wilson's Plovers, characterized by cautious stalking followed by swift, crouching runs ending in a terminal lunge to capture prey. In contrast to the Wilson's Plovers, the sand-plover frequently transported fiddler crabs to the water's edge for washing prior to consuming the prey. The crabs were typically grasped by a leg and shaken vigorously. When roosting, the sand-plover occasionally lay down in a slight depression partially concealing its lower body in a manner similar to other plovers roosting nearby.

Interactions with other birds principally involved agonistic encounters with Semipalmated and, especially, male Wilson's plovers. We observed brief encounters when one bird quickly shifted away from the aggressor, and more protracted interactions (Corbat and Bergstrom 2000), where both birds assumed conspicuous "upright hunched postures" (including tail fanning by the sand-plover) followed by swift chases in the "horizontal hunched posture." During some chases we heard the distinctive "song rattle" (Hayman et al. 1986) of Wilson's Plover, which obscured the softer pitched "trrri" calls (Hayman et al. 1986) of the sand-plover. The sand-plover demonstrated strong fidelity to the park throughout the two-week period of observation.

DISCUSSION

The Huguenot Memorial Park Greater Sand-Plover represents the first report and record for Florida (Kratler 2010) and the second report and record for the Western Hemisphere (Pranty et al. 2009).

Taxonomy.—There are three subspecies of the Greater Sand-Plover. *C. l. columbinus* breeds from Turkey and Jordan to the Caspian Sea and is a short-distant migrant that winters around the Arabian peninsula, the Red Sea, and the eastern Mediterranean. *C. l. crassirostris* breeds from the Caspian Sea to eastern Kazakhstan and is also a short-distant migrant that winters around the Arabian peninsula. Nominate *C. l. leschenaultii* breeds in western China, Mongolia, and adjacent parts of Russia and is a long-distant migrant that winters from southern Africa to Taiwan and Australia. During migration, this subspecies is accidental to France, Scotland, Sweden, Finland, Tunisia, and Morocco (Hayman et al. 1986).

The Greater Sand-Plover has been recorded in the Western Hemisphere once previously, at Bolinas Lagoon, Marin County, California, from 29 January to 8 April 2001 (Abbot et al. 2001, Pranty et al. 2009). The California sand-plover was captured, measured, and identified as *C. l. leschenaultii* (Abbot et al. 2001).

We determined that *C. l. leschenaultii* was the subspecies of the Florida Greater Sand-Plover because of its large bill, cleaner white flanks, and lack of black line on top of its breast band. We ruled out *C. l. columbinus* because of its shorter bill and more rufous mantle (Hirschfeld et al. 2000). Moreover, *C. l. leschenaultii* is the most likely race because it is the only long-distance migrant of the three subspecies.

Route of arrival.—A possible explanation for the bird's occurrence in Florida is that the bird flew west from Africa to Florida, possibly aided by tropical storm activity the previous fall. However, the timing of the Florida bird's sighting at Huguenot Park offers another possible explanation. The plover was initially sighted near a flock of Red Knots (*Calidris canutus*) including marked birds from southernmost South America that arrive annually in northeast Florida during the first two weeks of May (P. Leary and D. Leary unpubl. data). Since the Greater Sand-Plover is a long-distance migrant, it is possible that the bird flew from central Asia through Alaska, across the continent, and then south to the Southern Hemisphere, and back north to Florida. Abbott and Howell (2001) discussed a 180-degree orientation error to explain the appearance of the California record of the Greater Sand-Plover.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Patrick Leary for his assistance on this paper. We also thank Danny Bales and others for their generous contribution of photographs, and Eric Hirschfeld for reviewing images and offering his thoughts on subspecies distinctions. Bill Pranty, Janell Brush, Andy Kratter, and Humphrey Sitters improved drafts of this paper.

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