

FIRST RECORD OF A NORTHERN LAPWING IN ALASKA AND WESTERN NORTH AMERICA

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The Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) is a common Old World plover that breeds and winters throughout much of Europe. In Asia it breeds south of the tundra regions in a broad band from north of the Caspian Sea east to Mongolia and China. In Russia it breeds generally south of 57° N to the southern trans-Baikal region, the Amur valley, locally in the Pacific region in Ussuriland (Vaurie 1965). It breeds also on Honshu, Japan (Brazil 1991). Eastern Asian populations withdraw south to winter mainly in southern China and north to southern Japan (Vaurie 1965). The birds generally depart their easternmost breeding areas in Russia (Ussuriland) in September (Dement'ev 1969); wintering birds in Japan arrive from late August to October (Brazil 1991).

On 12 October 2006 I found and collected a Northern Lapwing on the island of Shemya at the western end of Alaska's Aleutian Islands (52° 43' N, 174° 07' E). The specimen provides the first documented record of the species in Alaska and within western North America.

Shemya Island is the home of the United States Air Force's (USAF) Eareckson Air Station and is also part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. I was on the island as part of a study associated with the bird-aircraft strike hazard (BASH) at the air force installation; corollary tasks included basic wildlife inventory for the refuge, scientific collection for the University of Alaska Museum, and avian influenza surveillance as part of a Department of Agriculture program. I began this BASH work in the summer of 1999 and have been on the island during spring and fall migration (approximately two months each season) through five subsequent years. The fieldwork requires intensive daily travel on the island's road system. Collection of bird specimens on the island has been under the permits and guidance of the University of Alaska Museum with the cooperation of the USAF 611th Air Support Group.

On 12 October 2006 I was checking a small wetland along the island's south beach road. As I crested a berm separating the wetland from the road a bird flushed at about 60 meters. As it became airborne it uttered a sharp call. The bird's pigeonlike size, dark plumage, large paddle-shaped wings, and crest identified it unmistakably as a Northern Lapwing. I had previously observed the species in Europe and Asia (Mongolia). The lapwing flew about 200 meters to the west and landed in deep beach grasses adjacent to the island's sewage-treatment pond. I stalked the bird and collected it as it flushed and flew past me in high winds at a range of about 40 meters.

The Northern Lapwing has a long history of casual occurrences in eastern North America. It has occurred from Baffin Island, Labrador, and Newfoundland south through southern Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New England to New York (AOU 1998:142). Elsewhere in eastern North America it has occurred accidentally as far south as the Caribbean (Puerto Rico and Barbados) and inland as far as Ohio (AOU 1998).

The tendency of Northern Lapwings to move from Europe to the New World is illustrated by invasions in 1927 and 1966, probably in response to unusual weather patterns. The 1927 event (which extended into 1928) was focused on Newfoundland, but unusual numbers were noted in the other Canadian maritime provinces as well. Estimates of the number of birds involved were in the hundreds, perhaps in the thousands (Ingersoll 1928). In 1966, records totaling 32 individuals came from Atlantic Canada (Tufts 1968).

NOTES

In western North America, the only historical reference from Alaska is based on an undocumented hearsay report (Dall and Bannister 1869, Gabrielson and Lincoln 1959). Thus, this *Shemya* specimen is the basis for the first documented record of the Northern Lapwing for Alaska and all of western North America. It is archived at the University of Alaska Museum, Fairbanks (UAM 22699), as a study skin and partial skeleton with two frozen genetic samples. It was an adult female, mass 223.9 g, wing chord 219 mm, tail 101.8 mm, tarsus 50.4 mm, bill width 4.8 mm, and skull length 61.6 mm, ovary 10 × 3 mm, ova all even-sized; fat extremely heavy; no molt. The stomach contained two caterpillars.

I thank Kimball L. Garrett, Daniel D. Gibson, and G. Vernon Byrd for their review of and suggestions to the manuscript. I also thank the USAF for funding my work, and Chugach-McKinley, Incorporated, for administering the logistical support essential for my work at the remote Alaskan outpost of Eareckson Air Station.

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Accepted 13 March 2007