Audubon Coastal Bird Survey: The Basics of Plover Identification
Identifying Shorebirds

- **Size** - compare to nearby known species.
- **Structure** - bill, leg length, body shape?
- **Colors** - feathering, legs, bill?
- **Pattern** - uniform, harlequin, hooded, bicolored?
- **Habitat** - beach, pond, pasture, marine, fresh?
- **Behavior** - feeding style, associations, density?
- **Seasonality** - migration window, mid-winter?
- **Range** - flyway specific?
- **Age** - buff, clean feather lines, scaly coverts...
Identifying Shorebirds

- Thin-bills
- Especially small sandpipers move quickly and non-stop (sparrow or warbler-like)

- Short, thick bills
- Pause between foraging attempts (robin-like)
- Note “ringed” look of small plovers
Breaking Down the Plovers

- **Large Plovers**
  - Black-bellied Plover
  - American Golden-Plover

- A little bigger than Killdeer
  - Willet- or Greater Yellowlegs-sized

- **Small ("ringed") plovers**
  - Piping Plover
  - Snowy Plover
  - Semipalmated Plover
  - Wilson’s Plover

- Smaller than Killdeer
  - Sanderling (Wilson’s) or “peep”-sized
Killdeer – the Familiar Plover

Two dark rings

Rufous rump
Large Plovers (genus *Pluvialis*)

**Black-bellied Plover**
- Common on beaches

**American Golden-Plover**
- Very rare on beaches

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<tr>
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<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
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<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black-bellied Plover</strong></td>
<td>MAP</td>
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Little contrast between crown and supercilium

thicker bill

Juvenile or winter plumages look very similar between these two species

thinner bill

More contrasting between crown and supercilium
Large Plovers (genus *Pluvialis*)

**Black-bellied Plover**
- Common on beaches

**Cautions**
- Back color is extremely deceiving
- Bill shape is difficult to judge without a direct comparison
- BUT...99.9% of large plovers on beaches are Black-bellied Plover
Large Plovers continued

Black-bellied Plover will have dark “wingpits” in all plumages

American Golden-Plover never has dark “wingpits”
Small Plovers

- Go by leg color then back color and bill size

**Orange legs**
- Semipalmated Plover (dark back)
- Piping Plover (pale back)

**Gray/brown legs**
- Wilson’s Plover (dark back, largest bill)
- Snowy Plover (pale - slightly brownish back, thinnest bill)
Semipalmated Plover

Wilson’s Plover

Snowy Plover

Piping Plover

hawfinches.co.uk

Richard Gibbons
# Small Plovers: Species of Conservation Concern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wilson’s Plover</th>
<th>Piping Plover</th>
<th>Snowy Plover</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>N. A. Pop Size</strong></td>
<td>~3000 pairs</td>
<td>~4000 pairs</td>
<td>~8500 pairs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gulf Breeding Pop. Size</strong></td>
<td>~2000 pairs</td>
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<td>~750 pairs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gulf Breeding Pop. Trend</strong></td>
<td>Unknown (Declining?)</td>
<td>Increasing, but leveling</td>
<td>Unknown (Stable?)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gulf Winter Pop. Size</strong></td>
<td>~500</td>
<td>&gt;1/2 global population</td>
<td>~2000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Non-breeding Pop. Trend in Gulf</strong></td>
<td>Declining? (4.8%/year)</td>
<td>Declining? (1.4%/year)</td>
<td>Stable?</td>
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</table>
Plover Quiz: 1
Plover Quiz: 2
Plover Quiz: 3
Plover Quiz: 5
Plover Quiz: 6
Plover Quiz: 8
Plover Quiz: 10
Plover Quiz: 11
Plover Quiz: 12
Plover Quiz: 13
No peaking!
Plover Quiz: 1

Piping Plover
Plover Quiz: 2

Semipalmated Plovers (and what look like Western Sandpipers - compare size with plover)
Plover Quiz: 3

Semipalmated Plover
Plover Quiz: 4

Black-bellied Plover
Plover Quiz: 5

Piping Plovers
American Golden-Plover
Plover Quiz: 7

Snowy Plover
Plover Quiz: 8

Black-bellied Plover
Wilson’s Plover
Snowy Plover
Plover Quiz: 11

Semipalmated Plovers and 1 Black-bellied Plover with what look like mostly Dunlin and a few Western Sandpipers
Plover Quiz: 12

Wilson’s Plover
Plover Quiz: 13

Piping Plover