

A large diverse group of birds of estuaries, coasts, riverbeds and farmland. Most are long-legged and feed in or near shallow water. Bill shape is varied; short and stubby in those (e.g. dotterels) that peck from the surface, but longer in those that feed in shallow water (e.g. stilts), or probe deeply (e.g. godwits). Flight strong and direct. Often form flocks while roosting or flying, but disperse to feed. Many species seen in NZ breed in the Arctic and arrive in September, with remnants of breeding plumage, and depart in March, often in breeding plumage. Most subadults and a few adults spend the southern winter here.

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis fulva*

Common Arctic migrant

25 cm, 130 g. Medium-sized speckled wader, often in marsh-turf or short grass. Wary; when alert stands tall, looking slim with long neck and large head. Breeding adult has brown upperparts heavily speckled golden yellow and white; black face and underparts (mottled on flanks) separated by broad white stripe from bill, above eye and down neck to flanks. Non-breeding has head and upperparts pale brown with golden-buff or cream spots; tail barred brown and buff; pale buff eye stripe; throat and chest buff, speckled brown and yellow, grading into pale buff flanks, belly and undertail. Sexes alike. Juvenile has more heavily speckled upperparts and yellower head and underparts; more dark markings on breast and flanks. In flight, dark brown upperwing with an indistinct pale wingbar, and uniform brownish-grey underwing and armpits. At rest, tip of tertials level with tip of tail, and wings just longer than tail. Large black eye, short black bill. Long dark grey legs give leggy appearance. Flight fast and direct, often in small flocks. *Flight call a musical 'too-weet'*. **Habitat:** Breeds Arctic tundra of Siberia and W Alaska. In NZ, at estuaries with extensive *Zostera* and *Sarcocornia/Samolus* beds (especially Parengarenga, Manawatu, Farewell Spit, Awarua Bay) or freshwater wetlands with marsh-turf on fringes (Kaimaumau, Lakes Wairarapa and Ellesmere); rarely on short grassland in NZ. Very few overwinter. [Sp 186]

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER



PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER



PLOVERS, DOTTERELS and LAPWINGS
Charadriidae

About 65 species, most of which are migratory. There are about 29 plovers and dotterels, of which 5 (formerly 6) breed in New Zealand and 8 visit as migrants from the Northern Hemisphere; 26 lapwings, 1 of which breeds in New Zealand. Some authorities place the Red-kneed Dotterel with the lapwings rather than the plovers.

In New Zealand, the terms plover and dotterel mean the same thing; there is no clear distinction. All are plumpish with a thick, short neck, short tail, small, rounded head

with a high forehead and bill shorter than the head, pointed and slightly swollen at the tip. The plumage is a blend of black, white, brown and grey, sometimes more colourful in breeding plumage. They have a characteristic 'walk and stop' way of feeding.

Lapwings tend to be inland on pasture and around coastal wetlands. They have wattles on the face and spurs on the bend of the wing, and are noisy on the ground and in flight, by night as well as by day.

186. PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis fulva*

Plate 42

Other names: Asiatic/Eastern/Least Golden Plover

Size: 25 cm, 130 g

Distribution: Breed in the arctic and subarctic tundra of Siberia and western Alaska. They migrate south on a broad front, mainly to the coasts of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, southern China, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Australasia and most Pacific islands. In New Zealand, they are the fourth most common Arctic migrant wader. They are seldom seen far from the coast. Favoured places are Parengarenga and Rangaunu Harbours, Lake Ohia (Far North), Whangarei, Kaipara and Manukau Harbours, the Firth of Thames, Bay of Plenty estuaries, Muriwai Lagoon (Gisborne), Wairoa and Ahuriri Estuaries, Manawatu Estuary, Lake Wairarapa, Farewell Spit, Lake Ellesmere, the Southland coastal lagoons and estuaries, and Te Whanga Lagoon, Chatham Island. They are recorded regularly at the Kermadecs and at many other mainland localities, and stragglers have reached the Auckland Islands.

The earliest birds arrive in September, but most arrive from October to early November.

Almost all depart northwards in late March to early April.

Population: 300-1200 birds visit New Zealand each summer, but very few overwinter, the highest winter total being only 6 birds.

Behaviour: Pacific Golden Plovers usually stay separate from other waders at high-tide roosts and sometimes roost away from the water's edge, often in a ploughed paddock or on short pasture. Flocks are usually small, 10-50. In New Zealand, unlike in the Pacific Islands, they are notably alert and wary. They are usually silent on the ground. In flight, which is fast, they give a clear, melodious, two-syllable 'tlu-ee'.

Feeding: They feed on grassland, saltmarsh and the upper levels of tidal flats on a wide range of animal food. On grassland, they eat insects and their larvae, including beetles, crickets, grasshoppers, caterpillars, flies, ants and earwigs; also spiders, earthworms and plant seeds. On tidal flats, they take mainly small crustaceans such as crabs, molluscs and marine worms.

Reading: Robertson, H.A. & Dennison, M.D. 1979. *Notornis* 26: 73-88.