

A Mongolian Plover in Louisiana

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Figure 1. *Mongolian Plover at Grand Isle, Louisiana. Dunlins in foreground. Reproduced from a color slide taken by D. N. Doubleday using a Nikkormat camera hand held, 1/15 second, f. 1.4, through a Bausch and Lomb telescope with a 20x eyepiece.*

On April 22, 1975 a red-breasted plover was seen by the authors at Grand Isle, Louisiana, on flats beside the pond at the Coast Guard Station. By using *Birds of North America* (Robbins *et al.*, 1966) we identified the bird at once as a Mongolian Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*). Several color photographs were taken, one of which is reproduced in black and white (Figure 1). Conditions for viewing were excellent, with bright sunlight, no heat waves, and no wind. The bird was under observation for one and one-half hours and was still there with Dunlins (*Calidris alpina*) and Semipalmated Plovers (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) when we left. We immediately telephoned Joseph C. Kennedy, Jr., one of the few birders whose name we knew in New Orleans, to alert competent observers in the area. Others were notified later.

The bird had a light chestnut, almost rufous, breast band; with the chestnut color extending completely around the nape. A buff stripe encircled the crown just above the black eye line and white forehead. The most striking features were the brilliant white throat and the rufous band. The color changed to buff on the lower breast and to white on the belly. The bill and the legs were black. Its posture was that of a Semipalmated Plover, its size slightly larger.

There are four species of Asiatic plover which are red-breasted: Mongolian Plover, Caspian Plover (*C. asiaticus*), Greater Sand Plover (*C. leschenaultii*), and Oriental Plover (*C. veredus*) (Nielson 1971). Comparisons were made with descriptions and pictures in several other field guides, particularly those by Kobayaski (1956), Falla *et al.* (1966), Gooders (1969), Slater (1970), and Heinzel *et al.* (1972). All of these confirmed the original identification. The conclusive evidence that the bird was *C. mongolus* was provided by examination of several dozen specimens of each of the four plovers in widely varying plumages at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University, with the assistance of the Curator of Birds, Dr. Raymond A. Payntor, Jr., and Peter Alden of the Massachusetts Audubon Society staff.

When compared with our notes and photographs every specimen of *C. asiaticus* with a

rufous breast showed a very distinct black band separating the rufous breast from the white belly. Specimens of *C. leschenaultii* were appreciably larger, with a much narrower breast band and a longer bill. All specimens of *C. veredus* had long yellow legs and were consistently much larger. Of all the specimens of the four red-breasted plovers, only the male of *C. mongolus* in breeding plumage had a wide rufous breast band together with a complete chestnut nape, a white forehead and throat, and a thin black line (sometimes faint) separating the white throat from the rufous breast. Based upon our research it is evident that the bird seen and photographed at Grand Isle was a male Mongolian Plover in nearly full breeding plumage.

As far as we can determine this is the first appearance of a Mongolian Plover in North America outside of Alaska. Eight sightings have been reported from Alaska (Gabrielson and Lincoln 1959, Kenyon and Phillips 1965, Thompson and DeLong 1969). No records were found that would indicate that it ever occurred elsewhere in North America.

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