

PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER

Pluvialis fulva

Other: *Kolea*, Lesser Golden-Plover (< 1993), American Golden-Plover monotypic

non-breeding visitor, regular winterer

The Pacific Golden-Plover breeds in Siberia and w. Alaska, and migrates to wintering grounds from Africa to Australia to California, including Johnston and Wake atolls and islands throughout the Pacific (Stickney 1943, Dement'ev and Gladkov 1951c, Amerson and Shelton 1976, Marchant and Higgins 1993, Johnson and Connors 1996, AOU 1998, Rauzon et al. 2008). In 1993 it was split from the American Golden-Plover (*P. dominica*) which breeds in c. Alaska-n. Canada and winters in S America (Connors 1983, AOU 1993, Johnson and Connors 1996). As yet there are no confirmed records of American Golden-Plover for the Hawaiian Islands, although a plover photographed at Ki'i unit of JCNWR, O'ahu, 12 Sep 2005 ([HRBP 5272](#)) shows some characters of this species, and the identification of others (e.g., Waiawa, O'ahu, in Oct 2016) have been debated. American Golden-Plover has occurred in New Zealand (Marchant and Higgins 1993) and likely reaches the Hawaiian Islands occasionally, but could easily be overlooked due to its similarity to Pacific Golden-Plover.

The Pacific Golden-Plover is one of Hawaii's most ubiquitous wintering birds, being found on lawns, athletic fields, beaches, mud flats, estuaries, ploughed areas, and upland pastures throughout the state. The fossil record indicates its presence in Hawaiian Islands for at least 120,000 yrs (James 1987). Based on the presence of winter-plumaged birds in summer, Peale (1848) and Cassin (1858) were confused over its status in Hawaii and the Pacific, believing them perhaps to migrate both to Australia and North America to breed. Cassin thought two species might be involved and C. Clerke (*in King 1779*) may also have been referring to summer and winter plumage aspects when he reported on the occurrence of "plovers of two sorts, one very like the whistling plover of Europe". Dole (1879) corrected its status as a North American migrant departing primarily in Apr-May and returning primarily in late Jul-Aug. It is possible that small numbers of failed breeders may return (or perhaps pass through) the Hawaiian Islands as early as 9-10 Jun (*cf. AB 53:435-436*, if not late spring migrants) and that first-cycle birds arrive in Sep-Oct. Numbers of first-year birds and unhealthy adults frequently over-summer, roosting and feeding together in small flocks, primarily at coastal wetlands. Individuals repeatedly return to winter territories (*AB 35:230*): a lame individual returning to the same territory on Laysan during the early 1900s surprised ornithologists at the time (Bryan 1915) and a banded individual wintered in the same field on O'ahu from at least 1982 to 2001, a longevity record for the species (Johnson et al. 2004). Pacific Golden-Plovers wintering in Hawaii take 3-4 days to reach Alaska breeding grounds, primarily to the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta to nearly the tip of the Alaska Peninsula (Johnson et al. 2011).

Golden-plovers comprised an important food resource for pre-contact Polynesians and were hunted extensively after the arrival of Europeans (Schwartz and Schwartz 1949; *PoP 14[7]:16-17*). Native Hawaiians coaxed them to eat insects on wooden hooks tethered to rocks, and post-contact hunters found them easily decoyed by potatoes on sticks at watering sites (L. Pyle 2009). Older accounts suggest a much greater abundance

of golden-plovers during the 19th century than is found today; e.g., Finsch (1880) alluded to swarms; Wilson and Evans (1899) noted seeing thousands on the Waimea Plain, Hawai'i I.; Seale (1900) mentioned thousands recorded at Waimanalo and Kahuku, O'ahu, including 100's shot annually (see also *PoP* 14[7]:16-17); and Henshaw (1900a) noted that thousands over-summered in upland areas. Henshaw (1902a) was already concerned about declining numbers and such concern, along with realization of their benefit to agriculture by eating insects (Perkins and Swezey 1924, Bryan 1937b), led to a prohibition on hunting in Hawaii in 1941 (*cf.* *E* 2:8; Schwartz and Schwartz 1949). More recently, numbers of golden-plovers counted on the Honolulu [Christmas Bird Count](#) have increased substantially and significantly (Engilis and Naughton 2002; [Graph](#)), perhaps signifying a protracted recovery from depletion due to hunting. [DOFAW Waterbird Surveys](#) during 1980-2007 also indicate an increase, with state-wide totals of 500-1,200 in the 1980s followed by totals of 800-1,800 in the 1990s and 1,500-2,200 in the 2000s, with a peak of 3,000 recorded in Jan 2005. Johnson and Johnson (1993) censused 1,902 plovers wintering on O'ahu golf courses during 1991-1992. Numbers around Kapa'a, Kaua'i, on the other hand, generally decreased during 1970-2014, but variably, according to the Christmas Count data ([Graph](#)).

Pacific Golden-Plovers have been recorded on every island of both the *Northwestern* (*cf.* Clapp and Woodward 1968; [HRBP](#) 0855, 1364, 1451, 6441) and the *Southeastern* (e.g., [HRBP](#) 0043, 0168, 5305) *Hawaiian Islands*, and there are frequent records of migrants *at sea* throughout Hawaiian waters. Schwartz and Schwartz (1949) estimated a population of 74,000 wintering annually and Engilis and Naughton (2002) gave a "conservative" estimate of 15-20,000. Higher counts noted since 1960 include 500 at *Kure* in 1962 (Robbins 1966, Woodward 1972); 2,000 at *Midway* in Oct 1982 (Pyle 1984); 150 at *Pearl and Hermes* in 1964 (Amerson et al. 1974); 2 at *Gardner Pinnacles* in 1966 (Clapp 1972); 2,000 on *Lisianski* in 1965 (Clapp and Wirtz 1975); 2,600 on *Laysan* in Nov 1984 and other counts $\geq 2,000$ on various occasions (e.g., Dill and Bryan 1912; 2066 in Apr 1995); up to 160 at *French Frigate* in 1965 (Amerson 1971); 6 on *Necker* in 1967 (Clapp and Kridler 1977); 50 on *Nihoa* in 1965 and 1968 (Clapp et al. 1977; see also Vanderbuilt and de Schauensee 1941, Conant 1983b); up to 100 at Hanalei NWR, *Kaua'i* in Mar-Apr 2001 (during the early-to-mid 2010s, 149 at the Port Allen Airport 28 Mar 2012); 1,321 at Keehi Lagoon, *O'ahu* 20 Apr 1993 (during the 2010s, 600 at the Honouliuli Unit of PHNWR 13 Sep 2014); 181 on Kalaupapa Peninsula, *Moloka'i* 19 Dec 2005 (during the 2010s, 130 at Kalaupapa 18 Dec 2014); 612 at Kealia Pond NWR, *Maui* 21 Sep 2006 (during the 2010s, 450 at Kealia 15 Aug 2013); 33 at Keokoku, *Lana'i*, 21 Sep 1977 and 70 island-wide in Nov 2010; 15 on *Kaho'olawe* 14 Oct 2003 (see also Conant 1983a) and again 14 Dec 2015; and 1,056 on the Waimea Plain, *Hawai'i I* 27 Jan 1989 (during the 2010s, 150 at Upolu Pt 39 Mar 2014). Fisher (1951) also saw a flock of about 1,000 on *Ni'ihau* in Aug 1947 and Caum (1936) noted several on Kaula Rock off Ni'ihau in late summer 1932. Aerial [DOFAW Waterbird Surveys](#) during the winters in the 1970-1990s recorded 7-36 birds on Ni'ihau. Over-summering flocks are largest in the Northwest Islands; e.g., 150 on Midway throughout Jun 1993 and >100 on Laysan during Jun 1979. In the Southeastern Islands over-summering birds are scattered, with the largest flocks seldom exceeding 40 individuals (*E*

28:45), although 112 at Honouliuli Unit of PHNWR, 2 Jun 2007, were mostly if not entirely over-summering birds.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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