

PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER Donald Shephard



Pacific Golden-Plover breeding plumage. Photo O. W. Johnson USFWS

Imagine you are the first-hatched chick of Pacific Golden-Plover parents along the shore of the Bering Sea. You are able to run soon after hatching. You regularly forage near the nest while your adult continues to incubate late-hatching siblings. Abundant high-protein insects and some seeds and berries fatten you almost to five ounces. You are ten inches long with a two-foot wingspan. It is an idyllic life without human disturbances.

In August, your mother leaves for Hawaii followed shortly after by your father. Now in October the weather turns cold, the days short and the food supply diminishes. Your assignment is to fly non-stop for fifty hours over 2,000 miles of the Pacific Ocean. You will make the return trip in a few months.

It does not surprise me that some Pacific Golden-Plovers migrate an alternate route down the coast and rest on our beaches where volunteers for the Save Our Shorebirds program monitor their numbers. The winter range of this species is spread over half of the world's circumference. It occupies upland and coastal habitats ranging from Hawaii to Japan, from the South Pacific, including Australia and New Zealand, through southern Asia and the Middle East to northeast Africa. It also winters along our coast and probably in Baja California, the Revillagigedo and Galapagos Islands, and Chile as well.

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continued

This uncommon species and the locally rarer American Golden-Plover, were previously considered subspecies of the Lesser Golden-Plover. Hawaiians call them kolea. The name plover comes from the French word meaning "the rain bird" (pleuvoir - to rain). In Europe, flocks of migratory plovers historically arrived at the beginning of the autumn rainy season.

Let us suppose you survived the trip from the Bering Sea to Hawaii. You hang out during the day on the many golf courses there and at night on city rooftops, not unlike other visitors. You will recognize others of your kind. Pacific Golden-Plovers are medium-sized shorebirds with moderately long legs, short necks, short bills and relatively large rounded heads. Their backs are speckled golden and black. Your fellow juveniles have a yellow wash on the face. Most adults molt into breeding plumage showing black under-parts. Although the white neck stripe is narrower on Pacific Golden-Plovers than on American Golden-Plovers, more white shows on the under-tail coverts.

They feed in short vegetation or open areas using the typical plover stop-run-stop, scanning, and then capturing prey with one or a series of pecks.

Enjoy your good life in Hawaii, fatten up there, because come April you will gather with a small group of friends one evening, fly high into the tropical air, circle a few times to orient yourself then fly non-stop two thousand miles again to the breeding grounds in Alaska. With luck, you will live to make this round trip fifteen times.



**Pacific
Golden-
Plover non-
breeding
plumage
Photo by
Aviceda**