

# **First Record of Mountain Plover in North Carolina**

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On January 26, 2016, I found an unusual plover with a buffy tinge to the breast at Cape Lookout National Seashore, Carteret County, NC. The plover, noticeably larger than the expected *Charadrius* species, was roosting on a large sandflat on the southern shore of Ophelia Inlet on South Core Banks. The purpose of my visit to this site was to survey for Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*), Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*), Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) and Red Knot (*Calidris cantus*) as part of the 2016 International Piping Plover Census.

After ruling out the survey species, consulting the Ibird application, and studying the bird from a distance of 20 meters with a spotting scope, I believed that the unusual bird was a Mountain Plover (*Charadrius montanus*). The tide was high during the observation period, and all shorebirds were roosting. The Mountain Plover made some minor movements, but primarily rested near some debris with other shorebirds. Piping and Wilson's plovers are common birds of the seashore, with 16 Piping Plovers recorded at this wintering site during the census. Snowy Plovers are infrequent summer visitors. Though similar in overall color and common as a wintering species, Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) was eliminated due to its orange legs and smaller size. Photographs were taken for further study and documentation (Figure 1).

Back in the office, I consulted The Sibley Guide to Birds (Sibley 2000) to confirm species identification and range. Close inspection of the pictures appeared to confirm my initial identification of Mountain Plover, and lack of orange/buffy fringes to the feathers of the mantle and scapulars suggested that the bird was a non-breeding adult. Gender could not be determined. Information on the sighting and photographs of the bird were submitted to The Carolina Bird Club website's photo gallery. Multiple observers ventured out to Ophelia Inlet to relocate the bird and pictures were shared of re-sightings on January 29 and 31, 2016 and February 1 and 9, 2016.

The Mountain Plover is a bird of interior and western North America. It breeds in open, flat, disturbed areas from Alberta and Saskatchewan to Texas and winters primarily in California's Central Valley. It is described as a vagrant along the East Coast (Paulson, 2005). Haymen et. al., (1986) reports sightings in Florida, Virginia, and Massachusetts. More recently a sighting from October 10, 2007 at Huntington Beach State Park, SC was accepted by the South Carolina Bird Records Committee

(Slyce, et al, 2009). There is no prior record of this species in North Carolina.

Literature Cited:

Haymen, P., J. Marchant, and T. Prater. 1986. *Shorebirds: An Identification Guide*. Houghton Mifflin, Massachusetts.

Paulson, Donald. 2005. *Shorebirds of North America: The Photographic Guide*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey.

Sibley, D.A. 2000. *National Audubon Society: The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

Slyce D., G. Beaton, L. Glover, C. Hill, T. Piephoff, W. Post, and S. Wagner. 2009. 2008 Annual Report of the South Carolina Bird Records Committee. *Chat* 73:105-106.



Figure 1. Mountain Plover (*Charadrius montanus*) roosting with a Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) and Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) at Ophelia Inlet, NC on January 26, 2016. Photo by Jon Altman.