SOME RECORDS AND NOTES ON THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE ORIENTAL PLOVER

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Records

During the afternoon of 21 January 1983, A. F. Lees, H. J. Cox and I saw a flock of 27 Oriental Plovers *Charadrius veredus* at Port Clinton Conservation Park, Upper Gulf St Vincent, South Australia. The flock was observed on several occasions, when the birds were either resting on extensive tidal mudflats or flying. When they were resting we noted that the leg colour only slightly varied between individuals, from pinkish-yellow to yellowish-orange. We occasionally flushed the flock in order to see the wing markings of the birds, and to ascertain that it did not contain a stray Caspian Plover *C. asiaticus,* which we knew differed from *veredus* by having whitish underwing coverts and a small white bar to the upperwing (see below). However, all birds that were clearly seen had a uniformly brownish underwing, and no white was seen on the upperwing of any birds. The next morning we again saw 23 *veredus* at the same place.

A single *veredus* was seen at Lower Light Beach, *ca* 48 km NNW of Adelaide, South Australia, by R. F. Brown and I on 27 December 1985. This bird also appeared to have a uniformly brownish underwing, and no white was seen on the upperwing. It was heard to call a bubbly *chip-ip-chip,* which was quite unlike the call of nearby Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* from which it also differed by its more uniform brownish upperparts (*i.e.* not heavily mottled), a clear demarcation between dark upper breast and whitish lower breast and belly, and much longer wings and legs (the colour of the latter unfortunately not being clearly seen).

The Port Clinton record was cited by McCrie (1984) who, unfortunately, did not mention all of the available details. Also, A. F. Lees and I do not know the provenance of the statement McCrie attributed to us, that the birds were seen "flying and feeding as a flock". We did not observe the birds feeding.

Notes on Identification

The main field identification characters of *veredus* and *asiaticus* are their wing patterns, as described by Marchant *et al.* (1986).

C. veredus: "Upperwing lacks clear wingbar, although outer greater coverts are narrowly tipped white and some individuals show traces of white on the outer webs of up to 4 inner primaries; underwing browner than in Caspian," with "Axillaries brown with narrow whitish fringes, underwing mostly brown but with some whitish feathers among coverts."

C. asiaticus: Has "a short white wingbar centred on the inner primaries," and "Formed by white tips to outer greater coverts and inner primary coverts and white on webs of inner 4 or 5 primaries," and the "Axillaries are brownish (an incorrect description — see below) and underwing coverts whitish."

Prater *et al.* (1977) described the underwing of *asiaticus* as "whitish underwing with axillaries suffused pale brown," the axillary coloration being the only major difference between their description and that of Marchant *et al.* 1986).

When McCrie (1984) reassessed "some problems in field identification" of *veredus* and *asiaticus,* he cited the description of the underwing of *asiaticus* from Prater *et al.* (1977) and remarked "Previously, axillaries of *asiaticus* were considered always white and therefore affording clear distinction from *veredus*", and did not acknowledge the differences between both species in underwing covert coloration.

McCrie (1984) also confused the differences in upperwing pattern by stating that in *asiaticus* the "wingbar is small but distinct in fresh plumage; it may be reduced or missing in birds with heavily abraded coverts", because if the coverts were abraded the white on the primaries would be exposed even more and *asiaticus* would *always* show a white wingbar of variable extent.

Contrary to McCrie's statement, confusion could arise in the field identification of the two species because *veredus*, while usually showing a dark upperwing, could possess a small white wingbar like *asiaticus*. Nevertheless, any bird seen showing a wholly dark upperwing would obviously be *veredus*.

Examination of Specimens

While the differences between the underwing covert coloration and upperwing markings of *veredus* and *asiaticus* are clear, the colour of their axillaries requires clarification.

McCrie (1984) based his discussion "From a survey of recent and earlier literature and specimens housed in the South Australian Museum," but did not detail the characteristics of any specimens. Therefore, I examined the following available specimens in the South Australian Museum:

C. veredus: 239, 5082.A, B7646, B7848, B11093, B11647 and B36515; all were collected in Australia.

C. asiaticus: B7647, from Pine Creek, Northern Territory, Australia; B7649, from Khartoum, Sudan.

All of the *veredus* specimens have dark grey-brown axillaries (of a shade that is almost as dark as their primaries) which are only very narrowly fringed whitish. Their underwing coverts are of a similar shade except a few which show whitish markings. However, any white in the underwing is very little and the whole underwing (primaries, coverts and axillaries) exhibits a rather uniform coloration of dark grey-brown, as correctly illustrated by Hayman (Marchant *et al.* 1986, pl. 37).

The axillaries of both *asiaticus* specimens are white with only a faint suffusion of very pale grey, and the overall effect from only a little distance is that they are whitish; quite different from the colour of axillaries on the *veredus* specimens. The two *asiaticus* also have mainly white underwing coverts although some have grey-brown smudges. The overall effect is that the underwing appears mainly whitish with darker primaries. Marchant *et al.* (1986) were therefore in error when describing the axillaries of *asiaticus* as "brownish", although Hayman (*loc. cit.*) correctly illustrated the underwing pattern. Also, Prater *et al.* (1977) were not in error in their description of the axillaries of *asiaticus*, but rather their brevity of description was unclear to McCrie (1984).

Conclusion

The key features to accurate field identification are the under and upperwing patterns: brownish on both surfaces in *veredus*, while *asiaticus* has a whitish underwing and a small white bar on the upperwing. However, in two such closely-related species a small amount of overlap in the characteristics of each could occur; but other features (detailed by Prater *et al.* 1977 and Marchant *et al.* 1986) can also be used as helpful guides should a bird that is difficult to identify be met. These features are: size of bird, leg colour, comparative width of a black breast band (if any), colour of breast and back and the extent of the pale supercilium.

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