

A record of Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* for South Australia

COLIN ROGERS AND CHRISTINE TAYLOR

INTRODUCTION

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* breeds in northern and eastern Europe, across the Russian Arctic, Greenland and the north-eastern Canadian Arctic. There are two subspecies, *C. h. hiaticula*, found in north-eastern Canada and western Europe, and *C. h. tundrae*, found in northern Scandinavia and Russia. The subspecies *C. h. tundrae* is smaller and darker than the nominate subspecies (Hayman *et al.* 1986: 282).

In Europe the northern breeders migrate into Africa while southern breeders are relatively sedentary. Subspecies *C. h. tundrae* is regularly recorded on migration or overwintering in China and Japan but is treated as a vagrant further south in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand (Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Birds of the World). Eight records for Australia have been appraised and accepted by the BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC) and the record from this note is the first for South Australia submitted to or accepted by them (BARC Case 1147).

Two previous reports of Common Ringed Plover in South Australia were not submitted to BARC or its precursor the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union Rarities Committee. Rix (1977) reported two in October 1976, one in breeding plumage and one in non-breeding or 'immature' plumage, from the Buckland Park Lake-ICI Saltfields area (Marchant and Higgins 1993: 831). Another was first seen at Price Saltfields on 12 April 1993 by John Cox and the bird remained over winter into the next spring (Cox pers. comm. 2020). Although often elusive, the bird was photographed by Tony

Bainbridge and later by others from Victoria. The photographs were not of the quality to distinguish between Ringed and Semipalmated Plover but, based on experience with the species in the UK, it was identified on call by John Cox. This record was later mentioned in the South Australian Ornithological Association Newsletter (SAOA, December 1993, No. 148: 11, the details having been forwarded by D. Close) and listed as the first South Australian record by Carpenter *et al.* (2003) who also attributed it to David Close.

The identification of Common Ringed Plover poses some interesting challenges largely because of its similarity to Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*. That is particularly the case with *C. h. tundrae* (Hayman *et al.* 1986: 283). Semipalmated Plover breeds in the Canadian Arctic and winters along coasts in the southern USA and Central America. It is treated as a vagrant to western Europe and Asia. Nevertheless, there are now six BARC records for Australia including one from South Australia at Carpenter Rocks on 4 September 2014 (BARC Submission 871; Christie *et al.* 2021).

Common Ringed Plover may also be confused with Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*, but this is less likely in breeding (alternate) plumage. Little Ringed Plover is widespread in Asia and is now regularly recorded in northern Australia. Menkhorst *et al.* (2017: 132-133) discuss the subspecies and identification criteria for distinguishing Little Ringed from Common Ringed Plover in Australia. In South Australia there are three records of Little Ringed Plover: one on Yorke Peninsula on 22 November 1980 (Treloar and Underwood 1982), another at Little

Bool Lagoon between 7 March and 9 April 1981 (Jaensch 1982) plus a third from Buckland Park Lake in 1986 seen by David Eades and John Cox but attributed to John Cox and listed as the first South Australian record (at St Kilda Saltfields) by Carpenter *et al.* (2003: 118).

THE RECORD

On 1 March 2020 while conducting a wader survey on Little Eyre Island off Smoky Bay, western Eyre Peninsula, Christine Taylor observed a small plover with a black breast band, white collar and forehead and brown upperparts. The bird was obviously different from the familiar Red-capped Plover *Charadrius ruficapillus*, of which 113 were seen in the vicinity on that day. Further visits to the site were made by Christine Taylor on 26 March and 14 May to take photographs and observe the bird. The plover's prominent white collar, single black breast band and yellowish/orange legs ruled out identification of the bird as Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*, Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*, or Double-banded Plover *Charadrius bicinctus*, which also occur in small numbers in the area. These species were present on several visits to the island, therefore providing an opportunity to compare and separate the species. The purpose of the visit on 14 May was specifically to confirm the presence

or absence of webbing between the toes and of a yellow eye-ring, which would differentiate Common Ringed Plover from Semipalmated Plover. Assisted by Jane Cooper and Danny Rogers, this resulted in BARC submission 1147 for Ringed Plover, which was accepted on 28 October 2020. The submission was further supported by photographs taken by Colin Rogers, with Stuart Hull on 17 June, and with Christine Taylor on 23 July.

The BARC Report on submission 1147 notes the following seven features used to identify Common Ringed Plover:

- (i) yellowish-orange legs,
- (ii) a pinkish-red base to the lower mandible, combined with an almost black, relatively long bill,
- (iii) absence of a yellow orbital ring,
- (iv) the absence of any obvious webbing between the middle and inner toes,
- (v) a black breast band that is wide and bulges at the shoulder,
- (vi) white forehead extending to the eye and a pale extensive supercilium,
- (vii) a broad black loreal stripe meeting the gape.

At least two identification features are diagnostic between Common Ringed and Semipalmated Plover in all plumages, as Brown (2018) notes:

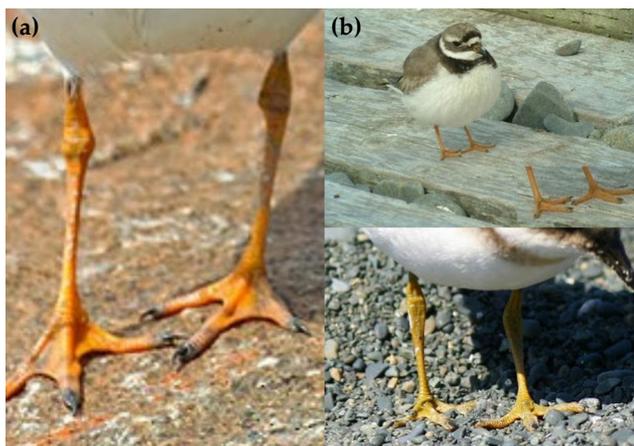


Figure 1. Comparison of (a) webbing between toes of *C. semipalmatus* and (b) no obvious webbing between the toes of *C. h. hiaticula*. Source Brown (2018).

'When it comes to separating Common Ringed and Semipalmated Plovers there are two absolutely fool proof characters to look for and they are: toe palmations and call'. As no calls were recorded in this case, the webs between the toes are the relevant diagnostic features to consider, namely:

1. Semipalmated Plover has webs between all toes: a larger web between the outer and middle toe and a smaller one between the inner and middle toe.
2. Common Ringed Plover may have a small web between outer and middle toe, smaller than on Semipalmated Plover, but has no visible web between inner and middle toe.

'So, the key is the semi-palmation between the inner and middle toe, which is absent on Common Ringed Plover, and present in Semipalmated Plover' (Lopez-Velasco 2012).

Figure 1 illustrates that Semipalmated Plover has an obvious web between outer and middle toe with a smaller web between inner and middle toe. Common Ringed Plover has no obvious web, or at best a very small web, between outer and middle toe (right foot) and no visible

web between inner and middle toe (left foot). The plover on Little Eyre Island clearly had no obvious webbing between the toes and, in particular, there was no obvious webbing between the inner and middle toe, as illustrated in Figures 2a and 3.

In addition to the diagnostic feature illustrated in Figure 2a, the remaining six features listed in the BARC report above support the identification as Common Ringed Plover. Figures 2a and 3 also illustrate the following points.

There is a reddish tone to the base of the lower mandible on an almost black and relatively long bill, by comparison with the well-marked yellowish base to the thicker, shorter bill of Semipalmated Plover (Figure 2b). The absence of a yellowish orbital ring (Figure 3) usually seen on Semipalmated Plover (Figure 2b), and very obvious on Little Ringed Plover in breeding plumage, supports the identification as Common Ringed Plover.

The pattern of the white forehead extending to the eye, a pale extensive supercilium (Figure 3) by comparison with the shorter supercilium on Semipalmated Plover (Figure 2b), and the



Figure 2. (a) Common Ringed Plover on Little Eyre Island, 23/7/2020, showing no obvious webbing between the toes in comparison with (b) the Semipalmated Plover at Carpenter Rocks, 11/11/2014 showing obvious webbing between the outer and middle toe. See also Menkhorst *et al.* (2017: 133). Images Colin Rogers

broad black loreal stripe, are all consistent with identification of Common Ringed Plover. The pattern of the forehead and the extent of the supercilium differs between the subspecies of Common Ringed Plover. In particular, *C. h. tundrae* has a less distinct supercilium than the nominate subspecies but the supercilium is still usually more extensive than on Semipalmated Plover.

The black lores of Semipalmated Plover are typically separated from the gape and base of the upper mandible by a narrow strip of white feathering. That is particularly the case on juvenile Semipalmated Plover (Boyle *et al.* 2009) and the presence of a strip of white feathering below the black lores at the gape is considered by many to be diagnostic of Semipalmated Plover, as is the case in Figure 2b (although not particularly clear in this individual), and is absent in Common Ringed Plover, which usually has a broader dark loreal stripe, as in Figures 2a and 3.

The shape of the breast-band (Figure 2a) is consistent with Common Ringed Plover but, as Figure 3 illustrates, the width of the breast band can change significantly with changes in posture. Nevertheless, in general the breast band of Common Ringed Plover will appear

broader than that on Semipalmated Plover and, on a standing bird, have obvious bulges at the 'shoulder' (Figure 2a).

As illustrated in Figure 4a, primary moult of the bird on Little Eyre Island was in progress on 26 March 2020, showing new inner primaries, a moult gap indicating that primaries 8 and 9 were in moult, while primary 10 was yet to be moulted; primary 10 was not markedly paler than the inner primaries, suggesting it was not particularly worn. By 23 July (Figure 4b) primary moult was complete. Adults of both subspecies of Common Ringed Plover typically complete their primary moult in January (Meissner *et al.* 2010: Figure 1). In their first year, *C. h. hiaticula* retains juvenile primaries throughout the year, while *C. h. tundrae* moults all its juvenile primaries between December and April (Meissner *et al.* 2010). The late, active primary moult of the bird at Little Eyre Island on 26 March, and the modest wear of its retained outer primary, are most consistent with subspecies *tundrae* in first winter plumage. The fairly subdued spot at the base of the lower mandible and the dark bill are also indicators that the bird was in its first year, as is the fact that the bird remained in Australia into the austral winter rather than migrating north.



Figure 3. Common Ringed Plover on Little Eyre Island 23/7/2020 (also showing no obvious webbing between the middle and inner toe on the left foot). Image Colin Rogers

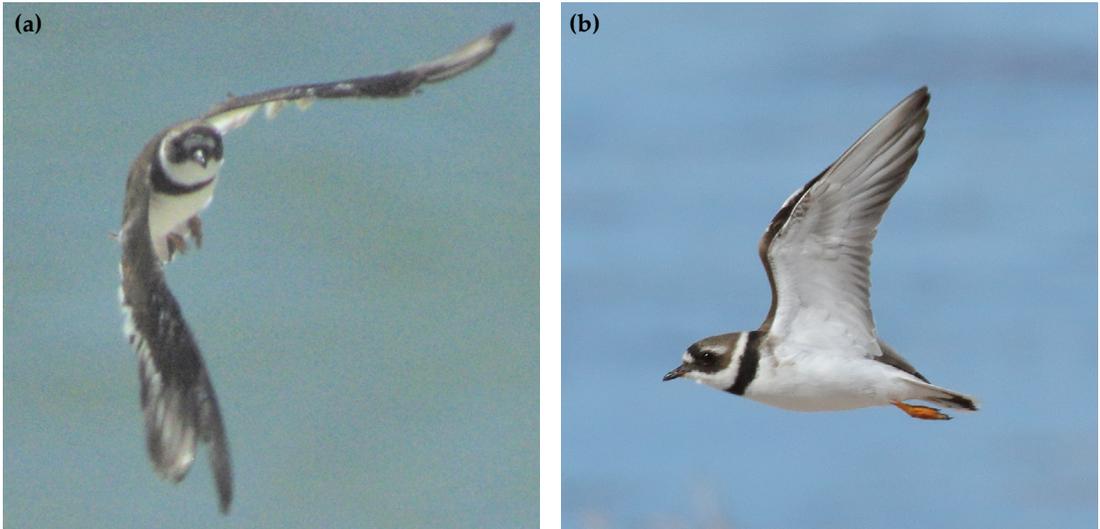


Figure 4. Common Ringed Plover on Little Eyre Island showing (a) primary moult on 26/3/2020 and (b) primary moult complete on 23/7/2020. Images (a) Christine Taylor, (b) Colin Rogers

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Colin Rogers

6 Flavel Avenue, Woodforde, SA 5072

Christine Taylor

6 Feltus Street, Streaky Bay, SA 5680