

BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee

Unusual Record Report Form

This form is intended to aid observers in the preparation of a submission for a major rarity in Australia. (It is not a mandatory requirement) Please complete all sections ensuring that you attach all relevant information including any digital images (email to tonyp@bigpond.net.au or andrew.silcocks@birdlife.org.au). Submissions to BARC should be submitted electronically wherever possible.

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Species Name: Semipalmated Plover	Scientific Name: Charadrius semipalmatus
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	Wed 2 nd October 2019, 12.30pm And Fri 4 th October 2019
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	2 hours on Wed & 3 hours on Fri.
First and last date of occurrence:	Wed 2 nd Oct 2019 and still present yesterday, Fri 4 th Oct.
Distance to bird:	Approximately 40 metres.

Site Location: Shoalhaven Heads, NSW. (The estuary of the Shoalhaven River) 150*44'45"E, 34*51'40"S

Habitat (describe habitat in which the bird was seen): It was feeding on the intertidal sand & mud of the estuary, and roosting on the adjacent sand and shingle banks between the estuary and the ocean.

Sighting conditions (weather, visibility, light conditions etc.): When first sighted weather was clear with a light NE breeze; temp approx. 23 degrees C. Later during the day the breeze strengthened to moderate. On Friday, initially clear, 25 degrees C. with a moderate SW wind. Later on wind tended to S, strengthened to gusty, and brought in 100% cloud cover. The bird was viewed with 10x42 Leica binoculars and a Swarovski 20-60 scope.
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To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site? Never before.
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Were other observers present Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification, if so, who? (please give names, addresses and phone numbers)? Sally Leonard (NP&WS volunteer) joined me and had good views of the bird on Wednesday afternoon. After the find was announced many birders and photographers came to see and photograph it. Most were not known to me but the attached photos were taken on Friday by Kim Touzel, Secretary, Birdlife Shoalhaven. To my knowledge no-one has disagreed with the identification.

How confident are you of your identification? , e.g. 70%, 100%. If not 100%, why not: 100% Please confirm that you are willing for BARC to display your images (fully credited with your name) electronically YES or NO The images are not mine, but Kim Touzel has agreed to them being submitted with this report.
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Other details: e.g. Do you have historical and or anecdotal information/comments relating to the prior occurrence/status of the species within or near this location?

According to the BARC Index of Cases there have only been five confirmed reports of this species in Australia; none at or near this location.

Physical Description of Bird - Please describe only what you saw: (1) No. of individuals present (living or dead); (2) age (adult, juvenile, immature) and sex; (3) size and shape; (4) plumage colour and pattern (including any details of moult); (5) colour of bill, eyes and legs/feet; (6) calls; (7) behaviour, movements, flight pattern, and anything else that might help to identify the bird e.g. feeding, interactions with other birds, describe where the bird was – on ground, in canopy, flying etc. Were comparisons made with other species?

Only one bird has been seen; an adult male in breeding plumage. It was loosely associating with small numbers (approx. 3 to 20 at different times) of Red-capped Plover. On one occasion I had the bird in the scope at the same time as a red-capped Plover and a (late departing) Double-banded Plover, enabling a good estimate of size, which was between the DBP and the RCP, but nearer to the latter.

Refer to the attached photos in lieu of a full description; but the key identification features are noted below.

Please indicate other species with which you think it might be confused and how these were eliminated?

Little Ringed Plover:

- 1) Readily eliminated as the LRP has a diagnostic and obvious yellow orbital ring; particularly obvious in breeding plumage. This bird is in breeding plumage and has a very narrow and inconspicuous yellow orbital ring.
- 2) The LRP has a narrow white upper edge to the black forehead, linking the left and right supercilium, which is not present in this bird.
- 3) This bird also has a pale wing bar, visible in flight, which the LRP lacks.
- 4) The LRP has “pinkish-yellow” legs whereas this bird has distinctly bright orange legs; very noticeable in the field.

Ringed Plover:

- 1) A male RP in breeding plumage has a white supercilium above and behind the eye. This is not present on this bird; merely a small, whitish spot towards the rear of the ear coverts, more conspicuous in the photos than in the field.
- 2) The RP is larger than the SP, and, having had this bird in the scope at the same time as both RCP and DBP, it is clearly only slightly larger than a Red-capped Plover.
- 3) The black loreal stripe on this bird meets the base of the upper mandible only. The feathering adjacent to the gape and the lower mandible is white. The RP has a broader black loreal stripe which meets the entire base of the bill.
- 4) The bill of this bird is barely as long as the distance from the bill base to the eye, and is mostly black. The orange portion being limited to approximately the basal third of the lower mandible, and a small spot at the base of the upper mandible. The bill of the RP is typically longer and orange from its base for more than half its length.
- 5) When first seen the bird was actively feeding and I noted that the black breast band was relatively narrow and, except for a small further narrowing in the centre of the breast, fairly even in width. The SP is said to generally have a narrower and more even width band than the RP. However, later when the bird was resting, the sides of the band near the “shoulders” were distinctly deeper, emphasizing the narrowing at the centre of the breast. This seems to be a matter of posture, related to the extension of the neck when feeding and a tightening of the feathers versus when settled down. The obvious change can be seen by comparing the attached photos, but the band, even at rest, seems narrower than published photos of the RP that I am aware of. (eg. Paulson, 2005)
- 6) The white forehead patch does not extend close to the eyes, as it does in the RP.
- 7) The black head markings are said to be more extensive on the RP than SP. This bird does not appear to have any black extending from the rear of the ear coverts onto the hind neck.

Was the description written from memory? No.

Detailed notes were taken whilst the bird was in view as I was aware of the difficulty in distinguishing Ringed P. from Semipalmated P.

Were photographs taken? (please include where possible): Yes

What experience have you had with the species in question? (Did you know it was a Rare bird when you first saw it?)

No prior experience with this species but have seen the Little Ringed Plover in Broome WA; discovered the second Australian Kentish Plover at Old Bar, NSW in Feb 2002 (BARC #343) and have had a lifetime of experience with shorebirds. (e.g. Pectoral Sandpiper ref. Emu Vol 66 Part 4 p382, June 1967, etc.)

It was immediately clear that it was one of: Semipalmated, Ringed, or Little Ringed Plover.

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Please email all material





