

## **First Record of Eurasian Dotterel (*Charadrius morinellus*) in British Columbia.**

**By Rick Toochin and Peter Hamel.**

### **Introduction and Distribution**

The Eurasian Dotterel (*Charadrius morinellus*) is a small beautiful plover found in the Old World breeding in high mountain areas and alpine habitats from Scotland, isolated areas in Western Europe, Scandinavia, across Arctic Russia, east to the Chukotka Peninsula with another population found in the steppes southern Russia, into Mongolia and eastern Kazakhstan (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The entire population from Europe to Siberia migrates south, normally in small flocks being found in migration at particular locations, with these smaller groups of birds often called “trips” (Message and Taylor 2005) to winter in North Africa from Morocco, through Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Southern Iraq and Southeastern Iran (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The Eurasian Dotterel is a scarce migrant through North Eastern China; it is rare in Japan with records from spring, fall and winter; and this species is accidental in Korea (Brazil 2009). There are scattered records from the Canary Islands, Madeira Island, Iceland, the Faeroes, Spitsbergen Island (where bred in 1974), Bear Island and Bermuda (Hayman *et al.* 1986, Message and Taylor 2005, Paulson 2005). In North America, the Eurasian Dotterel is a very rare summer visitor and breeder on the mountains of the Bering Strait Islands and the Seward Peninsula (West 2008). This species is best found in Wales at Cape Mountain and Ear Mountain (West 2008). It was formerly rare in the spring migration at Gambell, but there are only a few recent records (West 2008). The Eurasian Dotterel is a casual summer visitant and breeder along the coast of Northern Alaska from Barrow to Prudhoe Bay south into the Brooks Range at Alatna (West 2008). This species is a casual fall vagrant for the Aleutian Islands (West 2008). Along the West Coast south of Alaska, the Eurasian Dotterel is an accidental vagrant that has occurred primarily in the fall (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). There is only 1 recent record for British Columbia (Toochin *et al.* 2014a). In Washington State, there are 4 accepted records by the Washington Bird Records Committee (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2014). In Oregon, there is only 1 accepted record by the Oregon Bird Records Committee (OFO 2012). In California, there are 9 accepted records from the California Bird Records Committee, including a wintering bird (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). This species has even been found in the winter in Mexico with a first winter bird that was present from January 30 to March 1, 1998, in northwestern Baja California, which furnished the first winter record for the New World (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). The Eurasian Dotterel has occurred as a vagrant in Hawaii (Hayman *et al.* 1986). There is also an incredible recent record from Ontario at Oliphant, Bruce County, where a juvenile bird was photographed on October 3, 2015 (Swick 2015).

### **Identification and Similar Species**

The identification of the Eurasian Dotterel is covered in most standard North American field guides. This is a small, plump, pot-bellied bird that measures 20-22 cm, with a wingspan of 57-64 cm (Brazil 2009). Males weigh 86-116 grams and females weigh 99-142 grams (Brazil 2009). The Eurasian Dotterel likes to frequent areas away from water such as dry fields, turf farms or dry sand dunes (Paulson 1993). In the context of British Columbia, the Eurasian Dotterel is much smaller than an American Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*) which measures 24-28 cm in length, with a wingspan of 65-72 cm, and weighs 122-194 grams (Brazil 2009). It is also smaller than the Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) which measures 23-26 cm in length, with a wingspan of 60-67 cm, and weighs 100-192 grams (Brazil 2009) Any Eurasian Dotterel found in breeding plumage is a very straight-forward identification. Juvenile birds, though fairly obvious, might be confused with either American Golden Plover or Pacific Golden Plover (Message and Taylor 2005). The Eurasian Dotterel is an incredibly tame bird that will allow observers close approach without being disturbed (O' Brien *et al.* 2006).

Adult birds hold their breeding plumage from April to October (Sibley 2000). The female is quite brighter in coloration than the male (Brazil 2009). The crown is dark with a streaked dark and light face and broad white supercilium that meets on the nape in a distinct V (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The eyes are large and dark with a small dark finely tipped bill (Sibley 2000). Behind the eye is a darkish area that extends into the gray on the neck (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The cheek area is white with a few fine dark streaks around the lower edge (Jonsson 1992). The chin and the throat are both white (Message and Taylor 2005). The neck is gray with a narrow white chest-band that is bordered narrowly above with a black line (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The chest is orange-chestnut with dark flanks and belly (Brazil 2009). The vent and the undertail coverts are white (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The legs are long and yellow (Message and Taylor 2005). The back of the neck, the wings and rump is gray (Sibley 2000). On the folded wings, there are light brown edges to the scapulars, coverts and tertial feathers (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). In flight, the wings are long and sharply pointed (Jonsson 1992). The primaries are dark (Message and Taylor 2005). In flight, the underside of the wing is pale gray (Message and Taylor 2005). The tail is dark (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009).

Adult birds hold their winter plumage from October to April (Sibley 2000). The crown is dark and streaked with brown from the top of the bill to the nape (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The supercilium is a thick and bold buffy colour extending to the nape where it meets on the back of the nape and forms a distinct V (Message and Taylor 2005). The white on the chin is reduced from breeding plumage (Message and Taylor 2005). The eyes are dark, and the bill is dark, thin and pointed (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). There is a darkish line from behind the eye that extends on to the neck (Message and Taylor 2005). The upperpart feathers are fringed with

a dull sandy-buff; the sides of the neck, breast and flanks are mottled buffish-brown, with an indistinct whitish breast band (Message and Taylor 2005).

Juvenile birds hold this plumage from August to October (Sibley 2000). The head is similar to adult birds with a bold white supercilium that extends over the eye and meets as a V on the nape (Jonsson 1992). There is a darkish line that goes from behind the dark eyes down onto the sides of the neck (Message and Taylor 2005). The neck has light buffy and dark blotches that extend down to the white breast-band (Jonsson 1992). Below the breast band the belly and flanks are buffy with white undertail coverts (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The legs are yellow (Sibley 2000). The wings folded have dark-centered scapular and tertial feathers with light buffy edges with the lower scapulars having paler centered feathers (Jonsson 1992). The wing covert and tertial feathers also have dark centered feathers with light buffy edges (Jonsson 1992). The greater and lesser wing coverts also have paler-centered feathers with light buffy edges (Jonsson 1992).

### **Occurrence and Documentation**

The Eurasian Dotterel is an accidental vagrant with only 1 provincial record of an adult bird in basic plumage found by Peter Hamel in the company of 109 Black-bellied and 1 Pacific Golden Plovers, 1 Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) and 450 Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) on April 23, 2008, at Sandspit Airport on the Queen Charlotte Islands (Cecile 2008a, Toochin *et al.* 2014a). The bird was observed through a telescope and binoculars at close range for a few minutes before the entire flock was flushed by a Heli jet which swept in low over the airfield and all the birds left the area (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). This species is by far a fall vagrant to the west coast south of Alaska with almost all records occurring between August and November (Hamilton *et al.* 2007); however, there are 2 winter records with 1 for Baja Mexico and the other south-eastern California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007), making the spring record from the Queen Charlotte Islands almost surely a bird returning north from wintering somewhere in the New World (J. Fenneman Pers. Comm.). Almost all records of Eurasian Dotterel have occurred in coastal locations mostly as single birds, but there has been at least one occurrence in California of multiple birds (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). This species is found on migration on dry grasslands and occasionally on mudflats (Brazil 2009). The Eurasian Dotterel has been found as a vagrant along the West Coast of North America on its own or in company of other shorebirds that like the same environment such as Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*), American Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*), Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) and Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Calidris subruficollis*) (Paulson 1993, Paulson 2005). The location at Sandspit Airport is probably the best spot in the entire province for the Eurasian Dotterel to occur since it is located on the outer coastal flyway where birds moving out of Asia head along the Aleutian Islands and south past here, and then reach Northern California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). The fact that there have been multiple records

along the west coast since the first in California in September 1974 means this species should be watched for in British Columbia at all major shorebird hotspots both on the coast and inland.

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