

COMMONER WADERS
PART ONE
PLOVERS



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The UK can boast of an impressive list of 78 species of wader, though only 18 breed. Of the remainder, more than 40 are very rare migrants and thus fall outside our scope here. Personally, I've seen 59 in UK and on a World basis, I'm actually only 'missing' two, which are both now considered extinct (Eskimo Curlew for certain and Slender-billed Curlew almost certainly, though one reported in France in 2020). Species such as **Oystercatcher** and **Avocet** are not included since they have absolutely no confusion species and 'commoner' equates to common hereabouts.

Whilst all the ID help anyone might need is widely available in books and the Internet, what follows is invariably written in 'plain', hopefully easy to understand language, with minimal use of any technical, possibly confusing body part terms.

Ringed Plover:

Year round resident. Relatively small, dumpy, pale brown above white below, boldly head-patterned plover. It prefers salt to fresh water though does occur, even breeds inland. **Short, bi-coloured bill, orangey based, dark tipped.** Characteristic plover movement of **short walk followed by "stopping to listen"** before repeating. Head/upper breast patterns, though prominent are not dissimilar to the following species and there's much variation between sexes despite males being '**crisper**' rather than **subdued**. Legs variable but generally **bright orange-yellow**. In flight shows a **prominent white wing-bar** from body to wing-tip and the outer half of the tail is **dark**. Juveniles, particularly the head/breast areas **subdued browns** rather than black. **Bill black.**

Call is a two-note "**too-eee**" or similar. Song is less impressive than the following species and delivered during an altogether more boring song flight!

Little Ringed Plover: Spring/summer visitor in small numbers; can arrive in early March, consistently well before April. Invariable found **inland**. Marginally smaller than the previous species, with which it shares an overall similar appearance, other than for: **black bill at all ages, bold yellow eye-ring** and **dull pinkish legs**. In flight, **NO wingbar**. Juveniles **lack** juvenile Ringed Plovers' **white stripe over the eye**.

Typical call note is a single "**teu**" and sings whilst performing a beautiful, **languid** almost Greenfinch-like song-flight.

Golden Plover: Year-round resident and winter visitor from elsewhere; can form thousands-strong flocks in winter. Averages slightly smaller than Grey Plover and is typically **brown** overall appearance, rather than that species' **grey**. Mostly **inland** but regular in coastal situations. On close viewing it's a beautiful bird in all plumages with patterned upperparts of **dark brown** and **black** with **orange** (gold) spots galore. Un-impressive, **shortish** bill. Underparts in winter are **whitish** belly with a **brown streaked** upper breast. Summer plumage is not something we see that often hereabouts but in such plumage two races are identifiable, our own local *apricaria* (UK) breeders and *altifrons* from further north. Both are stunning with **white-bordered black bellies** and (UK race) **dark** throat, **greyish** face. *Altifrons* is even more spectacular, with the **throat, all the way up to the eye being as black** as the belly. Frodsham used to be (may well still be) a regular site for both races. In flight, shows a pale outer wing-bar and **brownish tail**.

Regularly associates with Lapwing flocks, within which they are readily found (if present) due to being **pale golden-brown** backed. Flight is **fast**, much faster than Lapwing when their fairly long, mournful call "**peee-oooo**" can be heard – oftentimes the call gives their presence away.

Grey Plover: Essentially a winter visitor to coastal areas in small numbers; can stay late enough into spring though for some to show their incredible **black and white** summer plumage. Individuals can stray inland, but shouldn't be expected. From Golden Plover through being **more robust** with a **stout bill; mottled greys** above, **off-white** below. Readily identifiable and distinguishable from Golden when in flight. Shows a large, **black armpit** - or wing-pit to be more accurate, the **axillaries**. As Golden, shows a pale, but more obvious outer wing-bar with a **white rump** and only **insignificantly marked** remainder of the **tail**.

Juveniles and first winters, in being more boldly patterned above than adult winters can be confused with Golden Plover but **location, stout bill, rump** and **axillaries** all help. Call is also mournful but comprises an undulating three note “**tee-you-weeeee**”, where the ‘**you**’ is lower in pitch.

Lapwing: Year-round resident; formerly a much commoner breeder than the present. Winter visitor from elsewhere **in large numbers**. Lapwing has since forever been **the** farmland breeding wader throughout much of the UK but latterly it's been disappearing at an alarming rate. Unlike all the previous species, **males and females are markedly different**.

If it were rare, I suspect more birders would be drooling over it as it really does have a lot going for it. Upperparts **glossy-green**, males also have a stunning **bronzy** coloured shoulder patch. Males also have a **black forehead, black before the eye,, throat** and upper breast as opposed to females, which have a **white throat, white before the eye** and smaller dark breast. **White below**. Both sexes sport crests, as do juveniles to a lesser extent. Male crests are **twice as long** as females’.

In flight apart from small areas of white on a few of the outermost primary feathers, upper wings are **dark, appearing black; white** rumped. In contrast, underwings are essentially half and half, **white nearest the body**, turning to **black** beyond. The effect produced is of alternating **black then white** – a ‘**twinkle**’ that can be seen from kilometres away given the right conditions. Call is the classic “**pee-wit**” which brought about the species alternate name. We've moved away from Lapwing/Green Plover/Peewit however to today's prosaic Northern Lapwing – because there's a Southern counterpart... The song is a varied, guttural arrangement of non-transcribable notes given whilst performing another wonderful aerobatics-filled song flight.

Juveniles superficially resemble adult females but on close views can be distinguished based on the presence of **broad buff edges to upperpart feathers**.

Thus, the bird here is a juvenile male, on the basis of short crest, bronzy wing patch and pale feather edges. Photo taken in early March, which accounts for the relatively few retained buff-edged feathers.

