

First records of Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* for Katanga, DR Congo

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Premières mentions du Gravelot mongol *Charadrius mongolus* pour le Katanga, RD Congo. Les 24 décembre 2014 et 11–13 février 2016, des Gravelots mongols *Charadrius mongolus* ont été photographiés à Pweto, sur la rive du lac Moero, Katanga, RDC (08°29'36"S 28°55'55"E). Il s'agit des premières données pour la province.

On 24 December 2014 and 11–13 February 2016 MH photographed single Lesser Sand Plovers *Charadrius mongolus* on a 400 m-wide beach at Lake Moero (spelled Mweru in Zambia, at the opposite shore), near a hotel at Pweto, Katanga, DR Congo (08°29'36"S 28°55'55"E). The birds were within loose mixed flocks that also included White-fronted Plover *C. marginatus*, Kittlitz's Plover *C. pecuarius*, Common Ringed Plover *C. hiaticula*, Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* and Little Stint *Calidris minuta*.

Identification

The birds were identified as Lesser Sand Plovers based on the diagnostic characters elucidated by Hirschfeld *et al.* (2000) and van Duivendijk (2011). They were decidedly larger than the common *Charadrius* in the area (see Figs. 1–4), but not as large as Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*. Three medium-sized species could occur: Caspian Plover *C. asiaticus*, Greater Sand Plover *C. leschenaultii* and Lesser Sand Plover *C. mongolus*. Caspian Plover has longer legs and a browner plumage than the birds photographed. Greater Sand Plover—which has been recorded just once in Katanga, near the border with Zambia, on 15 October 2014 (N. Voaden in *Bull. ABC* 22: 102)—is very similar, but has a 'Grey Plover-like jizz', a more angular head, and in most subspecies a relatively stronger, less blunt bill (Hirschfeld *et al.* 2000, van Duivendijk 2011).

White-fronted Plover is only slightly smaller but has noticeably shorter legs (Figs. 1–2). It also has a black eyestripe in all plumages, which is lacking in Lesser Sand Plover. Kittlitz's Plover is more slender than the generally plumper and larger-headed Lesser Sand Plover (Figs. 3–4). It also has a distinctive head pattern, with a white forehead and broad white supercilia meeting on

the nape; in the immature this feature is generally more subdued, but still visible (Fig. 4).

The Lesser Sand Plovers were in non-breeding plumage, as would be expected at this time of year, and probably belonged to the *atrifrons* group. Birds from this group have unmarked flanks and a more point-tipped bill, whereas those in the *mongolus* group often show brown-grey spots on the flanks, even in non-breeding plumages, typically with a blunt-tipped bill (van Duivendijk 2011). In juvenile plumage, the upperparts and wing-coverts are extensively fringed buff (Prater *et al.* 1977), but first-winters may already have moulted many coverts by December, retaining only buff-tipped median coverts (Prater *et al.* 1977). Short and worn coverts with buff fringes appear to be present in the birds in Figs. 1–3, alongside longer and fresh adult-type coverts. The bird in Fig. 4 is actually very similar to the smallest and smallest-billed Greater Sand Plovers of the subspecies *columbinus*. The size compared to the Kittlitz's Plovers, straight (not bulging) lower border to the ear-coverts patch and well-demarcated dark breast patch are most indicative of Lesser Sand Plover. The lack of any (visible) juvenile-type wing-coverts strongly suggests an adult.

Discussion

Lesser Sand Plover is a rather common non-breeding visitor from the eastern Palearctic to the East African coast, but is rare in the interior of Africa. Very few inland records are known from Tanzania, and none near the DRC border (N. Baker *in litt.* 2016). Only four records are listed for neighbouring Zambia (Dowsett *et al.* 2008).

There are just a few records from DRC, all in Kivu province, in the north-east of the country. Prigogine (1971) collected a specimen in December 1959 at Kamituga (03°04'00"S



Figures 1–2. Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* (right) with two White-fronted Plovers *C. marginatus*, Pweto, Katanga, DRC, 24 December 2014 (Michel Hasson)



Gravelot mongol *Charadrius mongolus* (à droite) avec deux Gravelots à front blanc *C. marginatus*, Pweto, Katanga, RDC, 24 décembre 2014 (Michel Hasson)

Figure 3. First-winter Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* (right) with adult Kittlitz's Plover *C. pecuarius* (and immature out of focus in front), Pweto, Katanga, DRC, 13 February 2016 (Michel Hasson)



Gravelot mongol *Charadrius mongolus* de 1er hiver (à droite) avec Gravelot pâtre *C. pecuarius* adulte (et immature pas net en avant-plan), Pweto, Katanga, RDC, 13 février 2016 (Michel Hasson)



Figure 4. Adult-type probable Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* (right) with two Kittlitz's Plovers *C. pecuarius*, Pweto, Katanga, DRC, 11 February 2016 (Michel Hasson)

Probable Gravelot mongol *Charadrius mongolus* de type adulte (à droite) avec deux Gravelots pâtres *C. pecuarius*, Pweto, Katanga, RDC, 11 février 2016 (Michel Hasson)

28°10'59"E) far from any large waterbody; this is presumably the record mentioned by Lippens & Wille (1976) for 'Kivu'. The specimen (RMCA 79448) is in active wing moult, having replaced the inner seven primaries, the three outer ones being worn. Hirschfeld *et al.* (2000) mention wing moult as being completed by December, occasionally by February. In 1970–74, ten were ringed at Lulimbi, south-east of Lake Edward (d'Huart 1977)—regrettably the mensural data have been lost and no photographs were taken (J.-P. d'Huart *in litt.* 2016). In the same area, two were recorded at Katanda lagoon, Virunga National Park, on 24–25 October 1992, with two also there on 4 April 1993 (Demey *et al.* 2000). There are no previously documented records from Katanga (Louette & Hasson 2011), although Pedersen (2010) mentions an unconfirmed record from Kalemie, at Lake Tanganyika. The species is probably under-recorded on the Rift Valley lakes.

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