

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*) in Martinique: First for the West Indies

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Abstract

This paper documents a Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*) in Martinique, a new species for the Caribbean Basin and first record in the Americas away from the Aleutian Islands of Alaska.

Field Encounter

On 17 April 2005, the author observed a small *Charadrius* plover in breeding plumage on the beach of Sainte Marie, on the northeastern side of Martinique, near a river mouth. Other shorebirds present at the site were a Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) and a Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*). The site was checked 16 April and again 18–19 April, when only the Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers were present, and the plover was not observed again. The plover was observed for 45 minutes, in good light, at distances of 10–25 m.

The plover's bill—rather slender, pointed, and entirely black—and its long white supercilium indicated that the bird was not of the expected species, Semipalmated Plover (*C. semipalmatus*). Moreover, the plover appeared to be too small for Semipalmated, its legs were yellow rather than orange, and its small head was more or less spherical in shape, giving the overall impression of a tiny Killdeer (*C. vociferus*) rather than the more stocky Semipalmated. Its orbital ring was a clear, bright yellow, of even width around the eye. In flight, its wings looked almost uniformly dark above. These features indicated Little Ringed Plover (*C. dubius*), and photographs were secured to document the record. The bird was not heard vocalizing.

Discussion

Ornithologists Anthony Levesque in Guadeloupe and Damien Cohez in France reviewed

the photographs of the plover and confirmed its identification as Little Ringed Plover. Cohez judged it to be an adult female because of the brown auriculars, apparently a consistent character that distinguishes the sexes (adult males have black auriculars, lacking brown tones; Paulson 2005). Although several subspecies have been described (Hayman et al. 1991, Del Hoyo et al. 1996), it is apparently not possible to identify the Martinique individual to the level of subspecies. The only previous records of this species in the New World come from the Aleutian Islands of Alaska: a specimen from Buldir Island 15–16 June 1974, plus single adults in breeding plumage at Attu Island 18–30 May 1986 and Shemya Island 18–19 May 1988 (A.B.A. 2002).



Figure 1. Adult female Little Ringed Plover at Sainte Marie, Martinique, 17 April 2005. The all-dark bill, broad, striking, bright yellow orbital ring, long white supercilium, and yellow legs distinguish this species from Semipalmated and Common Ringed Plovers. The rather small head and slim bill give the species a Killdeer-like appearance in many poses. Photograph by Vincent Lemoine.

Martinique, southernmost of the French Lesser Antillean islands, is located in the middle of the Lesser Antilles arc. To the north lies Dominica and to the south is Saint Lucia. Although Martinique has fewer nesting bird species than neighboring islands, the number of migrant or vagrant species is comparable to, perhaps even greater than these islands (Feldmann 1998; Levesque et al. 2005). Like other Antillean islands, Martinique serves as a stopover for many species that nest in North America and winter in South America or in the Caribbean. In Martinique, as on most other islands of the Lesser Antilles, Nearctic shorebirds are regular constituents of the avifauna, usually far more common during the fall than during the spring migration (AOMA 2002, 2003). Ebels (2002) summarized trans-Atlantic vagrancy of Palearctic species in the Caribbean, including of Old World shorebirds; additionally, several Palearctic shorebird species have been added to the Guadeloupe list in recent years, including Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*), Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), and Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*) (Levesque and Jaffard 2002, Levesque and Saint-Auret 2005). It is impossible to determine the provenance of the Little Ringed Plover on Martinique, which could have flown southeastward from Siberia almost as easily as westward across the Atlantic from Africa. Whatever its path to Martinique, it was not an expected vagrant there, given the species' minimal presence in the New World

heretofore. Perhaps significant in this record was the plover's choice of habitat: a freshwater river mouth, a typical habitat for this species.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks Anthony Levesque and Damien Cohez for assistance in the identification of the Little Ringed Plover on Martinique and Alvaro Jaramillo for help with earlier drafts of this article.

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