

NEW BREEDING LOCATIONS FOR SEMIPALMATED PLOVER IN THE CHILCOTIN REGION OF CENTRAL BRITISH COLUMBIA

Jim Sims¹ and R. Wayne Campbell²

¹PO Box 683, 150 Mile House, BC V0K 2G0

²2511 Kilgory Place, Victoria, BC V8N 1J6

The following notes provide documentation for two new breeding locations for Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) at Eagle Lake and Pyper Lake and an update for additional breeding at Le Blanc Lake, all situated in the Chilcotin region of central British Columbia. All observations for Eagle Lake are by the senior author, and Pyper Lake and Le Blanc Lake by the junior author unless otherwise stated.

Eagle Lake

On 19 May 2008, Kris Andrews visited the senior author at Eagle Lake which is located about 217 km west of Williams Lake, BC. She had gone for an early morning walk and reported seeing three Semipalmated Plovers displaying courtship behaviour. Later that morning Jim went looking for them and found the three birds spread out along the sandy shore busily feeding (Figure 1).

On 8 June, the area was revisited and a pair of plovers was found. When approached, the birds retreated away from the shore. This behaviour was different from the observation on 19 May. One of the adults displayed a “broken-wing” distraction behaviour (Figure 2) suggesting that it might have a nest nearby.

On 9 June, Jim revisited the site with hopes of finding a nest. He searched along the dry, rock strewn, sandy lakeshore without success, and decided to sit down and watch. Over the next half hour the male moved around from one side to the other of the observer and on one occasion approached fairly close. The female stayed relatively stationary, about half way to the lakeshore. Eventually, after the male had approached quite close, he moved back to the



Figure 1. One of the three adult Semipalmated Plovers observed along the lakeshore at Eagle Lake, BC. 19 May 2008 (Jim Sims). BC Photo 3688a.



Figure 2. Adult Semipalmated Plover giving “broken-wing” display which is often used to lure a predator away from a nest. Eagle Lake, BC. 8 June 2008 (Jim Sims). BC Photo 3688b.



Figure 3. Breeding habitat and general location of Semipalmated Plover nest at Eagle Lake, BC. 9 June 2008 (Jim Sims). BC Photo 3688c.

shore and fed for a few seconds. He then returned to the vicinity of the potential nest site but again returned to the lakeshore to feed. Some video was taken of the behaviour as a good collection of documentary still photos had already been obtained. Once the male had started to feed the second time the female (*e.g.*, paler plumage) moved towards a more precise location in a short semi-circular path. She soon stopped and just as the video was started she fluffed her feathers and sat down on a nest. It contained four eggs (Figure 4).

On 15 July, there was no sign of the nest or young and the adults did not display any defensive activity therefore it was assumed the nest had failed.

The following year, the nesting area was visited during the Victoria Day weekend between 23 and



Figure 4. Semipalmated Plover nest with four eggs nestled between rocks along the shore at Eagle Lake, BC. 9 June 2008 (Jim Sims). BC Photo 3688d.

25 May 2009. Three Semipalmated Plovers were found and over the three or four days they occupied different locations along the lakeshore. Only once were they seen near the previous nest site.

On 2 June, three Semipalmated Plovers were present on a small rocky island in Eagle Lake. The plovers displayed competitive courtship behaviour that was caught on video. A pair of Arctic Terns (*Sterna paradisaea*) was also on the island and it was suspected that they had established a nest. On 18 June, when Arctic Terns were confirmed nesting, at least one pair of Semipalmated Plovers was still present on the island. Nesting was suspected as the pair displayed distraction behavior. No search was made as disturbance to the terns was a concern.

The island was not approached again until after the terns had departed. There was no sign of plovers so successful nesting was not confirmed. Hopefully they were successful in 2009. It will be interesting to see if they are back again in 2010.

See Campbell et al. (2009) for a detailed description of the lake.

Le Blanc Lake

This lake is located about 32 km west of Redstone, BC. and straddles Highway 20. It is a drying lake with clear water, muddy and alkaline shores, marshy sections, and scattered gravel and rocky patches along the shores.

The first breeding record for Semipalmated Plover in the Chilcotin region of the province was reported by Hesse and Hesse (1961). On 27 June 1961, they counted eight plovers foraging along the lakeshore and commented they did not expect to find the species during the breeding season so far south of its known breeding range in northwestern British Columbia. They suspected breeding and later their search revealed three young feeding with two adults in a swampy section of the lake. The young were downy with no development of the flight feathers.

There is another breeding record for this lake 31 years after the initial discovery. On 1 July 1992, Ross MacKinnon (pers. comm.) recorded a pair of Semipalmated Plovers with at least two downy young feeding along the lakeshore. At first he thought they were a family of Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) so he hesitated in identifying the birds. By the time he

realized what they were it is possible that other young may have been present and were hiding nearby.

Le Blanc Lake is about 21 km northeast of Eagle Lake.

Pyper Lake

The turn off to Pyper Lake is located about 34 km west of Redstone, BC. and the lake is situated about three kilometres south of Highway 20. The lake's surface area is 169 ha with a mean depth of 8.2 m (in 1970) and lies at 982 m elevation. The water is clear and the perimeter shore, at 8,100 m, is comprised of mud flats from receding water levels and drying shores with patches of mixed rocks and low forb vegetation.

On 7 June 2009, the lake was visited to check for colonial-nesting waterbirds. A single Semipalmated Plover was feeding along the edge of the south shore of the lake. Realizing that the species was mainly a late spring and mid-summer migrant in the area (see Roberts and Gebauer 1992) Wayne searched the upper beach area. About half way along the shore a second plover suddenly appeared at the water's edge. No distraction behaviour occurred.

Within 15 minutes or so one adult scampered towards the upper beach and disappeared among the low foliage. Five minutes later, as the area was slowly approached, an adult appeared giving the "broken-wing" act. After a short search, a ground nest containing four eggs was discovered in a sandy, forb-dominated part of the upper beach. The nest was lined with dead plant stems, a few small spruce twigs, and some grasses. The eggs were tested (e.g., water test), indicating that incubation had started.

Pyper Lake is about 18 km northeast of Eagle Lake.

This is the third location that Semipalmated Plovers are known to breed in the Chilcotin area of central British Columbia.

Other Disjunct Breeding Locations in Western North America

In North America, the Semipalmated Plover breeds in arctic and subarctic regions from Alaska eastward across most of northern Canada, except the high Arctic islands, along the Hudson Bay coast, and south through the maritimes (Nol and Blanken 1999).

In British Columbia, it breeds regularly only in northwest portions of the province and on the Queen Charlotte Islands (Campbell et al. 1990).

South of its regular breeding range in British Columbia and including the Chilcotin region, the species has only been found breeding at Iona Island in Richmond on the extreme southwest mainland coast (Campbell 1972).

There are several other disjunct breeding locations in western North America. Semipalmated Plovers have nested at least two years at Ocean Shores on the central Washington coast (Wahl et al. 2005), at Stinking Lake and Harney Lake in eastern Oregon (Ivey et al. 1988, Ivey and Baars 1990), at Coos Bay on the Oregon coast (Hallet et al. 1995), and at the mouth of the Santa Maria River in California (Nol and Blanken 1999).

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