

Harbor Island, Naturally

JANUARY 2010

A PERSONAL PROJECT OF JOHN ALBERT

VOL. 2, ISSUE 4



BLACK BELLIED PLOVERS

THE LARGEST OF THE NORTH AMERICAN PLOVERS

The Black Bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) is a shy bird that frequents our beaches mainly in winter. They migrate in small flocks, a habit which may have saved them from extinction by hunters.

These birds breed in the high arctic where the snow first melts. The male makes a scrape on a dry ridge in a marsh. The female then lines the scrape with lichen. Usually they lay four eggs that are greenish, grey or tan spotted with brown. Incubation takes from 26-27 days. The females leave the young at 12 days with the male remaining until

the young are independent. The young leave the nest after 6 to 7 weeks. They forage the marshes and beaches for worms, clams and other marine invertebrates.

There are 65 species of Plovers scattered all over the world. Black Bellies are the most widely distributed. They are also found in South Africa, India, and Argentina. Europeans call this species the Grey Plover. In North America each spring they migrate up both coasts and the Mississippi Valley to the remote Arctic nesting grounds.

During the winter these birds are very aggressive in defending their feeding territories. Aerial displays and vocalization are quite conspicuous in the winter.



The birds act very differently when defending breeding territories. Aggressive visual displays are the main activity used in defense of breeding sites..

Watching Black Bellies dart and strut around the beach can help liven up your winter walks. So keep an eye out for a bird that looks like a waiter in a black apron.



PHOTOS BY JOHN ALBERT

for prints contact
johnalbert@gmail.com

Sources: Book of N. American Birds, James Cassidy Project Editor Reader's Digest General Books, 1990.
The Birder's Handbook, Paul Ehrlich, David Dobkin & Darryl Wheye, Simon & Schuster, NY, 1988.