

Robyn Cobb/R2/FWS/DOI
01/05/2010 10:26 AM

To Peter Plage/R6/FWS/DOI@FWS
cc Aimee M Roberson/R2/FWS/DOI@FWS, Alisa
Shull/R2/FWS/DOI@FWS
bcc
Subject Fw: Mountain plovers

Pete,

This is a second email from Gene in which he indicates that he may find more agreement with Mel's estimate if its a total for the state.

Robyn

----- Forwarded by Robyn Cobb/R2/FWS/DOI on 01/05/2010 11:25 AM -----



"Gene Blacklock"
<geneb@cbbep.org>
12/22/2009 01:00 PM

To "Robyn Cobb" <Robyn_Cobb@fws.gov>
cc
Subject FW: Mountain plovers

From: Gene Blacklock [mailto:geneb@cbbep.org]
Sent: Tuesday, December 22, 2009 11:49 AM
To: 'Gene Blacklock'
Subject: RE: Mountain plovers

Also keep in mind that there are other areas in Texas where these birds winter and once upon a time some actually breed in desert grasslands in Alpine, I saw them there many years ago.

Some also winter at other sites in South Texas and several sites near Granger Lake, central south Texas. Therefore, estimates that Mel provided may well represent possibilities for the state of Texas.

From: Gene Blacklock [mailto:geneb@cbbep.org]
Sent: Monday, December 21, 2009 10:07 AM
To: 'Robyn_Cobb@fws.gov'
Subject: RE: Mountain plovers

I do not agree with the numbers suggested for winter mountain plovers in this area. I suggest that we may have perhaps a couple of hundred. One area where plovers usually winter along the Texas Central Coast is immediately west and south of Odem; this is exactly where they have placed a hundred wind generators.

In addition, some of the plovers usually winter immediately south of Corpus Christi, Chapman Ranch; this is where I believe that wind generators are planned to be constructed within the immediate future. We also see migrating plovers during late February and March. We have little information about arrival times for this species in this area.

From: Robyn_Cobb@fws.gov [mailto:Robyn_Cobb@fws.gov]
Sent: Friday, December 18, 2009 2:39 PM
To: Mel Cooksey
Cc: David Newstead; geneb@cbbep.org; naturalist@dewittec.net; Sekula, Willie D CTR USAF AFCEE AFCEE/EXA
Subject: Re: Mountain plovers

Thanks so much Mel - that is great info.

I'm really surprised about the 2,000 - 3,000 count - I had no idea there was anything like that number coming here to winter (although the only info I have at all regarding abundance in this area comes from a compilation done by someone who used CBC's and TexBird records). Are you basing your guesstimates on the size and number of different flocks that you see within a given day(s)? I've never really tried to locate MoPl's, and given your description of the effort required, my hat is surely off to you.

Thanks again for sharing your knowledge,
Have a very Merry Christmas and happy holiday season,
Robyn

"Mel Cooksey"
<ssi@stx.rr.com>

12/18/2009 01:53 PM

To: "David Newstead" <dnewstead@cbbep.org>
cc: Robyn_Cobb@fws.gov, <geneb@cbbep.org>, "Sekula, Willie D CTR USAF AFCEE AFCEE/EXA" <Willie.Sekula@BROOKS.AF.MIL>, <naturalist@dewittec.net>
Subject: Re: Mountain plovers

Mountain Plovers are regular low-density winter residents. They can be found in the most extensive areas of ag fields. They will prefer recently plowed fields, but can occur any any type of plowed fields. I do not find them in grasslands or fallow fields, with one or two exceptions in twenty plus years of observations. One of the best ways to locate them is to find a tractor working a field and check out the birdlife. Usually the crowd can include Killdeer, Black-bellied Plover, Long-billed Curlew, Laughing and Ring-billed Gulls, and maybe American Pipit. Occassionally, MOPLs will be present.

MOPLs are NOT easy to find. Visiting birders are always asking for a sure spot. Probably, the worst place to look for MOPLs is wherever they were yesterday. It requires lots of slow driving around the fields, checking and maybe scoping the fields, watching for a flock in flight, or working all the fields with tractors. I would guesstimate the total population in Nueces and San Patricio Counties to be around 2000-3000 birds at any one time; a pretty important percentage of the world population. Problem is, considering the vast areas of habitat, even with that number, it is sort of the needle in the haystack approach. I have "blanked" more days than scored on MOPLs.

I like the Chapman Ranch fields, areas along CR 55 and CR 51 over to the new landfill, all the way down to Hwy. 70. Also areas just west of Robstown have been good. Fields east of Odem are sometimes good. They can be found with enough searching. I have found no fluctuation in populations, but that is quite subjective. We just don't see enough of the birds, nor are we able to census them effectively due to their habits, their wandering flock behavior, etc. I doubt that there are "good years" and "bad years" for our birds, but I am not qualified to comment on hazards such as pesticides, etc.

Mel Cooksey

From: David Newstead
To: Robyn_Cobb@fws.gov ; geneb@cbbep.org
Cc: 'Mel Cooksey' ; Willie Sekula ; 'Derek Muschalek'
Sent: Friday, December 18, 2009 1:26 PM
Subject: RE: Mountain plovers

Hi Robyn:

I have practically no sighting info on mountain plovers in the area, though I do know that they occur here. Most of the reports I've heard of are in ag fields, often following active plows. They may well use other habitats such as overgrazed pasture but since the area is quite rich (in terms of acres) in both tilled ag and overgrazed pasture and these are habitats that are probably less frequently birded than more wooded areas and beaches, I'd think that combination of less effort divided by much more area would necessarily result in fewer sightings. Basically there could be a lot of needles but it's a really big haystack.

I'm copying Mel Cooksey, Willie Sekula, and Derek Muschalek, who are all extensively familiar with the bird life of south TX and the Coastal Bend. Perhaps they have some more insight into mountain plover wintering distribution.

I would think that potential threats in this area would be those associated with any bird that spends a lot of time in ag fields - pesticides, and now (my favorite) wind farms.

Mel, Willie, Derek - As you may know, the decision to NOT list the mountain plover as a federally Endangered Species several years ago was appealed and sent back for a more focused review, and Robyn with USFWS is in charge of helping review the birds' usage of this region.

Thanks,

David

From: Robyn_Cobb@fws.gov [mailto:Robyn_Cobb@fws.gov]
Sent: Friday, December 18, 2009 11:05 AM
To: geneb@cbbep.org; dnewstead@cbbep.org
Subject: RE: Mountain plovers

Hi Gene & David,

I'm trying to find out whatever I can regarding mountain plover occurrences in the Coastal Bend or other parts of S. Texas. Looking for info on distribution, abundance, years of occurrence, habitat type, and threats. Wanted to run this past you and see if you had any personal observations and also to ask you if there were other folks that you would recommend that I contact.

David - Although I've already had Loren contact you about Christmas Bird Counts, I didn't remember to

have her ask you about any people you might recommend as a good source of sightings data.

Thanks in advance for any help,
And Merry Christmas!!

Robyn