

Year 1

We analyzed reports of maximum spring counts between 2000 and 2006 from the "Field Notes" records found in the *Meadowlark: A Journal of Illinois Birds* to evaluate the phenology of plover migration through the Midwest and determine the peak of migration. We delineated the primary stopover region (37,138 km²) based on effort-adjusted abundances reported from historical Spring Bird Count data (courtesy M. Ward, Illinois Natural History Survey). See Figure 1.



Unlike other migrants that are restricted to relatively rare habitats within this region, golden-plovers are found largely in row-crop fields, which cover some 76 percent of the entire study area. To conduct an effective long-term survey of such an enormous amount of potential habitat, we first needed information on the typical dispersion of plovers within the region. If they were evenly dispersed throughout the region, then a random sample of potential habitat would suffice, but if they were spatially clustered, then a spatially focused approach would be required. Existing ideas on the overall dispersion of plovers was mixed among shorebird observers, so our priority in year one was to determine the dispersion of plovers and establish the most effective sampling method for future years (Erickson 1984).

In April of 2007, we partnered with Eastern Illinois University to conduct a roadside survey for plovers. Twenty students volunteered and received training on identification, optics, and data recording. Many of these volunteers had limited bird-

An American Golden-Plover wanders a beach in Chicago in 2007. Photo by Kanae Hirabayashi.
A flock of American Golden-Plovers plies the sky in Edgar County, Illinois in spring 2008. Photo by Courtney McCusker.
A flock of American Golden-Plovers flies over a Shelby County, Illinois cornfield in spring 2007. Photo by Wes Serafin.



ing experience and were given the opportunity to partner with veteran birders to learn while helping out. We randomly selected eight road-based transects from four latitudinal strata within the study area, with four transects located in Illinois and four in Indiana (Figure 1). Eight crews conducted a one-day survey on April 21, 2007; each performing 30 visual point counts at approximately two-mile intervals along 60-mile transects for a total of 240 sampling locations across the region. In addition to plover abundance, we documented the characteristics of habitat used by plovers to help in a later effort to model plover site occupancy. We recorded ground cover (bare ground, tilled corn, soybean stubble, corn stubble, other) and moisture level (dry, moist, standing water). We also estimated the distance from flock to nearest road to examine any aversion to roads and their associated disturbance.

We observed plovers in 9 of our 240 samples, with a total of 2,204

