

# The plight of the plovers

“Kill-dee! Kill-dee!”

The killdeer’s call (ergo the name) is easy-to-recognize, and it should be equally easy to identify this common summer resident of Vancouver Island shores.

But toss a killdeer in

amongst the other plovers and identification becomes a challenge.

The plovers are compact shorebirds with hyperactive beach behaviour.

They dash across the sand, stop, and then dash off again, always

in search of worms and crustaceans.

Consider the thick black ‘necklace’ or breast band – a wonderfully simple identification tool, or at least it should be. Some plovers boast distinctive

black breast bands, but there are single breast bands, double breast bands, and, out of breeding season, some have no breast band at all.

Complicating matters somewhat is the fact that three species of plover tend to congregate along the Pacific Northwest: Killdeer, Semipalmated Plover and Black-bellied Plover.

Don’t let the word ‘semipalmated’ confuse you; it simply means this shorebird has partial webbing between the toes.

The Semipalmated is the smallest, at 18 cm, with one black neck band, an orange eye-ring, and a short bill coloured orange at the base.

The Killdeer is larger, at 25 cm, and sports an all-black bill and a fascinating scar-

let eye-ring.

Killdeer have two breast bands, and the only way I can remember this is by using the memory crutch that ‘kill deer’ is really two words (written as one). Works for me.



**Christine Scott**  
Island Wild

Our third and largest local plover species is

the Black-bellied, at 28 cm. Adults, when breeding, show an all-black face, breast and belly ... no breast band at all.

To see the resplendent male in full breeding plumage, with his frosty crown and jet-black front, is bird-watching at its finest.

Before summer ends, walk down to the shore and say “Hello” to the lovely plovers.

Thinking about nature? Share your thoughts with Christine by e-mailing: wildernesswest@shaw.ca.



CHARLES BRANDT/SPECIAL TO THE MIRROR

**Semipalmated plovers have a single breast band.**