

Golden Plovers

Golden Plovers in winter are a bird which usually passes unnoticed by the general public. They form flocks of anything from 50 to 2000 birds and they feed on mudflats (often high up in estuaries) or on agricultural fields where they are hard to spot being brown birds on a brown background. There are up to 5,000 Golden Plovers in Pembrokeshire in the winter (this winter's peak was 4250 in November) but this year has been unusual as they have been reported regularly from places which they do not normally frequent.



There has been a very large flock around the Mables Gate/Bicton area at St Ishmaels (see left), and as is often the case, they have been associating with Lapwings. Being tucked away in fields behind hedges they were only visible when they took flight, which they did when spooked by a harrier or a peregrine. Now Lapwings are easy to identify in flight – nothing else has those rounded floppy wings and black and white plumage. But Golden Plover are not so striking. They are basically pale golden brown on top (though quite speckly if seen up close) and pale underneath with distinctly whitish underwings. Their wings are sharply pointed, unlike Lapwings. They are an intermediate size – smaller than a Lapwing, Curlew or Whimbrel and much bigger than a Dunlin. In fact they are

more-or-less Redshank sized though a somewhat different shape – shorter legs and more dumpy body. You can often see Lapwings and Golden Plover in flight together and then the difference is very obvious.

Golden Plover flocks have recently been reported further down the peninsula in the Marloes and St Brides area. They are always in flocks – you never see a single Golden Plover - and have been feeding on recently ploughed fields. If you are lucky enough to find a flock on the ground at this time of the year you may be able to spot birds moulting into their summer plumage. A Golden Plover in summer plumage is truly a wonderful sight! The back is golden and spangled, the underparts are smart black and there is a white border between the two. However, to see birds in full breeding plumage you will need to go north - their UK breeding stronghold is in the uplands of Scotland and northern England, though there are apparently still a few pairs hanging on in the Welsh uplands.



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