

Photographs that might otherwise be rejected for At A Glance are occasionally valuable for illustrating less traditional approaches to bird identification. This column has repeatedly emphasized the risks in making identifications based solely on single characteristics, and often noted that structural and behavioral features can be as useful as plumage coloration and pattern in making precise identifications.

This month's photograph allows the thoughtful reader to apply pointers provided in *Bird Observer's* August 1991 Stilt Sandpiper analysis. The pictured shorebird is clearly a species whose semiaquatic feeding style immediately removes any of the plovers as candidates. Plovers are typically terrestrial feeders who seek their prey visually rather than by the tactile probing characteristic of most of the more streamlined sandpipers. Unfortunately, the feeding bird's head is submerged, so we cannot gain any clues from its bill structure or head pattern. Nonetheless, the bird's body shape is clearly visible, and, as was suggested for the Stilt Sandpiper, shape can be a very useful clue in identification. Most noteworthy is the length of the bird's folded wings, the tips of which are long enough to cross beyond the tail. Only two sandpipers, Baird's Sandpiper and White-rumped Sandpiper, present such an appearance, thereby considerably reducing our choices.

Further examination of the photograph reveals that the scapulars, secondary wing coverts, and tertial feathers show broad, pale fringes to the feathers, producing a scalloped look that is very characteristic of juvenile shorebirds. More importantly, however, is the presence of some dusky spots along the sides beneath the folded wing. These spots, which are lacking in Baird's Sandpiper, indicate that the pictured bird is a White-rumped Sandpiper (*Calidris fuscicollis*) in juvenile plumage.

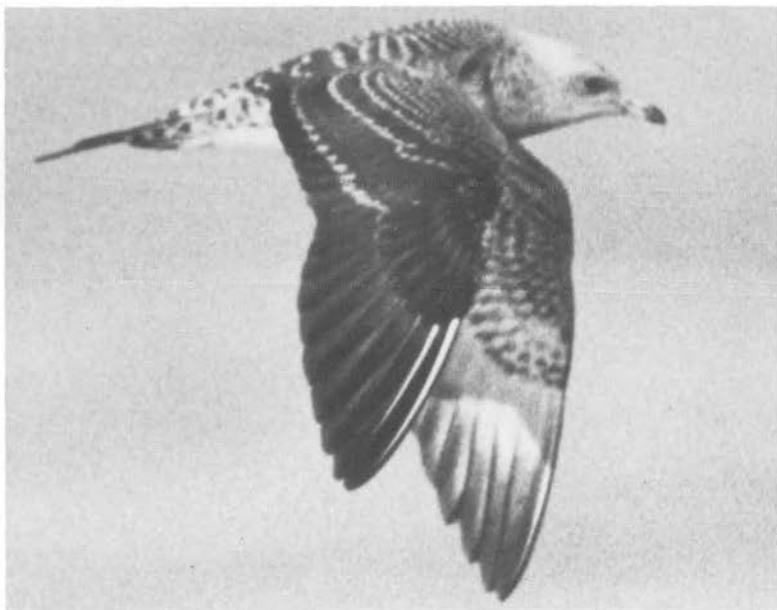


White-rumped Sandpiper

Photo by Wayne R. Petersen

AT A GLANCE

Photo by Jack Murray



Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

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