



Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* and Dunlin *C. alpina*. Photographed 1 October 1978 at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens Co., New York, by Thomas H. Davis.

When this photograph first appeared on the back cover of the April issue, the problem was stated approximately thus: during an October shorebirding trip, your companion spots a Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* — always a sought-after rarity — standing next to one of the omnipresent Dunlins *C. alpina*. But by the time you look through your friend's telescope, both birds are asleep, with heads tucked under wings. Can you tell which is the Curlew Sandpiper?

## Answer to Snap Judgment 2

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The Curlew Sandpiper is standing on the left, as discerned most quickly by structural rather than plumage characters. Although the Curlew's body size is hardly larger than the Dunlin's, it possesses proportionately longer legs, and thus stands 'taller' as this shot illustrates.

In a table below wing, bill, and tarsus measurements are given for Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, and Red Knot *Calidris canutus*. Red Knot is included since Curlews often occur in association with this species on the Atlantic coast of North America, especially in August. At this season adult Curlew Sandpipers are often 'lost' among flocks of knots since they may be equivalently colored below and stand as tall, even though knots are larger, 'chunkier' birds with straight bills.

	Sex	Wing	Bill	Tarsus
CURLEW SANDPIPER	M	125-136 (131.0)	33-39 (36.0)	27-32 (29.3)
"	F	125-136 (131.1)	35-42 (39.4)	29-31 (29.7)
DUNLIN (N. ALASKA)	M	116.5-126 (121.8)	30.1-39.8 (33.8)	M 25.5-27.5 F 26.5-27.5
"	F	121-129 (125.1)	30.8-41.2 (36.6)	
" (CANADA)	M	115-127 (119.7)	33.0-41.4 (36.3)	
"	F	117.5-128 (121.9)	35.6-42.4 (39.0)	} 29-33 (31.7)
RED KNOT	M	160-176 (167.9)	29-36 (32.6)	
"	F	167-177 (170.5)	31-37 (34.2)	

(All measurements in millimeters, sample averages in parentheses. Taken from Prater *et al.* 1977, *Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holarctic Waders*. Tring, Hertfordshire: British Trust for Ornithology.)

Note the differences indicated by these measurements: although the Red Knot is considerably larger in body size (as suggested by wing measurement), it has a slightly shorter bill and only slightly longer tarsus than the Curlew Sandpiper.

Most Curlew Sandpipers occurring on the Atlantic seaboard later than August are juveniles. That the bird in the photograph is a juvenile is indicated by the prominent pale edgings to the wing-coverts. A subtle plumage difference between Curlew Sandpiper and Dunlin showing in my shot is the Curlew's thinner, more sharply defined white eyeline.

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## News and Notices

**DARK NEWS FOR DUSKY SEASIDES** — We were alarmed to learn in 1977 that only 30 singing male Dusky Seaside Sparrows *Ammospiza maritima nigrescens* could be found in the very small range of this distinctive form in n.e. Florida; in 1978, only 24 could be located. This year the situation has deteriorated still further: only *twelve* males were singing on territory this spring. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has approved a recovery plan to try to bring the Dusky Seaside back from the brink of extinction, with intensive habitat management and perhaps captive breeding programs.

**SPLITTING THE KINGBIRD** — The lead article in the April 1979 *Auk* was written from a museum man's viewpoint, but the conclusion it reached will be of exceptional interest to most birders: the author, M.A. Traylor Jr., has gathered evidence to prove rather conclusively that the "Tropical Kingbird" in fact comprises two species. Both of these species occur in the United States. The one which will probably be known as Couch's Kingbird *Tyrannus couchii* is a year-round resident in southern Texas, while the other, probably to retain the name of Tropical Kingbird *T. melancholicus*, is a summer resident in southern Arizona and occurs in small numbers on the California coast in autumn. The two have different vocalizations (on this basis, their specific distinctness has been suspected for some time), but in appearance they are very similar. Thus, a vagrant "Tropical Kingbird" could pose a real identification problem — and both forms are known to be prone to vagrancy.

We have an article in preparation to deal with this field problem, and would appreciate hearing from anyone who has innovative field characters (especially behavioral ones) to suggest. In the meantime, it *may* be safe to assume that autumn birds on the California coast are *T. melancholicus* — but any vagrant "Tropicals" elsewhere should be studied with extreme care; ideally they should be photographed in color from several angles, with shots obtained to show the proportions of the bill and shape of the tail.