

Baird's Sandpipers in Oktibbeha County,
Mississippi, with a Review of Previous
Records for the State

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Baird's Sandpiper (Calidris bairdii) is a small sandpiper that migrates principally through the Great Plains (Terres 1980). Before fall 1986, the species was known in Mississippi as a rare but regular migrant, usually in numbers of one to three individuals. Reviewing records published in the Mississippi Kite, we found 14 occurrences spanning the years 1977 through 1986, with no records for 1979 or 1980. Five spring records of Baird's Sandpiper fall within the dates 22 March and 11 May, with from one to three individuals (Jackson and Cooley 1978, Jackson 1981, Hodges 1985, Jackson 1986). Eight sightings from fall span the dates 12 August through 28 September, numbering from one to five birds (Weber and Jackson 1978, Jackson and Cooley 1978, Jackson 1982, Schardien and Jackson 1983, Hodges and Jackson 1984, Hodges 1985). The only specimens we know of for the state are, first, a bird collected on 14 October 1937 by M.G. Vaiden in Bolivar County (Gandy and Turcotte 1970); and, second, seven birds (four males and three females) collected between 3 and 17 September 1960, also by Vaiden in Bolivar County. These specimens are in the M.G. Vaiden Collection, University of Mississippi. An unpublished record of two Baird's Sandpipers seen by Hodges and Judith A. Toups on 20 July 1978 probably represented early fall migrants. Another record outside the usual dates was a bird seen by Toups on 17 December 1977 (Weber 1978).

Most records were along or near the Mississippi coast (two Hattiesburg records); the only other upstate record besides Vaiden's specimens was a bird seen on 11 May 1985 at Sardis Dam, Panola County, by Marvin Davis and Gene Knight (Hodges 1985). Most records (nine) were from the Pascagoula River marsh, Jackson County, where the birds have been seen among the numerous other shorebirds using the area as a migration stopover.

During the fall of 1986, Oktibbeha County Lake, an impoundment of approximately 250 ha in east-central Mississippi, was drained to about half its normal level for improvements. The resulting exposed mud-flat was attractive to shorebirds, to which our list of 17 species will attest. Baird's Sandpipers were a major component of this movement.

Schiefer first saw seven Baird's Sandpipers on 27 September; later the same day, Hodges counted 15. The shorebird flocks were moving about, and some parts of the flats could not be reached for viewing. Thus, it was hard to obtain an accurate assessment of the number of individuals present. On 28 September, 23 birds were counted, when Margaret Copeland and Julia Broyles also saw them. Schiefer saw about 10 Baird's Sandpipers at Oktibbeha County Lake on both 29 and 30 September, but no more were seen until 9 October, when Hodges found two. He saw five on 11 October, but none was located on several trips later that month. However, Hodges found two Baird's Sandpipers at the same location on 2 November. Single birds were seen by Schiefer on 6 November and by Hodges on 8 November.

These sightings are not only the first for Oktibbeha County, but for any upstate location away from the Delta. The peak count of 23 birds surpasses by far the previous state high of five birds. Finally, this is the first time Baird's Sandpipers have been found to linger at one location for any length of time in Mississippi.

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