

OCCURRENCE OF AN OLD WORLD RACE OF WHIMBREL ON THE MAUMEE RIVER

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The Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) is a shorebird with a virtual cosmopolitan distribution. Four races are recognized: nominate phaeopus of western USSR and Iceland, variegatus of eastern USSR, alboaxillaris of central USSR, and hudsonicus, the North American race. Hudsonicus typically shows a dark back and rump; the Old World races exhibit varying amounts of white on the rump and lower back (Hayman, et. al. 1986).

On July 10, 1988, while scanning a variety of shorebirds, gulls, and terns on the Maumee river near Farnsworth Park near Waterville, Ohio, Anderson was surprised to observe a Whimbrel in the distance. It was the first Whimbrel he has seen on the Maumee River and apparently one of few records of this species for the river.

He was able to approach within 75 feet of the bird equipped with binoculars and a 22 power wide-angle spotting scope. The long, decurved bill, streaked crown and large size left no doubt that the bird was indeed a Whimbrel. However, first impressions of this bird indicated it was a bit different. Instead of the warm buffy brown observed in other Whimbrels of the expected hudsonicus race, this bird was a very uniform dark grayish-brown over its entire body. More noteworthy, though, was the white triangle extending up the bird's lower back which was very reminiscent of similar markings on dowitchers. This streak was most evident when the Whimbrel was in flight. This field mark was observed a couple of times as the Whimbrel flew short distances from one shallow to another.

As is often the case with birding, Anderson had other commitments and was not able to remain long enough to observe the Whimbrel as thoroughly as he wished. Additionally, he was without a field guide and thus, at the point, knew nothing of the different races of Whimbrel. Although mental notes were kept on this sighting, preoccupation with other duties kept Anderson from any additional research until the following weekend.

On July 16, we, along with Eric Durbin, relocated the Whimbrel. Kemp and Durbin agreed with the initial impressions described above. The white streak extending from just above the tail to the back and flecked only lightly with dark spots was once again obvious in flight.

It had become fairly evident that this Whimbrel was not of the North American hudsonicus race, but rather of either the phaeopus race or the variegatus race. We noted that the underwings seemed to be intermediate in color between the phaeopus and variegatus races as pictured and described in Hayman, et. al. (1986). Phaeopus, according to the guide, is supposed to show extensive white underwings contrasting quite sharply with the upperwing whereas the variegatus race is pictured with a much darker underwing, comparable in coloration to the upperwing. This bird's underwing seemed to be a fairly uniform lighter brown than the upperwing, tending to be lightest in color toward the lesser underwing coverts.

A subsequent scrutiny of phaeopus and variegatus specimens in the University of Michigan's collection by Kemp did not rule out either of the two palearctic races. There was considerable overlap in rump and lower back color and underwing color of the two races.

The short of the matter is that we may never know which race this particular Whimbrel represented. Having the bird in hand may have been the only way to definitively determine race. At the very least, however, it appears almost certain the Whimbrel was of either the phaeopus or variegatus race. Phaeopus is a rare vagrant to the east coast and variegatus is a regular migrant through western Alaska and apparently has been seen a few times on the west coast south of Alaska. Correspondence received from Paul Lehman, a prominent California birder, indicated that an inland sighting of either the phaeopus or variegatus race is highly unusual if not unprecedented in the United States.

We thank the University of Michigan Zoology Museum for use of their specimens and Paul Lehman for his comments on our field notes.

LITERATURE CITED

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Prater, A.J., J.H. Marchant and J. Vuorinen. 1977. Guide to the Identification and Aging of Holarctic Waders. British Trust for Ornith. Guide No. 17.

The National Geographic Society. 1984. Field Guide to Birds of North America.

OHIO CARDINAL RECORDS COMMITTEE REPORT

We evaluated a total of 14 reports this season. Eight were late submissions of observations made in spring, 1988. Thus, only six rare occurrence documentations were submitted for this summer. Two of these summer documentations were for the same birds (the Blue Grosbeaks in Lucas County). All sightings were accepted by the committee save two, both for spring:

Spring 1988. We were unable to accept:

Western Sandpiper (1), May 19, Buck Creek - rusty scapulars and relative size are mentioned, but description is otherwise incomplete. No mention of bill size and shape, or how other species (e.g., White-rumped) were ruled out.

Least Tern (2-3?), May 20, Ohio River near Parkersburg, WV. - First, there is considerable doubt that these birds were in Ohio. Second, although the size suggests a Least Tern, nothing else is provided in the description to rule out other species of smallish terns (Common, Forster's, Black) in winter plumage.