

## EUROPEAN DUNLINS IN NORTH AMERICA

BY LUDLOW GRISCOM

UNTIL very recent years the Dunlin (*Erolia* or *Pelidna alpina*) or Red-backed Sandpiper has been uniformly treated in America as consisting of two subspecies: typical *alpina* of the Old World, the "European Dunlin"; and *sakhalina* of the New World and eastern Siberia, the Red-backed Sandpiper. Ridgway's diagnosis of these two races in the 'Birds of North and Middle America,' pt. 8, p. 257, 1919, unfortunately continued the emphasis on the smaller size of European Dunlins as compared with New World birds, but I do not know how this idea first got started among American ornithologists, while the excellent color characters were relegated to second place or overlooked. The current A.O.U. Check-list continues the concept of two races, but a footnote very properly points out that some of the stragglers to North America may prove referable to the subspecies *schinzii* Brehm or *arctica* Schiøler, rather than to typical *alpina*.

For the benefit of American field workers, it may not be out of place to submit a brief review of the Old World subspecies and their characters. Those interested in further details are referred to Hartert (Vög. Paläarkt. Fauna, Nachtrag 1, pp. 82-83, 1923) and Buturlin (Alauda, 1932, pp. 261-266).

1. *Sakhalina* (Vieillot).—Easily distinguishable from any Old World subspecies in that summer adults have dorsal region paler and brighter, bright cinnamon rufous variegated with black, the feathers blackish centrally, broadly margined with cinnamon rufous; chest and throat very finely streaked with grayish or dusky, appearing nearly immaculate, in sharp contrast to black abdominal patch. Not appreciably larger than

2. Typical *alpina* (Linnaeus).—Summer adult with feathers of dorsal region broadly blackish centrally, more narrowly margined with dull ochraceous or rusty, consequently appearing darker and duller above; throat and breast heavily streaked or spotted with dusky, passing without abrupt contrast into the black abdominal patch. Breeds in Iceland, Färoes, arctic Europe and western Siberia.

3. *Centralis* Buturlin.—Exactly resembles the last in color and size, but 24% of a large series have the bill 35 mm. or more long. Breeds in north-central Siberia.

4. *Schinzii* (C. L. Brehm).—Exactly resembles the last two in color, but averages notably smaller than *alpina*. Resident in the British Isles, the coast of Holland and the Baltic Sea, and unknown as yet outside this area.

5. *Arctica* Schiøler.—Resembles *schinzii* in smaller size, but differs in color from the three other Old World races in being even darker above with less or no rusty edgings, these buffy or dull ochraceous; consequently even more different from *sakhalina* in dorsal coloration than is *alpina*.

A summary of measurements is appended:

		Wing	Culmen
<i>sakhalina</i> .....	♂	108.5-125.5	31-41
	♀	114 -125.5	34-42
<i>alpina</i> .....	♂	109 -118	27.5-37.5
	♀	115 -125	32-40
<i>schinzii</i> .....	♂	104 -112	26.5-31
	♀	106 -121	28.5-33
<i>arctica</i> .....	♂	108 -113	26-27.5
	♀	112 -120	30-32

When we remember that immature birds in early fall have much shorter bills and that there are no color characters for the winter plumage of any of these subspecies, it will be obvious that the positive subspecific identification of a straggler to North America can be made only if the specimen were still in breeding plumage when shot. Adult specimens in winter plumage with very short bills could be confidently referred to either *schinzii* or *arctica*, with the probabilities favoring the latter, a migratory subspecies, rather than the former, a resident subspecies. No other Old World dunlin straggling to North America could even be suspected. No specimen of *centralis* Buturlin could ever be recognized as such anywhere, and I see no point in the formal naming of such intangible characters.

The alleged North American records for "European" dunlins follow:

1. District of Columbia (Auk, 1886, p. 140). Long since shown to be an error, and requiring no further discussion here.

2. Long Island, New York, Shinnecock Bay, September 15, 1892. See Young (Auk, 1893, p. 78), who states that the specimen was identified by F. M. Chapman as a European Dunlin. I do not know the whereabouts of this specimen, but note that Chapman omitted this record from his 'Guide to the Birds of the Vicinity of New York City,' 1906. The date of capture precludes the specimen being in breeding plumage, and this record should be regarded as doubtful until the specimen can be remeasured.

3. West Haven, Connecticut, ♀, September 29, 1904; wing, 114.5; culmen, 36.5. Obviously no grounds for even suspecting an Old World subspecies, on our present knowledge of size variation. See the able discussion by Sage and Bishop ('Birds of Connecticut,' p. 58), who do *not* record it as a European Dunlin. Their remarks might appropriately be applied to the Long Island record. Nevertheless this has been regarded as a Connecticut record on several occasions, and is so included in the last A. O. U. Check-list.

4. Chatham, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, August 11, 1900. First recorded by Howe and Allen ('Birds of Massachusetts,' 1901, p. 41); now mounted and on exhibition in the Boston Society of Natural History and kindly

loaned me by the authorities. This bird is an adult in worn breeding plumage. It was sexed as a female but is almost certainly a male, as the measurements show; wing, 108; culmen, 25.5. Its very small dimensions can apply only to *schinzii* or *arctica*. In general coloration the bird is an "Old World" dunlin at a glance. The margins to the feathers above are dull buffy, devoid of any rusty tone. As it agrees minutely with two specimens from East Greenland, collected in the first days of August, and as it is easily separable from specimens of *schinzii* in comparable plumage, I confidently identify this bird as *arctica* Schiöler.

5. Monomoy, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, August 8-16, 1936, adult ♀, collected by Ludlow Griscom, and presented to Boston Society of Natural History. On August 8, 1936, I took my ornithology class to the great flats on Monomoy, accompanied by Miss Juliet Richardson, Dr. and Mrs. Richard Tousey and Mr. David L. Garrison. The sharp eye of the last gentleman picked out, among various "Peep," a dunlin, which, on account of the remarkable date, was subjected to very careful scrutiny. I became suspicious almost at once that the bird belonged to some Old World subspecies, because of the heavy streaking below, and the entire absence of any cinnamon tone on the very dark upper parts. The bird proved to have lost one foot and appeared sick, as it occasionally "yawned" or "gaped" and would fall forward on its chest.

I returned to these flats the following Saturday, with a collecting pistol, accompanied by Mr. Garrison and also Professor S. A. Eliot, Jr., and Mr. Aaron C. Bagg. As I had not unreasonably hoped, the dunlin was still present, though appearing more lively and less sick, and was collected as speedily as possible. It proved to be in a most remarkable condition, obviously the result of disease. It is in slightly worn breeding plumage as regards the body or contour feathers, though one or two of the fresh gray feathers of the winter plumage are coming in on the back. The primaries, however, are still in the process of coming in, so that apparently this part of the spring moult lagged behind, while the tail feathers are worn to dirty brownish shreds, with no sign of any renewal whatever! The ovaries were so minute and granular, that the sex was determined with some difficulty, and the bird could not possibly have bred this year.

The measurements are: wing, 105 +, the longest primaries not fully grown in; culmen, 37.2. The coloration above and below is clearly that of typical *alpina* in slightly worn plumage, and the measurements indicate this larger subspecies. This specimen might conceivably be *centralis* Buturlin also, but I do not regard a subspecies as separable, no specimen of which possesses any character not common to specimens of other subspecies.

*Museum of Comparative Zoology,  
Cambridge, Mass.*