

our methods. Much has been written upon the lighter side of bird banding, and possibly on account of this "picnic" viewpoint many have been persuaded to join in the work. Such remarks therefore as we may make from time to time, if of no other value, may at least prove a means of impressing upon any thoughtless bander the seriousness of the project that he has undertaken. For in all probability, if an investigation were made as suggested by Dr. Rowan, it might be found that the greatest danger of all is the apparently increasing inclination to turn banding into a race game, striving in a childish manner to band more than one's neighbor, or beat some foolish record, in all likelihood at the expense of bird life. To those so inclined, I should like to put the following question: Are we Bird Banding, or merely banding birds?

Cobble Hill, Vancouver Island, B. C., July 20, 1925.

A REPORT ON THE BIRDS OF NORTHWESTERN ALASKA AND REGIONS ADJACENT TO BERING STRAIT. PART VI

WITH FOUR PHOTOS

By ALFRED M. BAILEY

LITTLE BROWN CRANE. *Grus canadensis*.

Cranes were not observed at Wainwright, although the Eskimos claim that a few are usually seen each spring. At Wales they made their first appearance on May 10, when the natives saw a flock offshore, apparently headed for Siberia. Captain Joe Bernard, of the schooner "Teddy Bear", was frozen in about thirty miles below East Cape, and he told me that many flocks of cranes were observed early in May, cutting across Bering Strait to the Siberian shore, where they followed *down* the coast and spread out over the tundra.

I saw several flocks on May 12, regarding which, in my notes, I find the following comment: "The north winds sweep around the corner of the Cape so that there is a lea along the southwest slopes. A heavy fog-belt extended far out over the water, white over the snow-covered ice and black over the open water, with white patches here and there which were ice floes reflecting through. I flushed a flock of about seventy Little Brown Cranes from the mountain side and they straggled off in two V-shaped flocks, protesting in their guttural way until they came to the fog-belt, where they hovered, disconcertedly, calling loudly. Finally, they swung along the spur of the mountain and followed along the highland until they reached the fog-belt reaching from the hills. Then they flew into the fog and I heard them calling as they circled back and forth, soon re-appearing far out at sea. They seemed lost, not knowing where to go. I saw several flocks during the morning and all were bewildered when they reached the fog." A few flocks were seen almost daily the remainder of the month. On May 28, the date when a great number of species seemed to be migrating, I collected three birds on the hillsides, where they were resting. The cranes spread out over the tundra beyond Cape Prince of Wales, a few pairs nesting along Lopp Lagoon. I saw several near Mint River the first week in July but I was unable to discover a nest.

RED PHALAROPE. *Phalaropus fulicarius*.

This is one of the most common species in northern Alaska, where it has a wide breeding range, from the Yukon to Barrow and to the eastward. We saw Red Phalaropes at St. Lawrence Island, where Hendee found a nest with two eggs July 1, and Captain Cochran told me that the birds were usually very numerous at St. Lawrence Bay during the first week in July.

At Whalen, near East Cape, Siberia, we saw thousands of these beautiful little fellows on July 11. The day was very disagreeable, with a strong wind off the ice and a drizzling rain. From the ship we could see waves of birds rising some distance off in such dense flocks that individuals could not be distinguished; the mass looked like a long, thin cloud swirling before the wind; one end of the line rose high in the air, while the other end swerved nearer to the water. They swung about with the erratic movements and wave-like flight so characteristic of Black Skimmers, now high in the air, again low over the water. As we worked along the shore, thousands that were feeding close along the beach rose and flew across the sand-spit in front of us. There was a continual stream of them drifting by, like so much sand before a strong wind. They were, at this time, beginning to molt their breeding plumage.

When we arrived at Wainwright we found birds of the year common; many of the young with downy heads, but able to fly, were on all the tundra pools. They continued very abundant throughout August and the first week in September. At this latter time flocks were feeding in the shallow water at the mouth of Wainwright Inlet, frequently a hundred of them together. They were so tame as to allow a person to come within a few feet. Several were seen September 27, and the last bird recorded was on September 28. The adults evidently migrate southward as soon as the young are able to shift for themselves, for but few adults were seen during the fall.

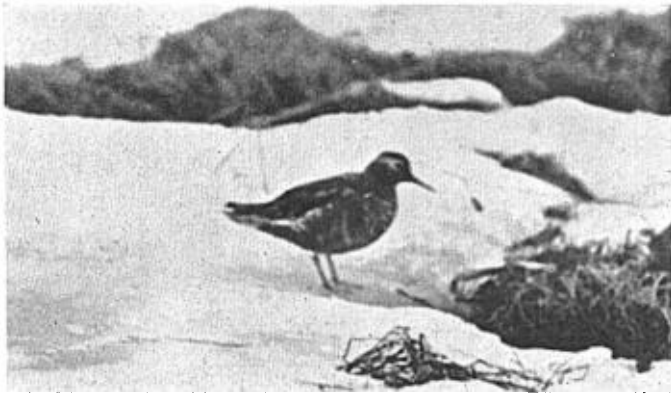


Fig. 62. MALE RED PHALAROPE. NOME, 1922.

Photo by Frank Dufresne.

Red Phalaropes returned in the spring in small flocks, appearing on May 28 about the open leads far from shore, the land being still snow-covered; on May 29 they were common. During June a few could be seen about every tundra pool, and they were continually flushing from the dead grass in which they often made their nests. The first eggs were found on June 21, and fresh eggs were found from that date until July 15, which shows that the species has rather a long nesting period. Some of the later nests were possibly second attempts of birds whose first nests had been destroyed. Hendee collected two of this species on June 26, which were still in winter plumage,

both non-breeding birds. He states: "Many flocks of fifty or more were seen by the middle of July. These bunches were so compact that at a distance they appeared as black spots against the sky. They were performing many curious evolutions, the whole flock moving together as if on parade. These bands, which were seen from this time on, were probably formed by non-breeding birds, or those who failed in their nesting attempt. Many nests were broken up by the heavy snow of July 4 and 5. Young birds, able to fly, were seen by August 4. In the late summer of 1922, none of the large flocks of young which appeared the preceding fall were seen, and this circumstance leads me to believe that comparatively few young were reared in 1922."

This was the most abundant of the shore birds at Wales, as at Wainwright. The bulk of the species arrives soon after the first newcomer; I did not note these phalaropes until June 1, and on the fifth they were common. They are to be found



Fig. 63. EGGS OF RED PHALAROPE. WALES, JUNE, 1922.

everywhere upon the tundra, choosing grassy places in the wetter parts of the flats in which to build their nests. The first nest was found on June 22 and fresh eggs were taken until the middle of July. As a person walks over the tundra there is a continual string of these handsome birds rising from the grass, and occasionally a nesting male flutters from the eggs when almost underfoot.

NORTHERN PHALAROPE. *Lobipes lobatus*.

This small species is more common below the Arctic Circle than above, according to my experience, although it seems to have as wide a range as the Red Phalarope. We found it very common on the tundra at Nome the middle of June, when small bands could be seen at any time. They are confiding and make interesting subjects to photograph. To me, a broad stretch of flat tundra, with snow-covered mountain chains on the horizon and fleecy clouds mirrored in the placid lagoons, would make

an incomplete picture, unless a few of these graceful little long-necked creatures were whirling away in the shallow waters, or leaving V-shaped ripples as they work through the reeds. We looked carefully for nests around Nome but were unable to locate any. A few birds were seen at Point Hope August 1, and at the Corwin coal mine August 3; at Wainwright we took two specimens from a flock of Red Phalaropes on August 23.

In the spring of 1922, at Wainwright, but two were seen, one on June 26 and the other on July 3. They were fairly common at Wales during the spring and summer, the first arrivals being noted offshore on May 29. After that date a few were seen almost daily, but they seemed scarce in comparison with the great number of the former species. A few sets of their eggs were found; their nesting habits were very similar to those of the Red Phalarope.



Fig. 64. DOWNY YOUNG OF WILSON SNIPE. NOME, JUNE, 1921.

WILSON SNIPE. *Gallinago delicata*.

The Wilson Snipe was fairly abundant at Nome, more so than I had expected, as various authors state that this is a rather rare species along the shores of Bering Sea. On June 19, on the tundra back of Nome, we saw a great number, fully a dozen in one neighborhood, where they were nesting under small bushes on the wet tundra. By carefully marking the birds down, I found three young—fluffy, dark-brown little fellows, difficult to see. All three had left the nest and were standing to their bellies in water. The adults were remarkably tame and returned within a few feet, circling anxiously about. Overhead several birds were sailing, sometimes so high as to be

almost invisible. They would drop on set wings, making a noise like a nighthawk as it descends from high in the air. The snipe were very noisy and were undoubtedly nesting in a small colony, if several pairs in thirty or forty square yards can be called a colony. On the 21st we located two more nests, this time on the exposed tundra, in long grass bordering the lagoons. Near one there were two rather large, downy young, which had left the nest and were standing in the water; the other nest held two small youngsters and two eggs, one of which was pipped. This latter nest I left untouched and returned next day to photograph, but found only the remains of the shells, where a jaeger had doubtless strewn them. On the 24th we found two more downy young, so it is evident that the snipe begin laying early in June in the vicinity of Nome. In 1922 we made but one record, a single specimen collected at Wales on May 31.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER. *Limnodromus griseus scolopaceus*.

Not many of this species were seen during the summer, the first being taken at Cape Blossom, August 1. A few were seen at Cape Simpson, to the eastward of Barrow, August 19, upon the tundra; while Hendee reported them common at Wainwright between August 9 and 22, the last flock of a couple of dozen birds being seen on the latter date. The bands were composed mostly of birds of the year. In the spring they were seen on but one date, at Wainwright, June 29, when three of four birds noted were taken. This species nested in the vicinity of Wales in small numbers, a few being flushed from the tundra throughout the summer. I was never successful in locating a nest, although I am sure a pair nested along Lopp Lagoon early in July, judging by the antics of the old birds.

AMERICAN KNOT. *Calidris canutus rufus*.

Two specimens, immature males, were collected at Wainwright, August 15 and 26. Mr. Bangs says: "We refer your specimen number 9127 to the American Knot, now recognized by name by Hartert, properly, we think."

EASTERN ASIATIC KNOT. *Calidris tenuirostris*.

One specimen of this species, an adult male in light plumage, was taken at Cape Prince of Wales on May 28. At this date the tundra was still covered with snow, but the higher benches of the Cape were becoming bare. The first arrivals of many species were just making their appearance, using these high exposed spots as resting places. Among these numerous migrants I took this one straggler. It was so tame I collected it with my .32 aux. This is the basis of the first record of the species for North America (see Condor, xxvi, 1924, p. 195).

ALEUTIAN SANDPIPER. *Arquatella maritima couesi*.

Birds of this species were fairly abundant during the first week in July at Emma Harbor, where they were breeding. A few pairs were seen scattered across the tundra, along the beaches, and up some of the small streams. The first nest was found July 3 on the shores of the bay, in gravel along the beach, and it contained three young and an egg. The old birds were very solicitous, and I found the nest by taking advantage of the parents' anxiety, for they kept returning until I finally located it. The second nest was found by Mr. Burnham, who kindly built a cairn and directed me to it. I had great difficulty, however, in locating the sitting female and had almost decided she was not on the nest, when she flushed, wobbling over the tundra in a very decrepit manner, both wings and legs broken, apparently, judging from the strenuous efforts she made to decoy me from the vicinity. The eggs were about four-fifths incubated. Our only other records for the season were made on St. Lawrence Island, where several of the birds were noted the first week in July, and at St. Michael, July 20, where we collected a series. These little fellows delight in working among the

boulders, hopping from one slimy rock to another, like so many turnstones, occasionally taking short flights over the bay, only to return to some favorite feeding spot. According to Nelson, these birds are fairly abundant in that locality a little later in the season.

The next year I found the Aleutian Sandpiper an abundant nesting bird at Wales, which extends the known breeding range almost to the Arctic Circle. They made their first appearance on May 28, and by the end of the month were common upon the rocky slopes of the high tundra along Wales Mountain. At this time they appeared in small flocks but by June 10 they were paired and preparing to nest. On June 14 I found my first nest by flushing the female from underfoot. The nest was on top of a ridge at an elevation of about 500 feet, in moss, and no effort had been made to conceal the contents. There were but three eggs in the nest, but the fourth



Fig. 65. DOWNY YOUNG OF ALEUTIAN SANDPIPER. EMMA HARBOR, SIBERIA, JULY 4, 1921.

had been laid when I returned a few days later. Several other nests were found from time to time up to June 25, at which date the eggs were well incubated. The nesting sites varied from exposed depressions in the moss, to well-concealed nests in dried grass. Nesting birds were seen along Lopp Lagoon the first week in July, and on July 28 I took two young which were just able to fly.

The Aleutian Sandpipers at Wales present an interesting study in variation, ranging from a dark rusty on the back to a light cinnamon. The color differences seem even more noticeable in the field than in the dried specimens. Ridgway (*Birds of North and Middle America*, part VIII, 1919, p. 248, footnote) remarks: "Variations in both coloration and dimensions, according to locality, indicate the possibility that further subdivision of the species may be required." The breeding range of this species is of interest. Nelson states (*Natural History Collections in Alaska*, page 104): "It is safe to say—as confirmed by my own observations—that this bird does

not nest on the Alaskan mainland north of the Yukon at least." My experience refutes this, of course, but the fact that this species has a breeding station on this westernmost point, without connecting links between there and the Yukon, is strange. Mr. Outram Bangs (in letter) says of our series of Aleutian Sandpipers: "All of your series are *couesi*, typical except number 8962, which bears a very close resemblance to *A. m. quarta* (Hartert) of Bering Island. This form, however, is said to be non-migratory. Judged by color alone it would pass for *quarta* and it may be a stray wanderer of that well marked form."

I saw other brightly colored individuals at Wales, similar to this example. My attention was first called to them when I shot this specimen and a darker bird, which I took to be a female. On dissection, both proved to be males. It was my intention to make a large series to show the extreme differences in color, but walrus hunting kept me offshore until the nesting season was well advanced. Cape Prince of Wales will prove an interesting field to ornithologists, for many years' work can be done at this place without exhausting the possibilities, and among other things, the variability of these sandpipers should be worth studying. As I understand it, *A. m. quarta* is supposed to be a resident form, but it would seem far more strange for a bird so closely related to the Aleutian Sandpiper to be strictly non-migratory, than for it to wander northward along the Alaskan coast.

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER. *Pisobia acuminata*.

Hendee took one specimen of this rare straggler to the Alaskan coast on September 27 on Unalaska Island. It was a young of the year.

Denver, Colorado, June 23, 1925.

WITH THE BIRD BANDERS

Pith and Pathos.—There is always someone to take the joy out of living. Michener's splendid article and graphs analysing a banding season with the Purple Finches were in my hands when Sprot's "Dangers in Bird Banding" came from the editor for my perusal. Since the latter is listed for publication, it seems proper to apply to its inferred conclusions certain tests for soundness.

Unfortunately, in Sprot's article, not a single empiric fact is offered in support. So far as Rowan's article is concerned, I suspect that it came into the mind of every bander to write an indignant reply. On second thought, they probably came to the same conclusion that I did, namely, that his article were best ignored since it merely represented crude mechanics and cruder natural history, which was self condemnatory. The marvel was not that several of Rowan's juncos succumbed, but that any survived when confined in a day-lighted compartment for a continued period after capture.

Unfortunately, too, Sprot's isolation deprives him of personal contact with any group of banders or with any of the "leaders", else he might not consider his own such a unique case of humane understanding. His efforts to provide against distress for the birds is the history of nearly every bander who has any ingenuity whatever, and those who have not have proven themselves quick to adopt any improvements offered.

The number of commendable traps that have been evolved by banders in the last three or four years is spectacular, and no small proportion of them were developed for the birds' comfort. The rest were mainly adaptations for species not theretofore catchable. How these traps escaped the attention of Sprot is not clear.

Bird netting for banding purposes presents insurmountable legal difficulties at the present time, aside from the fact that it involves expense beyond the means of the average bander. I see no reason for believing that it causes less distress to the bird than many traps now in use.