

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

WITH TWO PHOTOS

By ALFRED M. BAILEY

PECTORAL SANDPIPER. *Pisobia maculata*.

Fairly common throughout northern Alaska. Several pairs were seen on the tundra near Nome, and a nest with three downy young and one egg was found there June 21. The nest was on a small hummock on the open tundra, well away from the water, and was located by watching the parent bird, whose evident anxiety made it certain that her nest was near. It was neatly hidden by overhanging grasses and was made up of short pieces of grass. Downy young of the Western and Pectoral sandpipers, aside from size, are very similar in coloration, the Pectoral being slightly darker with a little rufous on the underparts, while the underparts of the Western are almost white, the chin and throat alone being tinged with brownish.

A few Pectoral Sandpipers were seen on the summit of King Island, where they were working about the grass, and others on St. Lawrence Island, July 29. Several were noted at Point Hope August 1, and at Barrow August 6, while they were abundant upon the tundra at Demarcation Point August 15. At Wainwright there was quite a flight August 25, several flocks swarming over the tundra during the forenoon. They were so tame that the boys turned out in force to try for them with bows and arrows. They reappeared at Wainwright on June 17, on which date a male was seen in flight, with the characteristic air sacs inflated. During the following week the courtship of these birds, so well described by Dr. Nelson, was observed daily, but after this time few birds of this species were seen. On July 3, Hendee flushed a female from a set of four slightly incubated eggs. "The nest," he states, "was in a patch of marsh grass, similar to the location usually chosen by the phalaropes except that the ground was not wet. The female fluttered away to a distance of about thirty feet and went through a remarkable performance in her attempt to decoy me from the nest. She crept about among the hummocks in a very unbirdlike fashion, uttering all the time a mouse-like squeaking."

On July 28 this species was unusually common at Wainwright, some of the birds from farther inland probably beginning to return to the coast. The species was not at all common at Wales, although a few birds were seen throughout the summer. As with the dowitchers, they were undoubtedly nesting in small numbers, but I failed to find a nest. The first arrivals were noted on May 31.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER. *Pisobia fuscicollis*.

The recording of this species at Wainwright extends its range to the westward of Point Barrow at least one hundred miles. Hendee says: "Several of these birds, apparently mating, were seen flying about the village on June 29, but I was unable to secure any at this time. On July 3 I shot one specimen. On the ground, the bird greatly resembled the Baird Sandpiper, but it attracted my attention by trying to escape by running, whereas the Baird Sandpiper almost invariably flies. On the wing, the white rump was conspicuous, the heavier marking on the breast being also noticeable."

BAIRD SANDPIPER. *Pisobia bairdi*.

The only Baird Sandpipers noted during the summer were above the Arctic Circle, the first being at Cape Blossom on August 1, when one was collected from

the shore of a small lagoon. They were fairly common at Point Hope on August 2, and at Barrow on the 6th. A few were working the grass-grown tundra at Demarcation Point on the 16th, and one young bird was taken at Wainwright August 23, the last record for the summer. They returned to Wainwright on May 29, and others were seen on June 12. From that time on, they were observed daily, although never in flocks. They began nesting the latter part of June, choosing the dry parts of the tundra. The first set of eggs was found on June 25. The nest was a mere depression in the moss with no effort toward concealment. Other sets were found throughout the month and up to July 12, on which date downy young birds were secured.

I found this species breeding abundantly, for shorebirds, at Cape Prince of Wales, which occurrence extends its known range below the Arctic Circle. The first arrivals were seen on May 28, and after that date a few pairs were to be seen scattered over the tundra. They were especially fond of the rocks and hillsides of Cape Mountain, where they chose their nesting sites in the brown moss. Both Hendee and I observed that this species has a preference for the open in nest building, making a depression in the moss, although we found a few nests well hidden in dried grass. My first nest was discovered on June 15, on the hillside, in brown moss. The nesting site was among many jagged boulders fallen in a landslide. In my field notes of June 15 I find the following entry: "Cutting down the opposite side of the ridge, I heard many calls which reminded me of home in the early spring, for the combined totals sounded like the singing of many little grass frogs in a meadow pond. It was the call or, rather, the 'spring song' of the Baird Sandpiper. I soon flushed a little female which fluttered away uttering cries of alarm. I concealed myself and she soon returned, the male also hovering about, making his little, frog-like peep. At times he would rise high in the air, in the way so characteristic of male sandpipers, give forth his song, and sail down to perch. I located the eggs in brown moss, without any covering whatsoever, but left them, as I desired a photo." I then hunted offshore for a few days until bad weather drove me in. The day I went for the eggs the wind was blowing a gale. My notes give indication of the way it blows at Wales. "It was so windy that it was difficult to shoot an adult for identification. I shot several times at a Baird before collecting it, and only succeeded then by putting the muzzle against a rock to hold it steady and shooting up wind."

The reader is referred to Dixon's excellent account, "The Home Life of the Baird Sandpiper", in the CONDOR for May, 1917, for information concerning this interesting little species. Our notes differed from his in that both Hendee and I heard their courtship song, while he observes, "The courtship of the Baird Sandpiper appears to be carried on in absolute silence", and in that we recorded the species nesting below the Arctic Circle.

LEAST SANDPIPER. *Pisobia minutilla*.

But one specimen of this species was recorded for the summer; a bird was taken by Hendee at Wainwright August 6.

RUFIOUS-NECKED SANDPIPER. *Pisobia ruficollis*.

I first made the acquaintance of this species in Emma Harbor, Siberia. The birds were undoubtedly nesting along the little tundra streams, but no eggs were found. At Cape Prince of Wales they were first noted on June 11, 1922, when several birds were seen on the high tundra at the base of Wales Mountain. I collected one specimen on this date, an adult female. On June 14 I observed a pair building a nest along the stream bed. In my notes of that date I wrote: "With my glasses I watched a pair of little pink-necked sandpipers as they worked around the grass at

the foot of the hill. The male would give up his searching among the dried grass stalks to demonstrate his love for his little partner, upon which she would take to wing and circle about. Finally she entered a little tussock of grass, standing on her 'nose' and fluttering her tail and wings. Soon the male pushed his way inside too, and after a few more rustlings about, they took to wing. I looked in the grass and found a little cavity which they were just lining with leaves." Upon examining their nesting clump, I found a small pit, exactly similar to the nest of the Western Sandpiper, in which they had deposited about twenty small willow leaves. I marked the spot carefully, but upon my return found the nest abandoned.

Hendee secured a single specimen, a bird of the year, at Wainwright on August 15, 1922. The sex was doubtful. From the above, it will be seen that the species



Fig. 17. NEST AND EGGS OF RED-BACKED SANDPIPER; WALES, ALASKA; JUNE, 1922.

will probably be found more or less commonly along the Alaskan coast when further work is carried on. As the A. O. U. committee did not accept the record from Nome (Condor, xi, 1909, p. 173), our specimens furnish the first authentic records for North America (see Condor, xxvi, 1924, p. 195). When hunting upon the pack in Bering Strait, I often saw small sandpipers migrating across from Siberia; but they always appeared too suddenly to allow me a chance to collect any.

RED-BACKED SANDPIPER. *Pelidna alpina pacifica*; *Pelidna alpina sakhalina*.

Red-backed Sandpipers are fairly common throughout northern Alaska. We saw a few birds in the vicinity of Nome, some of them in the foothills at an altitude of 1000 feet, far back from the beach. Several pairs were noted on St. Lawrence Island the first week in July, where they were no doubt breeding, as specimens we took had their sex organs well developed. They were common at Point Hope August 1, and

several were seen at Barrow August 6. They were most abundant at Wainwright the last week in August, when large flocks of adult and young birds were working the flats at the mouth of Wainwright Inlet. They were noted in their southward migration the first week in September in considerable numbers, a few birds around the tundra pools at Icy Cape, September 8, and a few straggling flocks along the beach at Wainwright up to September 19, on which date we made our last record for the season.

In 1922 a single bird was seen at our northern station on May 29, but by June 3 the species was common. Great numbers were present between June 10 and 20, but the bulk of the birds moved on after that date; those that remained were evidently paired. The first nest with eggs was secured on June 20, and on July 13 four newly-hatched, downy young were found. During the first week in August these birds again became common about the village, accompanied by young which were able to fly.

A few birds were noted at Wales on May 29, and they were abundant by the 31st. They nested upon the tundra, usually choosing dead grass as a nesting site, where they deposited their four eggs in a depression lined with a few willow leaves and, occasionally, a few wisps of dried grass. The nests were very difficult to find, unless the brooding bird flushed from underfoot. Individuals differed as to returning to their nests after once flushed. Some would return immediately, while others would not go back as long as I remained in the vicinity. The Red-backed Sandpipers were among the most numerous shorebirds at Wales. A set of four fresh eggs was found on June 14, and another fresh set on July 4. Downy young birds were found by July 7. A parent bird showed great solicitude for her young, which were large enough to leave the nest; she came within two feet of where I was sitting, holding the youngster, and fluttered and scolded in her attempt to draw me away.

I have given the account of these birds under the subspecific names of both *pacifica* and *sakhalina*; for Dr. Oberholser identified a series submitted to him as *pacifica*, and Mr. Outram Bangs, on the other hand, is inclined to unite the two forms under *sakhalina*. Mr. Bangs says: "In the Proceedings of the New England Zoological Club, Vol. V, April 9, 1914, Thayer and Bangs contended that the Siberian *P. a. sakhalina* and the North American *P. a. pacifica* are recognizable subspecies. Hartert did not accept this, though I believe Oberholser is inclined to do so. After examining much material, it now seems to me to be too fine a split, and I would unite the two supposed races, although the red of the upper parts in some, not all, Siberian birds does average paler. Your number 8951 is a pale bird like the palest from east Siberia, that is, it is extreme *sakhalina*." No. 8951 is a male collected at Wales on June 8, 1922. In case the form *pacifica* is finally accepted, then this specimen of *sakhalina* would represent a new North American record.

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER. *Ereunetes pusillus*.

One specimen was taken at Wainwright August 26, 1921. The species was not observed again until August of the next year, when it was rather common about the same village on August 15. One specimen was taken, and no birds were seen after that date. I did not record the species at Wales, but when collecting along Lopp Lagoon, twenty miles away, I found it a common form, with just a few Western Sandpipers present. This latter species was common at Wales. The Semipalmated Sandpiper was nesting along the sandy shores of Bering Strait. The first nest I found was a mere depression in the sand, with a slight lining of grass. These eggs were much incubated on the date on which I secured them, July 5. Two days later I found a set of four downy young. This nest was in grass, similar in every way to the nesting site of the Western Sandpiper.

WESTERN SANDPIPER. *Ereunetes mauri*.

These birds were noted commonly about the middle of June on the tundra along the lagoons and small streams in the vicinity of Nome. A nest was found June 21, a mere depression in the moss on a hummock well away from any ponds. Three downy young were in the nest. Several birds were noted at King Island June 27 upon the grassy crest, and at St. Michael July 20. A young male with downy head was taken at the latter place, and several of the birds were seen along the shores of the bay.

At Wales this form proved to be the most common of the nesting sandpipers. The first birds arrived early in June and were to be found scattered over the tundra in pairs, doubtless already mated at the time of their arrival. Housekeeping begins



Fig. 18. NEST AND EGGS OF WESTERN SANDPIPER; WALES, ALASKA; JUNE, 1922.

almost immediately, for nests were found by the middle of June. Four eggs is the usual complement, although several sets of three were found well advanced in incubation. A set of four fresh eggs was taken on July 4 and a nest of four downy young was discovered on July 8.

These little sandpipers nested high along the sides of Wales Mountain, sometimes on the high tundra and sometimes on the wet flat far below. Many of their nests were made in the moss with no effort at concealment, although I believe the typical nesting site to be a clump of dried grass. They are very confiding little fellows. I placed my hat over one set of eggs, leaving just room for the parent bird to crawl under, which she immediately proceeded to do. There is a very great variation in the color of the adults, many of them being bright colored on the backs, while others are much grayer. In collecting mated birds, I found that there was a close similarity in type of coloration between the two.

Charles Brower sent me a set of three eggs of this species, with the brooding bird, which he took at Point Barrow on July 10, 1923. This is a northern breeding record for the species.

SANDERLING. *Crocethia alba*.

Observed only during the last two weeks of August and the first week of September at Wainwright and Icy Cape. A few birds were seen at the former place on August 22, 29, and 30, also September 1 and 3; a few specimens were taken for records. As usual with this species they were seen only along the shores of the open ocean and the sand flats at the mouth of the lagoon. At Icy Cape, September 7, several bands were seen in their southward migration. None was observed during 1922.

PACIFIC GODWIT. *Limosa lapponica baueri*.

Hendee collected several specimens of this species at Wainwright August 11, 13, and 17, all birds of the year. None was seen during the fall after that date. Three others were taken by Hendee the next season, one on August 13 and two on August 16. It will be seen that the species is rather regular in the time of its migration, if the records mean anything. At Wales I took a male on June 11, and a native brought me two others a week later. None nested in the near vicinity of Cape Mountain, but along Mint River, about twenty miles from Wales, they were a fairly common nesting bird. On July 8 I saw several pairs of godwits and found the general vicinity of a nesting pair but could not flush the female. The male sat upon a hummock and protested vigorously, calling "to-bak-to-bak", and then circled about my head; but though I combed the region closely, I could not make the female fly. Nagozruk found a nest the same day containing two whole eggs and two broken ones, the latter the work of a jaeger, no doubt, as a pair was nesting within fifty feet. The male godwit flew directly at us when within a few feet of the place, but the female did not flush until directly underfoot. Whenever the jaeger circled near, the godwit promptly pursued it. It was interesting to note that the jaeger too had suffered disaster, for one of its eggs was broken.

BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER. *Tryngites subruficollis*.

We arrived too late at our winter station to observe many of this species. One of a pair noted was taken August 11 at Wainwright, the only record for the season. The following year Hendee secured five specimens, three on June 28 and two the next day. No others were seen. Murdock (Expedition to Point Barrow) reports this to be a common species at Barrow, which is only one hundred miles away, but Hendee found it very rare at Wainwright. I saw none of the species at Cape Prince of Wales. Charles Brower sent me from Point Barrow an adult female and a set of two eggs of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper, which he took July 13, 1923, at the sandspit on the northwest point.

Denver, Colorado, June 23, 1925.