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## OBSERVATIONS OF A MIGRANT COMMON SANDPIPER IN ETHIOPIA

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On the evening of 8 August 1986, a Toyota Landcruiser literally ran over a Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* which was either roosting or feeding at a puddle on a track in the Hareenna Forest, Bale Mountains National Park, Ethiopia (39°44'E, 06°44'N, alt. 2 400 m). The bird was captured, dazed but apparently unharmed. It was measured, weighed, and given a Nairobi Museum ring (B25801); with a wing length of 110 mm, it was probably a male (cf. Lofaldi 1981, Holland et al. 1982) and presumably, on ringing recoveries reported by Cramp & Simmons (1983), part of the Russian breeding population. It weighed only 30.5 g, and the prominent keel confirmed that it was in poor condition; in Britain, breeding male Common Sandpipers weigh on average 51.6 g (n = 42, s.d. 3.3; Holland et al. 1982), but before migrating they may accumulate up to a further 30 g of fat. The bird was kept overnight in a bird bag, and reweighed in the morning at 29.5 g. When released at first light it walked from the hand, and immediately commenced feeding, at about 1 m range from its former captor in a ford of a nearby stream.

Over the next 9 days, it was seen feeding at or near the ford on at least 9 occasions. At dusk on the 18 August, it was retrapped, using a small, single-shelf mistnet set across the stream above the ford. It then weighed 43.0 g, a gain of 13.5 g in 10 days' of feeding (or 1.35 g per day). It was released immediately, but was not seen on the 19th, nor subsequently; since it was flying well by this time, we presume that our disturbance caused it to resume its migration.

There are several points of interest about this record. Even a weight of 43.0 g seems low for a migrant Common Sandpiper to be continuing its migration, though it matches the range quoted by Ash (1969) for spring migrants at Defilia oasis in Morocco (mean 38.8 g, range 35.0-43.5 g, n = 12). It is surprising that a migrant should allow itself to reach such a low weight when it must have crossed several potential feeding areas (sea shores, lakes, rivers) on any conceivable route from Russia to Ethiopia. We have on occasion seen colour-ringed adult Common Sandpipers back on their English breeding grounds in late April (Holland et al. 1982) which fed intensively, virtually ignoring the observer even at ranges down to 10 m, giving the impression of being exhausted and

near starvation. These observations have led us to suspect that adult Common Sandpipers undertake "long-hop" migrations. The Ethiopian bird clearly suggests this, in contrast to the rather slow and hesitant passage which is implied by the dates of peak counts of this species at various sites in Western Europe (O.A.G. Munster 1984). Juveniles (in autumn) or returning first-year birds (in spring) may take longer over their migrations, than breeding adults. The early date by which our bird had reached Ethiopia is also noteworthy; O.A.G. Munster (1984) report a mean migration date in Hungary (presumably of Russian birds) of 14 August by which date our individual was well established in Ethiopia (2 other, unringed, Common Sandpipers had also arrived by that date; they also left by the 20 August).

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