

## REVIEWS

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Mork, K., Holstad, R.L., Sætre, S. & Kalinin, A. 1995. *Ornithological registrations in the Uboynaya area, NW Taymyr, July 1994*. Norwegian Ornithological Society Report no. 4-1994.

Under the Joint Norwegian-Russian Commission on Environmental Co-operation of 1988, the Ministries of the Environment of the two countries have agreed to collaborate on a range of environmental projects, including a working group for the marine environment. This working group has a seabird expert group to establish contact and collaboration between research and management institutions responsible of these organisms. Bjørn Frantzen has initiated a collaborative project on Steller's Eiders under the agreement, which aimed to locate breeding birds and describe the breeding and feeding biology of the species, funded from the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management. This report details the fieldwork undertaken on the project carried out during July 1994.

As previously reported by Rogacheva (1992) and Yésou & Lappo (1992), densities of nesting Steller's Eider are extremely low on Taymyr, and are generally more numerous in the north-west of the peninsula. The team were skilled and fortunate to find one nest, and considered that there were between two and seven pairs nesting, but the report gives some interesting anecdotal descriptions of nest searches and details of their findings. There is also a very useful summary of the status of Steller's Eider at other research camps throughout Taymyr in 1994.

The report also contains annotated lists of mammal and bird observations, including brief accounts of the locally breeding species (Ringed Plover, Pacific Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Turnstone, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Little Stint,

Temminck's Stint) as well as species which were not proven to breed (Dotterel, Sanderling, Knot, Grey and Red-necked Phalaropes). Observations include the remarkable observation of a Little Stint apparently adopting a Curlew Sandpiper chick, a phenomenon which caused the anxious parent particular problems when attempting to brood an offspring almost as big as itself!

Despite its focus on studies of Steller's Eiders, and the frustrations of studying a species at such low breeding densities, the project still managed to ring 131 birds in all, including the following numbers of pulli: 3 Ringed Plover, 4 Pacific Golden Plover, 12 Turnstone, 33 Curlew Sandpiper, 4 Dunlin and 36 Little Stint.

If you are a Steller's Eider buff, the report is worth obtaining just for the colour front cover photo of male Steller's Eiders on the tundra!

## REFERENCES

- Rogacheva, H. 1992. *The birds of central Siberia*. Husum Druck-u. Verlagsges.
- Yésou, P. & Lappo, H.G. 1992. Nidification de l'Eider de Steller du Taimyr à la péninsule de Yamal, Sibérie. *Alauda* 60: 193-198.

Tony Fox



Paulson, D. 1993. *Shorebirds of the Pacific Northwest*. University of Washington Press. ISBN 0-7748-0442-4. US\$ 40.00.

Shorebirds are a fascinating and diverse group of birds, with about 200 species world-wide. They seem to attract unusually talented, committed, and diverse people - artists, naturalists, biologists, ringers and conservationists. As a result, we know a great deal about shorebirds (thanks to publications from groups like the Wader Study Group and Australasian Wader Studies Group), and we are blessed with superb (and superbly illustrated) books about shorebirds, notably those by Cramp (1983), Hayman *et al.* (1986), and Marchant & Higgins (1993). Where then is the place for a new book about shorebirds? The remarkable book reviewed here is so fresh and sweeping in its approach, and so comprehensive, that it makes its own place.

This book covers an important area for shorebirds in North America, the "Pacific Northwest": Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington and southern British Columbia. Sixty-one species have been documented in the area, with 42 occurring regularly.

The book begins with 31 pages detailing plumages and moult, colouration and patterns, size and general behaviour. This section introduces terms needed for the detailed accounts that follow, and skilfully interweaves text, tables, and illustrations that are well organised, clear, and informative. The following section ("*Shorebirds in time and space*"; 19 pages) is an account of a shorebird's year, with general patterns and specific examples for migration, wintering, and breeding. But this is not just a dry account of occurrences and migration patterns; it also provides or proposes explanations of them that will be as fascinating to biogeographers as to birders:

*"The numbers of...[juvenile] Sharp-tailed Sandpipers seen every autumn attest to major movements down the American Pacific coast...an unusually great deviation from adult migration routes. Most of these birds must head out into the Pacific, as*

records of them decrease from north to south. Of great interest is the situation in the autumns of 1987 and 1988, when relatively few of these birds reached our region, almost surely correlated with the general scarcity of west winds" (p. 42).

In the following 20 pages, Dennis Paulson gives tips on how to find and identify shorebirds. The tips are down-to-earth and sensible, and are presented in thoughtful and interesting ways. For beginners, "give yourself a break" (p. 59): start working with shorebirds in winter, when few species are present; or try freshwater localities during the peak of migration. Use the best equipment you can, do your homework, and "look at the bird, not the book" (p. 61). Become

accustomed to using patterns when identifying birds - "blocks of related information [that] can be loosely or tightly tied together", such as body proportion plus manner of feeding or walking (p. 58). Develop the ability to identify birds at a distance; use identifying features that don't change with posture or lighting, and that appear the same to different observers. There are many more suggestions in these pages, plus a useful six page "quick identification" table.

Eight pages introduce the species accounts, with good clear definitions [examples: very short bill, "no longer than distance from base of bill to back of eye"; long legs, "exposed legs distinctly longer than the body diameter" (pp. 78-9)]. Tail shapes,

plumages (and plumage charts), distribution, and other points, are covered succinctly.

Species accounts constitute most of the book (280 pp.). General treatments introduce major groups (e.g. about a page each for the Scolopacidae and its tribe Tringini - Spotted and Solitary sandpipers, etc.). The general accounts summarise global distribution and diversity, appearance, habitat, etc. Behaviour patterns that characterise groups are usefully provided, for example: most Tringine sandpipers "are 'sentinel' species, flying up with loud calls when potential predators appear" (p. 143); and plovers "run and tip down to capture prey, then stand with head upright until they run again" (p. 85).

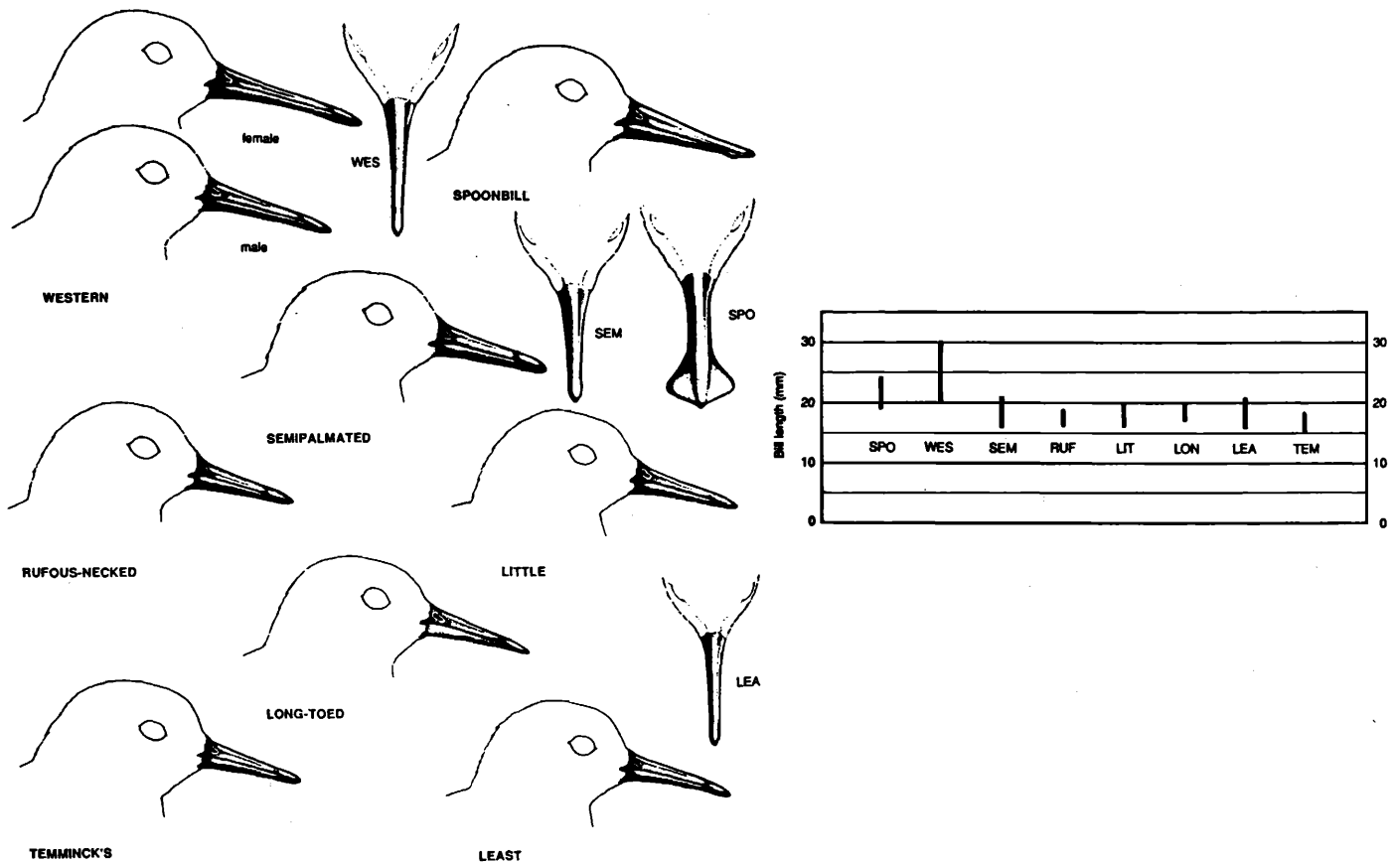


Figure 1. Illustration from Paulson's book (p. 242), with the legend: "Stint and Spoonbill Sandpiper bills. Illustrations intended to typify each species; overall similarity in shape points out difficulty in use as field mark. Semipalmated a bit thicker, with tip slightly expanded from above, but variable. Western only species with substantial sexual dimorphism in bill length, allows sexing of many individuals. Spoonbill 'spoon' not easily seen from side. Bill-length measurements (below) show substantial overlap among all but two longer-billed species. Extent of variation probably greater than indicated in Rufous-necked and Long-toed."

Species accounts for common species begin with a brief summary of characteristics and a diagram showing seasonality along the coast and in the interior. Sections on distribution, status in the Pacific Northwest, habitat and behaviour, general features, and plumage (with diagrams of seasonality for non-breeding, breeding, and juvenile plumages) follow. Most accounts have detailed text plus illustrations that give identifying characteristics. Detail varies according to identification problems presented by the different species. Thus, the similar Long-toed Stint and Least Sandpiper receive treatment in the text, in black-and-white drawings, and in photographs, ranging from general behaviour to fine points of plumage.<sup>1</sup>

The illustrations in the species accounts (most by Jim Erckmann) are one of the finest features of the book: informative, heuristic, economical, pleasing, and always relevant. Some illustrations are drawings that illustrate key distinguishing features (Figure 1). Drawings include whole-body silhouettes (e.g. postures of different Calidridine sandpiper species) and details of important body areas (e.g. feet and faces of Ringed and Semipalmated Plovers). There are also a few distribution maps that show fine points of species distribution or occurrence in the Pacific Northwest (e.g. the patchy breeding distribution of Snowy Plover). The colour photographs are beautiful and, in addition, obviously have been ruthlessly selected for the detailed and salient information they contain - information about species characteristics, about breeding vs. non-breeding plumages, juvenile vs. adult plumages, and even subspecies distinctions. The drawings and photographs are rich with information, which is concisely pointed out in the

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps because they are so large, conspicuous, and distinctive, oystercatchers seem never to have received the detailed field descriptions they deserve. For example, in all species (as far as I know) it is easy to tell adult males and females apart (certainly when they are side-by-side) by bill colour: females have much duller and more orange bills than males, whose bills are brighter and pinker. In this book, it is noted only that "individuals in pairs might be sexed by female's slightly longer bill" (p. 132).

legends; for example (photograph of juvenile Red-necked Phalarope):

*"As non-breeding adult, but upperparts much darker, with well-defined mantle stripes; gray feathers of first-winter plumage appearing first in scapular tract; buff on breast and upperparts typical of younger juveniles mostly faded away."* (p. 358).

Some useful short sections at the end of each species account mention problematic sightings, questions about identification criteria, and detailed critical comments about shorebirds portrayed in photographs in several widely used reference books. These sections are provocative and extremely effective as teaching tools, causing the reader to ponder questions, or encouraging the reader to examine other works. Here are some examples:

Questions: Baird's Sandpiper: *"Why do Baird's Sandpipers commonly forage in mountain habitats in migration, while so few other shorebirds do?"* (p. 283).

Long-billed Curlew: *"Are the birds that winter on grasslands and mud flats - these very different environments - different sexes?"* (p. 199).

Notes: Semipalmated Plover: *"The legs of juveniles are usually duller and paler than those of adults, contrary to National Geographic Society (1987: 104-5)." (p. 227).*

Pectoral Sandpiper *"Few field guides have noted how reddish this species appears in spring or how bright juveniles can be."* (p. 287).

Photos: Wandering Tattler: *"The 'winter adult' in Farrand (1983: 353) is a juvenile."* (p. 170).

Wilson's Phalarope *"The 'winter plumage' bird in Bull & Farrand (1977: Pl. 204) is a breeding-plumaged male, a good example of the erroneous conclusion 'if it isn't bright it must not be in breeding plumage'."* (p. 352).

Important literature is mentioned unobtrusively in a small section at the

end of each species account, with significant topics mentioned for each reference. About 600 references are given in the back of the book. Other back matter is a gazetteer of Pacific Northwest localities mentioned in the book, a summary of the status of shorebird species, an appendix of body weights and measurements (with a separate breakdown into size groups, for identification purposes), a summary of earliest and latest migration dates for regularly occurring species, and an index (by subject, common and scientific names).

This book is authoritative yet friendly. Its writing is lucid. It presents masses of information but does so with extraordinary clarity through interwoven writing, tables and illustrations. It provides syntheses, explanations, and questions. It excites us by having us think in new ways. It is positive and full of many practical suggestions. It is encouraging to beginners - never condescending. It is beautiful. And it is caring - about the future of shorebirds and their habitats.

This is a remarkable book of scholarship, intimacy, information, communication and beauty. If you are a birdwatcher or naturalist, get it. If you are a wetlands biologist or manager, get it. If you love, work with, or simply watch shorebirds anywhere in the world, get it. This book is certain to be distributed, read, and used widely, and it deserves to be.

## REFERENCES

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- Hayman, P., Marchant, J. & Prater, A.J. 1986. *Shorebirds: an identification guide to the shorebirds of the world.* Boston, Houghton-Mifflin.
- Marchant, S. & Higgins, P.J. (eds.). 1993. *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic birds, Vol. 2.* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

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