

First record of the Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*) in Utah, with comments on its occurrence in North America

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ON AUGUST 6, 1978, at 5:30 p.m., while censusing shorebirds at The Barrens Ponds, about 3 km west of Amalga, Cache County, Utah, I observed a small bird with an exceptionally decurved bill (Fig. 1). Initially thinking it to be a Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*), I watched it at about 70 m with a 20X spotting scope for 20 min. It possessed several suspicious characteristics relative to Dunlin I had seen: (1) the bill was more slender and more decurved; (2) the neck and legs seemed longer, the posture more erect, and the gait less of a waddle; (3) the supercilium seemed lighter. In its full basic (= winter) plumage it looked remarkably similar to (though more brownish than) nearby Wilson's Phalaropes (*Phalaropus tricolor*), thus emphasizing its slender bill, long neck and legs, and light supercilium (see Fig. 1 for this comparison). When I waded out to flush the bird, it quickly flew up above eye level against the glare of the water, and directly away from me so that its dorsal aspect was not visible. The bird was not seen again that day.

When I returned the following day at 3:00 p.m., the bird was bathing in shallow water at the same location, clearly displaying the diagnostic white rump of a Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*). During the next hour I observed the bird carefully with a 20X spotting scope. It was associating with a loose flock of about 20 Wilson's Phalaropes. It dominated 8 out of 8 interactions with the slightly larger phalaropes, displacing or supplanting them. The bird was quite tame, allowing me to approach within 30 m. I photographed it, and flushed it four times. The rump and base of the tail were whitish, and the terminal portion of the tail was darkly flecked with gray. At 7:00

p.m. I returned with several observers, but could not locate the bird. Nor did I see it on subsequent days.

Rare shorebird sightings on The Barrens Ponds are usually associated with stormy weather (unpubl. data). But in this case local weather consisted of cloudless skies, warm daytime air temperatures (about 34° C), and moderate winds from July 23 to August 9. A stationary front had persisted over the region for several days.

The Curlew Sandpiper does not appear on the Utah Check-list (Behle and Perry 1975), and to my knowledge this represents the first state record for the species.

THE CURLEW SANDPIPER, which breeds chiefly in northeastern Siberia and winters widely in southern Asia and beyond to Australia and New Zealand as well as in Africa and Madagascar (A.O.U. 1957), has generally been considered a casual visitor to the eastern coast of North America and accidental in Alaska. In a survey of the literature I found records from 25 states and six provinces. Most records are indeed from Atlantic (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Québec, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia) and Gulf Coast (Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas) states or provinces or from states or provinces associated with the Great Lakes (Ontario, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin). The records I found for western North America are given in Table 1. Two significant points emerge from a consideration of these distributional data: (1) truly western sightings have been largely coastal, with the Intermountain

West forming a gap in the record (prior to this Utah sighting), and (2) sightings have proliferated in the last decade. The extent to which these points reflect the growing popularity of birdwatching, better communication and reporting through such efforts as the *American Birds* Seasonal Reports, and a dearth of observers in the Intermountain West is unknown. However, it is of special interest that small populations of Curlew Sandpipers nested in Alaska in 1962 (Holmes and Pitelka 1964) and 1972 (*AB* 26:891). All nests were apparently predated in 1962 but the 1972 breeding effort was successful. Sightings have been fairly regular since then (Table 1), perhaps due to a rise in the number of observers in northern Alaska (Pitelka, pers. comm). Holmes and Pitelka (1964) presented evidence suggesting that Curlew Sandpipers had not occurred near Barrow since about 1897 (except perhaps for an occasional vagrant individual like a specimen taken in 1956). They suggested that the 1962 breeding attempt was a novel situation in that well-studied area. One would assume, although it is by no means proven, that birds appearing in eastern North America arrived via a trans-Atlantic flight. However, for the western records it would be

more parsimonious to assume an "A1-Can" route. The fact that this bird is more common in the spring along the East Coast (Palmer 1967), whereas most of the western records outside Alaska seem to be fall migrants (Table 1), lends support to the idea that these may be separate phenomena. Spring records in the West could be accounted for by Pacific Ocean crossings or birds overwintering in South America (there is a record from Patagonia)

The Curlew Sandpiper is a wanderer, and as such it may turn up almost anywhere. But if the recent breeding attempts in Alaska and the burgeoning number of sightings to the south indicate a trend, observers in western North America should be increasingly on the lookout for this species.

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Table 1. Published records of Curlew Sandpiper occurrence in western North America.

<i>State or Province</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Alaska	June 6, 1883	Murdoch 1885
	June 25, 1956	Holmes and Pitelka 1964
	nested in 1962	Holmes and Pitelka 1964
	nested in 1972	<i>AB</i> 26:796,891; <i>AB</i> 27:103
	June 9, 1973	<i>AB</i> 27:906
	June 1, 1974	<i>AB</i> 28:936
	August 4-5, 1975	<i>AB</i> 30:111
	September 11, 1977	<i>AB</i> 32:244
Alberta	June 18 1969	<i>Aud. Field Notes</i> 23:670
British Columbia	July 31, 1936	Brooks 1937
	July 30-31, 1977	<i>AB</i> 32:247
California	September 7, 1966	Small 1974
	September 16-17, 1972	<i>AB</i> 27:115
	April 27-28, 1974	<i>AB</i> 28:852
	September 7-14, 1974	<i>AB</i> 29:114
Kansas	August 3, 1972	<i>AB</i> 26:873
	(1st specimen, 2 previous sight records)	
Oregon	July 21 and	<i>AB</i> 31:214
	August 16, 1976 (same individual?)	
South Dakota	May 14, 1972	<i>AB</i> 27:77
Utah	August 6-7, 1978	this paper
Washington	May 10, 1972	Meyer 1973; <i>AB</i> 26:784



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Fig. 1. Two views of a Curlew Sandpiper (left, with Wilson's Phalaropes), Cache County, Utah, August 6-7, 1978. Note long-legged, long-necked appearance and strongly decurved bill. Photo/ Tex A. Sordahl.

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