

CONTRIBUTORS — Gordon Black, Phil Bruner, Vernon Byrd, George Campbell, Patrick Conant, Sheila Conant, Peter Connally, Brent Giezantanner, Craig Harrison, Cameron Kepler, Rey Larsen, Jaan Lepson, T.

James Lewis, Michael Ord, Carol P. Ralph, John Sincock, Dan Snider, Hawaii Audubon Society (H.A.S.), Paul Sykes, Tom Telfer, Nick VeraCruz, John Walters, Rick Warshauer, David Woodside. — **ROBERT L. PYLE, 741**

N. Kalaheo Ave., Kailua, HI 96734 and C. JOHN RALPH, U.S. Forest Service, Institute of Pacific Islands Forestry, 1151 Punchbowl St., Honolulu, HI 96813.

COMMUNICATIONS

Jan. 10, 1979

To the editor,

I feel compelled to question the article by Tex A. Sordahl (*American Birds* 32(5):1065-1068), in which the first record of the Curlew Sandpiper for Utah is claimed. The reason why the bird appeared to the author "remarkably similar to . . . nearby Wilson's Phalaropes" is simple—it is a Wilson's Phalarope. The literature is peppered with accounts of malformed bills in a wide array of bird species. This appears to be just one more case, or else the bill is simply broken as a result of some accident. A Curlew Sandpiper bill, in addition to being *much* stouter than the bill of the photographed bird, would typically show more curvature along its entire length, rather than a sudden droop at the tip.

Although both photographs are out of focus, the general aspect of the body in each picture is, in my opinion, completely diagnostic of Wilson's Phalarope. The small head and long, narrow neck in combination with a relatively elongated body, even in silhouette, distinguish this species from any other shorebird I know of. A Curlew Sandpiper has a much chunkier appearance, closer to that of other calidridine (peeps) sandpipers than to tringine (yellowlegs, phalaropes) types. The most likely possibility for confusion would be with a Lesser Yellowlegs, but the posture of the bird in the left-hand photograph is not typical of Lesser Yellowlegs and the bill is much too thin. Wilson's Phalarope probably has the slenderest bill of all shorebirds. Note that there is no perceptible difference between the vertical dimension of the bill of the purported Curlew Sandpiper and that of each of the Wilson's Phalaropes.

Some other points. The author remarks about the brownish appearance of the bird compared with the others. The first week of August is about the time that juvenile Wilson's Phalaropes begin appearing in flocks of post-breeding adults. The juvenal plumage is very brownish dorsally. Alternatively, and perhaps more likely, the bird could be an adult male in worn breeding plumage among birds that have been away from the breeding grounds

long enough to have nearly completed the body molt into winter plumage. An adult male recently arrived from the breeding area might well be more aggressive (see p. 1065) than birds physiologically more acclimated to a migratory flocking situation. If more argument were needed, it could be pointed out that the description of the tail pattern is probably more typical of Wilson's Phalarope than Curlew Sandpiper. And no mention is made of a wing stripe, which is lacking in the former, but present in the latter.

Therefore, not only do the text and photographs *not* support the Curlew Sandpiper conclusion, they support the likelihood that the bird is in fact a Wilson's Phalarope. I feel that a retraction is in order and that Curlew Sandpiper should be deleted from the list of Utah birds.

—Marshall A. Howe
Migratory Bird and Habitat Research
Laboratory
Laurel, Md. 20811

March 16, 1979

To the editor:

I have received correspondence which casts serious doubt on my report of a Curlew Sandpiper in Utah from M. A. Howe and R. G. McCaskie. The ability of both at field identification is undisputable. And apparently others share their suspicions that the bird may have been an immature Wilson's Phalarope with a deformed bill. I sent the original photographs to a third authority, R. T. Holmes, who felt (as do I) that the pictures are not diagnostic either way.

The bird was most certainly not a Lesser Yellowlegs. I think it was not a phalarope either. But I have only a recollection, brief field notes, and a set of poor photographs for evidence. Wilson's Phalarope is a common nesting species on my study area, so I am familiar with the species in different plumages. I had been observing them almost daily from their arrival on April 23 until August 6, the day of the sighting. The bird in question was seen at close range, and looked unlike any phalarope I have seen in five seasons there. I

believe the bird had, and the pictures show, a distinctly thicker bill than the phalaropes around it (of course this could also result from malformity). Are there any records of phalaropes with deformed bills? I doubt very much that the bill was broken, as it was curved along its entire length.

My description was intended to distinguish the bird from a Dunlin. Consequently I was more interested in the rump pattern than the wing stripe (which is also present in Dunlin) when the bird flushed. I did not note whether the bird had a wing stripe. I now believe that, in following my field notes in the published description, I erred in describing the rump pattern. Probably the rump and upper tail coverts, rather than the rump and base of tail, were white. The bird I saw looked almost identical to the fall-plumaged Curlew Sandpiper on Plate 37 of Pough, R., 1951 (*Audubon Water Bird Guide*). Its legs were dark, whereas adult Wilson's Phalaropes at that time of year usually have yellowish legs. A photograph I took of a captured juvenile-plumaged phalarope in 1977 shows very light flesh-colored legs.

While I do not wish to perpetuate a possible error, I am not convinced that I misidentified the bird. However, it is clear that this should *not* be taken as a definitive record of the Curlew Sandpiper for Utah. In my opinion it should be placed in the "hypothetical" category on the state list, as is customary for reports unsubstantiated by a specimen or unambiguous photographic evidence.

—Tex A. Sordahl
Dept. of Biology
Utah State University
Logan, Utah 84322

Apr. 17, 1979

To the editor:

Chapter 3 in the saga of the Utah Curlew Sandpiper. I received a long letter from Tex Sordahl recently, in which he expressed his own afterthoughts about the Curlew Sandpiper, acknowledging the possibility of misidentification. However, he included another photograph of the bird with his letter. This

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photograph, though *not* diagnostic, bears considerable resemblance to a Curlew Sandpiper, enough so that I would not have bothered to write had it been the photograph published. I find it difficult to believe that it is a photograph of the same bird. Sordahl also claimed that he was very familiar with Wilson's Phalaropes because they breed in his study area.

These facts lend some credence to the Curlew Sandpiper record, though the evidence falls well short of adequate documentation for a state record. You might now include this acknowledgement that Sordahl may be correct. I still consider my initial letter an appropriate response to the article as published.

—Marshall A. Howe

Sept. 27, 1978

To the editor:

It is most interesting that D. W. Finch (*Am. Birds* 32:312) has seen juvenile Black-headed Gulls in Newfoundland, and he may well be correct in concluding that they were reared locally. However, it seems questionable whether "the evidence of breeding was unambiguous." By that date our birds, including some very clumsy juveniles, are spreading far and wide, and August is the month when this species is commonest at the central Atlantic weather ships. Since it colonised Iceland between the wars one bird banded there has been recovered in Greenland, and four in Newfoundland (F. Gudmundsson, *Proceedings X International Ornithological Congress*: 502-514, 1951; L. M. Tuck, *Bird Banding* 42: 184-209, 1971). It seems possible that Icelandic birds may have taken to passing through Newfoundland regularly on their way to new winter quarters in North America, where their arrival has been documented by A. J. Erskine (*A.F.N.* 17:336-338, 1963). It would appear from your pages that Lesser Black-backed Gulls, which colonised Iceland slightly

later, are now following the Black-headed, the Little Gull, which breeds in the centre of the Old World and winters at sea off southern Europe, presumably arrived in North America as a breeding species by an entirely different route, across the subtropical North Atlantic in the north-east trade-winds. It had less chance of returning home.

In view of the fact that breeding gulls are rather sensitive to disturbance, and considering what happened to the first breeding Little Gulls, may I enquire whether now that the site has been revealed any steps have been taken to protect these gulls from disturbance if they return to breed again? We can recommend them as acceptable immigrants.

—W. R. P. Bourne,

Dept. of Zoology, Univ. of Aberdeen,
Aberdeen, Scotland AB9 2TN.

July 28, 1978

To the editor:

I must take exception to your article, "The Tule Goose mystery — a problem in taxonomy," appearing in your excellent magazine, *March* 1978, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 164-166. The author, Mr. Bruce Krogman, writes that he undertook a research project "to investigate the question of whether there really is a Tule Goose," under the direction of his professor at the University of California at Berkeley, Professor A. Starker Leopold.

Mr. Krogman states that, quite properly for a taxonomic study, he first undertook a "literature search" in order "to weed out fact from fiction." This appears to be a correct procedure, and he cites the publication of Swarth and Bryant of 1917 discussing the subspecies of the White-fronted Goose, as well as a paper of Alfred M. Bailey of 1928 describing variations in eye ring color and number of tail feathers in birds from different parts of the

continent Mr Krogman then makes a statistical analysis of some 16 different body characteristics (not stating what these are), as well as an examination by eye in the field and among museum specimens, and states that there are indeed two different populations of White-fronteds in California, one larger and darker, and relatively uncommon, the other smaller and lighter colored and common.

All of this is all very well and substantiates what I myself believe. However, I must take exception to what I assume to be the author's taxonomic comment (?), that Swarth and Bryant "bestowed" upon the larger bird "the formal Latin name *Anser albifrons gambelli*, designating it a subspecies of the common White-fronted Goose." A cursory survey of the literature undertaken by the author, should have revealed that *Anser gambelli* was described by the German author, G. Hartlaub in 1852, and subsequently discussed by N. Kuroda in 1929, who examined the specimens in the Berlin museum, one of which was designated as a neotype (from Alvarado, Texas) by Dr. Stresemann, the Curator, as mentioned by Kuroda in his paper. Later the subspecies of the White-fronted Goose have been discussed by Todd in 1950, by Delacour in his publication, *The Waterfowl of the World* (1954), and still more recently, rather exhaustively (but somewhat inconclusively from a taxonomic point of view), by Ralph S. Palmer in *Handbook of North American Birds*, Vol. 2, 1976. That volume had gone to press by the time Dr J. Delacour and I published a "Description of a new Subspecies of the White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*" in *American Museum Novitates* (American Museum of Natural History, New York), No. 2565, February 5, 1975. Having determined that *gambelli* referred to intermediate-sized birds from the Central Flyway area of Canada and the United States, we named the larger wintering California population (which seems to number only some 1500

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birds), *elgasi*, after Mr Bob Elgas who has devoted so much time in recent years, along with Fish and Wildlife Service staff, in studying the Tule Goose. Hopefully, the latest experiments, using radiotransmitters attached to the wings of male *elgasi*, and attempting to track them on migration will solve the problem of their whereabouts during the nesting season. As Mr. Krogman correctly states, the Tule Goose is not only recognizable taxonomically, but in the field as well, separated from the commoner, smaller White-fronted by its ecological preferences. Nearly 10 per cent of the known wintering population appears to be shot during the winter goose hunting season in central California in an average year. If average life expectancy for the species in North America is about 4 years (*vide* Palmer, p. 107), the turn-over rate for a population of some 1500 birds, with an annual kill besides of up to 150 birds would mean that over 500 young must be reared each year to maintain stability only. Clutch size in the species ranges from 4-7 eggs, which would imply 33 1/3% clutch success based on an estimate of 300 adult nesting pairs in this population. It would be interesting to know what the average nest success expectancy of a high-Arctic species of goose should be?

In any case I feel that Mr. Krogman's browsing through the literature was somewhat cursory, and that his article in *American Birds* could have been far more exhaustive, and perhaps in the process more interesting.

—S. Dillon Ripley
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560

Dec. 29, 1978

To the editor:

In the September, 1978, issue of *Am. Birds* page 971, I read with more than passing interest, reference to, "The only reports of Red Crossbills nesting out of their normal ranges were at Evergreen and Fort Collins, Colorado." It may not be too well known, but Red Crossbills nest almost every year in some area around Evergreen. This has been true for the last thirty years.

A nest was found on the Evergreen CBC December 19, 1971, in Bergen Park, adjacent to Evergreen. A picture appeared in *Am. Birds* 26:467, 1972 of a female on a nest. Based on many field observations and actual nest sightings in the Evergreen area, I would regard Evergreen as part of the normal nesting range of the Red Crossbill.

—Winston William Brockner
5965 S. Herzman Drive
Evergreen, Colo. 80439

DETERMINING THE STATUS OF THE PIPING PLOVER ON THE GREAT LAKES: HELP NEEDED

As the status of the Piping Plover at its breeding areas on the Great Lakes becomes a matter of concern, the first surveys to determine the population size are being planned for 1979. The particular problem of this plover is that it nests on open beaches and therefore it is subject to human disturbance in densely populated areas. Nesting locations numbers are a small fraction of former numbers and at some of the present locations populations are declining.

I would appreciate hearing from anyone with knowledge of recent nesting locations (even possible ones) on any of the Great Lakes (or Great Lakes area). We will try to include any possible locations in this year's survey, and the records of locations and numbers are themselves important. Determining the numbers on the Great Lakes is the first step to protecting the population. Also, I would be glad to hear from anybody else who would like to survey part of the Great Lakes shoreline during the period mid-May to the end of June, 1979.

Please send reports to:

—Anne Lambert
483 Russell Hill Rd.
Toronto, Ont. M5P 2S8.
Phone — (416) 481-3087

INFORMATION ON WILLETS WANTED

Observers on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts are requested to be on the alert for color-marked Willets, especially from June through August. As part of a study of the breeding ecology, population dynamics, and movements of Willets, nearly 150 adults have been feather-dyed and/or color-banded over the past two years in the Chincoteague-Wallops Island area of Virginia. Many more will be marked this year. Sightings have already been reported from North Carolina, the Caribbean Sea, and northern South America. More sightings are needed to better document the migration routes of this species. If you should sight one of these birds, please note the date and place, the colors of dyes (if present), the parts of the body dyed, and, if possible, the sequence of leg-band colors. Incomplete or uncertain information should also be reported. I shall be most grateful for even the most fragmentary information. All reports will be personally acknowledged, and as much information as possible about the sighted bird will be provided. Please send reports of sightings to:

—Dr. Marshall A. Howe
Migratory Bird
and Habitat Research
Laboratory
Patuxent Wildlife Research Center
Laurel, Maryland 20811

ANNOUNCEMENT AND CALL FOR PAPERS

The Third Annual Meeting of the Colonial Waterbird Group will be held October 25-28 1979 at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette. Field trips to the Gulf Coast are planned, and a *Proceedings* will be published as in 1978 and 1979. For information on contributing papers, please contact P.A. Buckley, North Atlantic Regional Office National Park Service, 15 State Street, Boston Mass., U.S.A. 02109. Abstracts must be received by September 1. For information on registration, please contact D. McCrimmon, Laboratory of Ornithology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, U.S.A. 14853.

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