

First sightings of the Ruff in Peru

Frank Oatman, Manuel A. Plenge, and David Simon

THE RUFF (*Philomachus pugnax*), which breeds on northern tundra across Eurasia, is an irregular to casual migrant over much of North America. There are, however, many fewer records farther south in the New World, with only sporadic records in Bermuda, the Lesser Antilles, Trinidad, Guatemala, and Panama (A.O.U. Checklist 1957, Blake 1977, Bond 1971, Ridgely 1976, Stout 1967).

Therefore, two sets of observers were surprised to find Ruffs in the same area of coastal marshland near Pisco, Department of Ica, Peru. On July 18, 1976, at the marsh of Agua Santa, 8 km north of the Río Pisco, Plenge and Simon noticed a sandpiper brown in color and similar in size to a nearby Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) but appearing a bit bulkier, relatively short-billed, with short orange legs. It was observed at a distance of 75-100 m through a 20 x 60 telescope and through binoculars as it fed on a mudflat, allowing comparisons with nearby dowitchers (*Limnodromus* sp.) and Stilt Sandpipers (*Micropalama himantopus*). It was flushed twice.

Oatman and Robert Holbrook, unaware of this record, observed another (or possibly the same) winter-plumaged individual on March 3, 1977, in lagoons 2 km south of the mouth of the Río Pisco. It was feeding in a grassy salt flat and was found in a mixed flock of American Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis dominica*), Semipalmated Plovers (*Charadrius semipalmatus*), Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*), Ruddy Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*), Short-billed Dowitchers (*Limnodromus griseus*), Least Sandpipers (*Calidris minutilla*), and Pectoral Sandpipers (*Calidris melanotos*). The brownish bird was of about the same size as a Lesser Yellowlegs, with short orangish legs and a stout bill, yellow-orange at the base. The bird was studied as it fed actively in the wet, grassy vegetation and then was flushed. Observations were made through binoculars and a 20 x 60 zoom telescope at a distance of 20-60 m.

Both Oatman and Simon, who have each had extensive experience in Europe, recognized the birds as Ruffs, and all were aware that only one uncertain record existed for South America. Careful field notes were taken by both par-

ties while the birds were under observation.

Much later we compared notes and agreed that we could summarize the descriptions as follows: Bill straight, yellow-orange at the base with a dark tip, ca. 1/3 longer than the width of the head; bill relatively thick at the base in comparison to bills of Pectoral Sandpipers. Body size roughly that of a Lesser Yellowlegs, with shorter, orange legs. General color brown rather than gray, the crown slightly rusty, with very pale slight superciliary line. Entire upperparts a clear brown conspicuously scaled with pale edgings on the back, scapulars, and wing coverts. Below paler gray-brown indistinctly scaled or scalloped on foreneck and breast; throat light gray and unmarked; posterior underparts whitish. Eye dark. Wings appeared same length as tail when bird sitting, with a pale wing-bar visible in flight. Posture erect. Rump and tail dark brown, with the rump edged on either side by whitish patches conspicuous in flight.

The sightings were within a few kilometers of each other, although separated by over seven months in time. There were, however, some points of difference. Simon described the legs of the July bird as bright orange while Oatman recorded those of the March bird as pale orangish. Simon and Plenge considered their bird about equal in size to

a Greater Yellowlegs, while Oatman's and Holbrook's bird seemed approximately the size of a Lesser Yellowlegs, differences that suggest a male (Ruff) in July and a female (Reeve) in March. Oatman and Holbrook also noticed very fine and pale gray streaking on the breast, to about the level of the shoulder, underlying the faint scalloping.

These are the first records of this species for Peru and only the second and third for continental South America, the first being a specimen without data from Colombia (Hellmayr and Conover 1948: 208 footnote). A fourth record, for Venezuela was reported in *Am. Birds* 32(3):309-310, 1978.

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- Stone's Throw, Craftsbury, VT 05826 (Oatman), P.O. Box 2490, Lima 100, Perú (Plenge), 5005A Lynwood, Austin, TX (Simon).

First documented Panama record of Spotted Rail (*Pardirallus maculatus*)

Victor L. Emanuel

AT APPROXIMATELY 9 a.m., January 14, 1978, I spotted a green bill poking out of some ferns and other water vegetation growing in a ditch beside the Tocumen marsh, eastern Panama province, in Panama. The bill was attached to a black and white spotted head with a red eye. As I watched along with others who joined me, the bird walked out into the open followed by its small downy black chick. We noted its large size, black and white plumage and red eye.

We watched the birds for about 45 seconds before they disappeared back into the vegetation.

Returning to the marsh on January 21, 1978 we relocated the birds at the same spot at approximately 10 a.m. Recognizable but unreproducible photographs were then secured by Robert Krebs. A tape recording was made of the alarm call of the adult. Again we watched the birds for about 30 seconds.

The Spotted Rail (*Pardirallus macula-*

tus) is listed in Ridgely's *A Guide to the Birds of Panama* (1976), as hypothetical, based on Wetmore's observation of "a bird believed to be this species at Mandinga, San Blas, on January 22, 1957."

Thus, our observation constitutes the first documented observation of this species for the Republic of Panama and

the first breeding record for Panama. This fills in, not unexpectedly, part of a supposed gap in the range of the species, which had been recorded from Costa Rica and the upper Cauca valley of Colombia.

Others who saw the birds described above on both occasions included Ann Cullen, Ray and Betty Deur, Bob and

Juanita Krebs, Norm and Maggie Mellor, Mary Ann Neuses, Lee Oetzel, Roger Ridley, and John Rowlett.

The photographs of this bird were verified by Robert S. Ridgely, Kenneth C. Parkes, and Eugene Eisenmann.

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Communications

To the Editor:

About cuckoos and tent caterpillars, and logic in reference to your editorial comments in my article (*AB* 33(6):863). As an observable fact in years of great caterpillar outbreaks there are more cuckoos visible (if we use the word visible to include audible here also) than in other years, and I do believe that there are more of them present. Somehow the idea of a lot of cuckoos sitting silently and motionlessly around in the woods on non-caterpillar years while whooping it up in calling, and flying around all over in caterpillar years doesn't strike me as very likely.

I think that it's likely that there are indeed more birds present during the big years of outbreak, and that this follows from the nature of the caterpillar outbreaks. I must confess that I have not researched these outbreaks thoroughly and my opinions derive largely from watching two cycles and anticipating another this year or next. This is the way I see caterpillar outbreaks here in our area [West Virginia]. There will be years of only a few or maybe even no, caterpillars for a while. Then will come a year or maybe two in which numbers are very large. This will be followed by a year in which the numbers far exceed those previous large years. After this enormous year there is a die-off for some reason, and the following year may see practically no caterpillars. Then the cycle starts over. In other words we have a moderately fast build-up to a grand peak, and very abrupt decline. Now all geographical regions do not get the cycle at the same time. There is a north-south progression and a time lag of a year or two. Thus the cycle seems to have about a ten-year period, and while southern West Virginia may have had its peak this last year I expect one in northern West Virginia this year or next.

Now let's fit the cuckoos into this picture. As a result of the good preliminary years they have had reproductive success so there are numbers of them present in the boom year. Now your "logic" would say that that's all there is to it, but maybe there is more. In the boom year breeding would be even more successful and so in the year following the die-off there should be lots of birds around. Are these those silent motionless birds sitting around in the woods waiting for the cycle to repeat? I think that rather most of them would simply move farther north where the caterpillar populations are still good. So there would be more birds

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