

GREAT KNOT IN OREGON

by Nick Lethaby and Jeff Gilligan

A JUVENILE GREAT KNOT (*Calidris tenuirostris*) was located by Lethaby in a flock of Surfbirds (*Aphriza virgata*) and Black Turnstones (*Arenaria melanocephala*) September 1, 1990, on the north jetty of the Coquille River estuary, near the

town of Bandon, Coos County, Oregon. He took detailed notes on the bird in the next half hour, before meeting with other birders. Before the others could verify the sighting the bird flew off. No photographs had been obtained and only Lethaby had

seen the bird. The fear was that it had departed southward on the high tide.

After considerable effort, the bird was relocated on the mudflats at low tide about five hours later. The observers were familiar with the species within its Asian and Australian ranges, and had no doubt of the identification. Gilligan shot a roll of film on the bird, just before it flew some distance and out of sight. Fortunately, the Great Knot remained at Bandon until September 19, 1990, when it was last seen, and several others obtained photographs as well. Many birders from across the country were able to see it in those weeks.

The species breeds in Siberia and migrates to the Indian subcontinent, southeast Asia and Australasia. It occurs rarely in winter in New Zealand. Vagrants have been found in Morocco and Arabia (Hayman *et al.* 1986), and in Great Britain. It migrates casually in spring through southwestern and western Alaska (Shemya Island and Adak Island), in the Pribilof



Islands (St. Paul Island), on St Lawrence Island, and on the Seward Peninsula (American Ornithologists' Union 1983). In addition there are two reports from the Pacific coast of North America which we do not analyze here. The Bandon record represents the first record in print for North America away from Alaska which is verified by photographic evidence.

The species winters in large numbers in Australia, and is a powerful flier and long-distance migrant. Its occurrence on the west coast of the United States is not surprising.

DESCRIPTION

Size and build: A large, rather long-billed calidrid. It was slightly larger and bulkier than Red Knots and Surf-birds, which were in direct comparison at times. It was proportionally long-necked for a calidrid. Combined with very long wings, which projected well beyond the tail, the long-necked look gave the bird a gangling, elongated appearance.

Soft parts: The bill was very slightly decurved, and quite long by calidrid standards. It was dark in color. The legs were greenish, and very similar in color to the small group of juvenile Red Knots with which it occasionally associated.

Plumage: The forecrown, crown, nape, and hindneck were marked with heavy dark streaking. With the exception of a small dark patch at the base of the bill, the rest of the face was pale and unmarked. This patch caused the dark eye to stand out prominently, giving a facial expression somewhat reminiscent of Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) or Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*). The breast was heavily streaked gray-brown which tended toward blotching on the lower breast, and there was a sharp demarcation between the breast and the white belly. Dark blotches and streaks continued along the flanks to the sides of



the rump and the undertail coverts. The rest of the underparts were white. The upperparts were very distinctive. The mantle was heavily streaked gray-brown. The scapulars, coverts, and tertials all had broad pale edgings. When at rest, the bird sometimes showed a dark carpal patch reminiscent of a winter-plumage Sanderling (*Calidris alba*), which could also be seen in flight. There was a narrow white wingbar. The uppertail coverts were white, with much less marking than on a Red Knot. This could be seen while the bird was in flight and at times while it was preening or stretching. The tail was dark with a very thin white tip.

This is very distinctive species in juvenile plumage. However, this plumage is not well described in any of the standard North American field guides. An excellent description and illustration are found in *Shorebirds: An identification guide to the waders of the world*, by Hayman *et al* (1986). The only significant difference between the Bandon bird and the illustration is that our bird had a much less prominent dark eyeline.

In our view, a summary description for the identification of a juvenile Great Knot might be: crown and

nape heavily streaked, white rump narrower and much less marked than on Red Knot, only a vague impression of a supercilium or none at all, mantle dark with distinct whitish edges.

We thank Owen Schmidt and Jim Johnson for their helpful comments regarding this note.

Literature Cited

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