

Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*): a first for Mexico

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Abstract

This paper documents the first Mexican record of Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*) at Ensenada de La Paz, Baja California Sur and summarizes other New World records of the species.

Field Encounter

As part of a research program studying shorebirds at Ensenada de La Paz, Carmona, Galindo, and Sauma surveyed a stretch of Ensenada de La Paz biweekly from August 2001 to March 2003. The study area was an approximately 4-km length of tidal mudflat at Chametla-El Centenario, which is at the southern end of Ensenada de La Paz, which in turn is at the southern end of La Paz Bay. Due to the shallow slope, extensive muddy tidal flats are revealed at low tide (Fernández et al. 1998). This region, at the far southeastern corner of the Baja California Peninsula, is characterized by its aridity, with an annual

precipitation averaging 200 mm (García 1964).

On 11 April 2002, Galindo located a Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*; Figure 1) at Chametla-El Centenario. This bird was seen again during late May 2002. Presumably the same bird was relocated there on 21 August 2002 and was seen eleven more times before it was last recorded 10 February 2003. The Terek Sandpiper fed mostly in the intertidal zone, usually in mixed flocks of Semipalmated Plovers (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) and Western Sandpipers (*Calidris mauri*). On four occasions, it was observed roosting at the supralittoral zone, among a flock of Semipalmated Plovers. Throughout its stay, it appeared to be in good health, feeding and flying without apparent problems.

The following is a description of the Ensenada de La Paz Terek Sandpiper based on field notes and videotape by SGM from 29 January 2003 (archived at the San Diego Natural History Museum):

A medium-sized wader with very active feeding habits. Overall, its size was distinctly larger than that of nearby Semipalmated Plovers, but it seemed smaller than Lesser Yellowlegs [*Tringa flavipes*], which were not available for direct comparison. The back, nape, and crown were uniformly gray with a slight brownish cast. The folded wings were similar in color, but the lower edge, from lesser coverts to primaries, was darker, forming a dark line along the entire lower wing edge. This dark line curved upward and backward a short distance along the upper edge of the lesser coverts, in a manner reminiscent of juvenile Sanderling [*Calidris alba*]. The gray of the nape extended downward onto the side of the neck. The auriculars were gray. A narrow, dark eyeline extended behind the eye about the same distance as the loral length (i.e., the distance between the eye and the bill base). Above the eye was a white supercilium that extended back as far as the eyeline. This white supercilium met, or nearly met, above the bill. Often, there seemed to be a short, narrow dark upper border to the supercilium. While perched, the tail appeared gray with a white outer

edge. The wingtips extended backward to just reach the tip of the tail. The underparts were white and unmarked. The legs were extremely bright yellowish-orange. The length of the legs relative to the bird was shorter than that seen in most *Tringa* and approximated the proportions of a Spotted Sandpiper [*Actitis macularius*]. The bill was long and curved upward. Its length was 1.5 to 1.75 times that of the head. The bill was largely blackish, excepting a small area of bright orange at the base. Brief flight views revealed a thick white trailing edge to the secondaries that extended as a narrower whitish area onto the innermost several primaries. The rump and uppertail coverts were gray. The rectrices were gray with whitish barring on the outer portion of the outer web of each rectrix (which provided a whitish outer border to the tail as a whole). The Terek Sandpiper fed by dashing forward quickly and then picking food off the surface (or near the surface) of the mud (or wet indentations/shallow puddles). Occasionally, the bird appeared to probe. Indeed, the Terek was easy to spot at a distance with the naked eye because of this very active feeding style.

Discussion

The Ensenada de La Paz Terek Sandpiper provided Mexico's first record and was at a latitude consistent with the northern edge of this species' wintering range in Asia (Hayman et al. 1986). Other Western Hemisphere records also fit the latitudinal pattern of this species' Old World distribution: northerly records have mostly been during migration, whereas Southern Hemisphere and tropical records seem to pertain largely to wintering birds.

Terek Sandpiper breeds in northern Russia from the Scandinavian border east to the Kolyma River (north of the Kamchatka Peninsula) and winters from southern Africa eastward along the shores of the Indian Ocean to northern Australia (A.O.U. 1998). New World records have come mainly from Alaska, where the A.O.U. (1998) considered this species a regular migrant through the western Aleutians and a casual vagrant to St. Lawrence Island, the



Figure 1. Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*) at Ensenada de La Paz, Baja California Sur 29 January 2002. This individual is the first to be recorded in Mexico and only the ninth in the Americas away from Alaska. Photograph from digital videotape by Steven G. Mlodinow.

Seward Peninsula, and Anchorage. The species is also seen almost annually in the Pribilof Islands (D. Lovitch, *in litt.*) A review of recent records published in *North American Birds* and its predecessors (from summer 1992 through spring 2002) yielded the following Alaska records: nine records from 29 May through 12 June, two records from 8–27 July, and two records from 25 August–8 September. Only three of the above records were from the Aleutians. Six were from Gambell on St. Lawrence Island, two were from St. Paul Island, one was from the Seward Peninsula, and one was from Anchorage. Notably, the Anchorage record, 8–15 July 1998, was that area's seventh (Tobish 1998); Kessel (1989) listed only one other record for the Seward Peninsula.

Away from Alaska, there are only nine Western Hemisphere records prior to that from Mexico (Figure 2). Along the Pacific Coast, singles have been recorded at Sooke, Vancouver Island, British Columbia 21 July–6 August 1987 (Goodwill and Goodwill 1988) and Monterey County, California 28 August–23 September 1988 (Wil-

son and Harriman 1989). From interior North America, there is a single record from Churchill, Manitoba 13 July 1972 (A.O.U. 1998; *Birding* 5: 11–12); the immediate coastline of eastern North America also has but one record, at Plum Island, Massachusetts 23 June 1990 (Stemple et al. 1991). In the Caribbean and mainland South America, reports of single Tereks come from Trinidad and Tobago 29 June 1999 (Taylor 2001), from Barbados 1 May 2000 (ph. E. Massiah), from Porto Seguro,

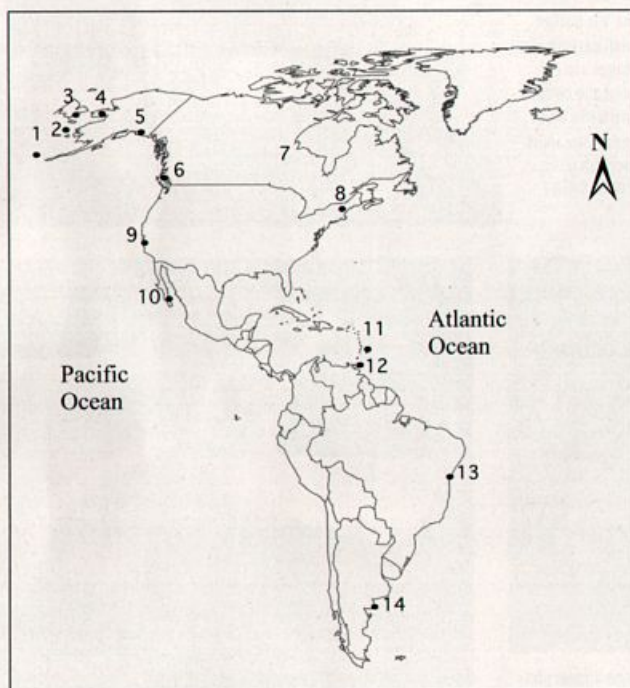


Figure 2. Locations of Terek Sandpiper records from Americas: (1) Aleutian Islands, (2) St. Paul Island, (3) St. Lawrence Island, (4) Seward Peninsula, (5) Anchorage, (6) British Columbia, (7) Manitoba, (8) Massachusetts, (9) California, (10) La Paz, (11) Barbados, (12) Trinidad and Tobago, (13) Brazil, and (14) Argentina.

Bahia, Brazil 16 March 1997 (Mazar Barnett 1997), and in Argentina from Punta Rasa, Buenos Aires province December 1987–January 1988 and from Saladillo, Buenos Aires province in December 1990 (Mazar Barnett and Pearman 2001).

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