

NOTES

A RUFOUS-NECKED SANDPIPER IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

GUY McCASKIE, San Diego Natural History Museum, P. O. Box 1390, San Diego, California 92112

On 17 August 1974, while enjoying a day in the field with Jon Dunn, Philip Unitt and John Butler, I discovered a Rufous-necked Sandpiper (*Calidris ruficollis*) feeding with other small shorebirds at the south end of the Salton Sea, Imperial County, California. The exact location was at the mouth of the Alamo River about 1 km east of the Red Hill Marina, and the birds with which it was associating were Least (*C. minutilla*) and Western (*C. mauri*) sandpipers. Since the bird was in non-breeding plumage, some comments on its appearance and actions are in order.

When first noticed the Rufous-necked Sandpiper was feeding with Western Sandpipers in shallow water some 50 m out from the shore. I was initially attracted by its very short bill and small headed appearance, so considered it a possible Semipalmated Sandpiper (*C. pusilla*). The bird looked slightly smaller than the Western Sandpipers, and when it moved onto the mudflats it picked at the surface, rather than probing like a Western Sandpiper, supporting this identification. However, the bill appeared thin and delicate, rather than heavy and thick based, casting some doubt on the initial identification.

As we were discussing the identification of the sandpiper, the bird in question got up and flew off alone to a stretch of shore about 100 m from us. By using the car as a blind, we were able to approach to within 5 m as it fed along the water's

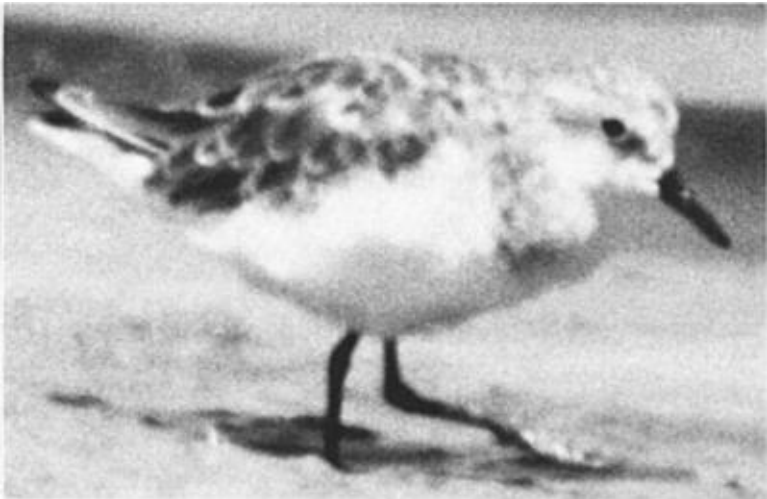


Figure 1. Rufous-necked Sandpiper found at the south end of the Salton Sea, California on 17 August 1974. The short, relatively slender, bill is apparent. The lack of partial webbing between the toes is not evident in the picture, but was noted on occasions in the field.

Photo by John Butler

NOTES

edge. I was most interested in studying the bird's feet, for Rufous-necked Sandpiper was now being seriously considered. At first it appeared there was partial webbing between the toes, but this was evidently due to mud on the feet, and it soon became evident no webbing was present. At this time we concluded the bird was indeed *ruficollis*, believing the Little Stint (*C. minuta*) unlikely on the basis of range.

In coloration the Rufous-necked Sandpiper closely resembled the adult Western Sandpipers. The back looked gray with conspicuous scaling, a result of pale edgings to the feathers, and the presence of a few rusty edgings on the scapulars was evident at close range. The gray coloration extended up the nape to the crown, but became paler, merging into the white of the forehead. The face was mostly white, but a dusky mark extended from just in front of the eye, through the eye, and back over the ear coverts. The underparts were mostly white, but light gray covered the sides of the breast, forming a partial wash across the breast. The bill, legs, and feet were black, matching those of the Western Sandpiper. In flight the Rufous-necked Sandpiper showed a pattern like that of a Western Sandpiper; however, the white wing-stripe was more prominent, and the scaling on the back was visible.

We kept the sandpiper under observation for about two hours. It fed actively at all times, and aggressively chased nearby Western Sandpipers on three or four occasions. As far as could be determined the bird remained silent throughout the period. A gun was borrowed from Stephen Vehrs, Refuge Manager at the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge, and the bird was collected. The specimen is now No. 38887 at the San Diego Natural History Museum. It proved to be an adult



Figure 2. A molting adult Semipalmated Sandpiper at Bar Harbor, Maine, on 18 August 1974. The bird very closely resembles the Rufous-necked Sandpiper. However, the bill is heavier with a thicker base, and the semipalmation is visible between the toes.

Photo by Will Russell

NOTES

male, weight 20.4 g, and was molting wing feathers. Dr. Joseph R. Jehl, Jr. has examined the specimen and concurs with the identification.

A Rufous-necked Sandpiper in breeding plumage photographed (slide on file at San Diego Natural History Museum) at Crescent City, Del Norte County, on 18 June 1974 (Stallcup and Greenberg 1974) was the first recorded in California, and one photographed at Ashtabula, Ohio on 21 July 1962 (Ahlquist 1964) appears to be the only other individual found in North America outside Alaska.

The Rufous-necked Sandpiper is a breeding bird of northeastern Siberia, migrating to southeast Asia and Australia for the winter (Dement'ev et al. 1951). In Alaska it is known to nest at the western extreme of the Seward Peninsula (Gabrielson and Lincoln 1959, Gibson 1968, Gibson and Byrd 1974b), and has also been found in summer on the north coast at Wainwright (Bailey 1924) and Point Barrow (Gibson and MacDonald 1971; Gibson and Byrd 1972a, 1972b, 1973). Migrants have been found on St. Lawrence Island (Gibson and Byrd 1972b, 1974b), St. Paul Island (Swarth 1927), and on the Aleutian Chain at Adak (Gibson and MacDonald 1971), Buldir (Gibson and Byrd 1974a, 1974b) and Agattu (Gibson and Byrd, 1974a, 1974b) islands. Since the Rufous-necked Sandpiper is a long distance migrant with a tendency to wander (Wallace 1974), additional birds should be looked for along the Pacific Coast of North America.

LITERATURE CITED

- Ahlquist, J. 1964. Rufous-necked Sandpiper, *Erolia ruficollis*, in northeastern Ohio. *Auk* 81:432-433.
- Bailey, A. M. 1924. Four species new to North America. *Condor* 26:195.
- Dement'ev, G. P., N. A. Gladkov and E. P. Spangenberg, eds. 1951. Birds of the Soviet Union, vol. 3. English translation by A. Birron, Z. S. Cole and E. D. Gordon, Israel Program for Scientific Translations, Jerusalem. 1969.
- Gabrielson, I. N. and F. C. Lincoln. 1959. Birds of Alaska. Stackpole Co., Harrisburg, Penn. and Wildl. Manag. Inst., Washington, D.C.
- Gibson, D. D. 1968. Nesting season. Alaska region. *Aud. Field Notes* 22:636-638.
- Gibson, D. D. and G. V. Byrd. 1972a. The spring migration. Alaska region. *Am. Birds* 26:795-797.
- Gibson, D. D. and G. V. Byrd. 1972b. The nesting season. Alaska region. *Am. Birds* 26:890-893.
- Gibson, D. D. and G. V. Byrd. 1973. The nesting season. Alaska region. *Am. Birds* 27:905-907.
- Gibson, D. D. and G. V. Byrd. 1974a. The spring migration. Alaska region. *Am. Birds* 28:838-840.
- Gibson, D. D. and G. V. Byrd. 1974b. The nesting season. Alaska region. *Am. Birds* 28:935-938.
- Gibson, D. D. and S. O. MacDonald. 1971. The nesting season. Alaska region. *Am. Birds* 25:893-895.
- Stallcup, R. and R. Greenberg. 1974. The nesting season. Middle Pacific Coast region. *Am. Birds* 28:943-947.
- Swarth, H. S. 1927. The Rufous-necked Sandpiper on St. Paul, Pribilof Islands. *Condor* 29:200-201.
- Wallace, D. I. M. 1974. Field identification of small species in the genus *Calidris*. *British Birds* 67:1-17.