
Second record of a Bristle-thighed Curlew from Asia and first record for the former Soviet Union

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INTRODUCTION

The Bristle-thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*) breeds in restricted mountainous regions of western Alaska and winters on islands and atolls of the central and south Pacific (A.O.U. 1983; Kessel 1989). On 21 May 1989, a color-banded Bristle-thighed Curlew was observed by Konyukhov near the Soviet village of Sireniki on the Chukotka Peninsula (64° 24'N 173° 55'W). The bird was observed on a grassy slope for several hours, frequently flying short distances. Eventually, it flew to the east along the coast, and was not seen again. This sighting represents the first record of the species for the Soviet Union and only the second record for Asia (Yamashina 1974; A.O.U. 1983; Stepanyan 1990).

Based on Konyukhov's descriptions of the color-band combination, the curlew was banded at its nest by McCaffery on 21 June 1988 at Curlew Lake, Alaska (62° 21'N 163° 30'W). She was last seen on 25 June 1988 incubating her 3-egg clutch. Her mate remained at Curlew Lake until 2 July tending a single chick from the pair's nest. The banded female did not return to the Curlew Lake breeding grounds in 1989 or 1990, but her mate did both years.

A severe spring storm on the Chukotka Peninsula from 20–22 May 1989 with heavy snow and strong east winds may have caused the curlew to drift west of the normal trans-Pacific migration route to its western Alaskan breeding grounds, 400–600 km ESE of Sireniki. The virtual absence of previous records from

the mainlands of North America and Asia (Yamashina 1974; Roberson 1980; Stepanyan 1990) suggest a remarkable homing ability in the species, particularly since 1) the flights originate throughout the central South Pacific over a 75° span of longitude (8,300 km); 2) the majority of birds converge on two isolated sites in Alaska following a nonstop flight of 4,000–6,000 km; and 3) severe storms likely to alter the migration of curlews are not uncommon in the Bering Sea each spring (Brower *et al.* 1988).

The possibility that small numbers of Bristle-thighed Curlews breed at least intermittently on the Chukotka Peninsula cannot be ruled out. A young male was collected on western St. Lawrence Island on 24 August 1957, and 3 curlews of questionable identity were seen in the same area during the proceeding 2 weeks (Fay and Cade 1959). Two Bristle-thighed Curlews were seen on August 29, 1987 on the western coast of St. Lawrence (63° 24' N, 171° 49' W) (J.F. Piatt, pers. comm.). This is less than 130 km southeast of the Chukotka Peninsula, but 380 km west of the nearest Alaska breeding grounds and over 350 km northwest of the central Yukon Delta, where most Bristle-thighed Curlews stage each August (Handel and Dau 1988). If small numbers of Bristle-thighed Curlews do indeed breed in Siberia, their status there may be comparable to that of some Palearctic shorebirds in North America, such as Rufous-necked Stints *Calidris ruficollis* and Curlew Sandpipers *C. ferruginea*, which normally breed west of Bering Strait, but are very rare, occasional breeders in Alaska (Jessel & Gibson 1978).

