Short communications

Underwater flight of Terek Sandpiper

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Observations I made in 2002 add Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* to the list of wader species that occasionally dive underwater to escape danger (see Minton 2001 which stimulated the reporting of several such observations in *Wader Study Group Bull.* 97). On 2 August 2002, a colleague and I were observing birds and collecting some of them by permit for research purposes at Piltun Bay, NE Sakhalin Island, Russian Far East (52°37'N, 143°10'E). As a result of shooting, a Terek Sandpiper took flight, but after flying 15 m it turned sharply and dropped onto the shallow water of the bay close to the shore. It then started to swim away from us quickly and easily. The substrate was hard sand and the water only 30 cm deep and I was able to wade out and catch up with the bird without difficulty.

At my first attempt to catch it by hand, the bird evaded and swam away, but when I reached it again, it surprised me by diving and swimming underwater. Because of the pale sand of the bottom and clear water it was easy to see how the bird behaved as it swam underwater. It reminded me of slow flight with energetic beats with half-bent wings. Its tail was fanned and legs stretched back, both probably functioning as a rudder. This observation was so unusual and interesting that we followed the bird, forcing it to dive again and again. Each time it swam 3–5 m underwater; then, after appearing on the surface for a moment, it dived again. During these brief emergences on the surface, it seemed that the bird was able not only to breathe, but also to evaluate the situation around. Depending on its distance from a person, the bird dived just once or in a series of 2–6 consecutive dives. Judging from sharp changes of direction and turning away when an observer approached closely, it seemed that the bird was able to see movements and to take its bearings while underwater.

It was clearly seen that, in the first few moments after the bird dived, its whole body was covered with a thin layer of air that gradually dispersed, leaving a trail of air bubbles coming to the surface. The underwater flight took place 5–15 cm below the surface, and during maximum immersion, sand on the bottom was disturbed by the wing beats. All the time, the bird's legs were stretched out behind, and it never tried to push itself off or touch the bottom with its legs while underwater. In total, the bird swam underwater for at least 50 m while we made these observations and took some photographs (Fig. 1).

The bird was caught when it started to move towards deeper water, but was not easier to catch then than at the very beginning. We could not see any sign that the bird was tired. Therefore, after several unsuccessful attempts, we had to play a trick in order to catch it. We noticed that, despite its long underwater swim, its plumage was still dry and water drops simply rolled off it, as from a duck. Careful examination of the bird did not reveal any external or internal damage, so we were puzzled as to the reason why it did not fly away. It turned out to be an adult female. It was well-fed, without any active moult.

Fig. 1. Photos of a Terek Sandpiper swimming underwater at Piltun Bay, Sakhalin Island, Russia, 2 August 2002.

Minton, C. 2001. Waders diving and swimming underwater as a means of escape. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 96: 86.

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A Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima* nest with seven eggs

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As with many northern waders, the Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima* has a modal clutch size of four eggs (Cramp & Simmons 1983). Here, we describe the circumstances that led to an egg-set of seven eggs (Fig. 1). The observations were made on the Melrakkaslétta, a peninsula in northeast Iceland. It was in the diffuse coastal colonies of Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* at Melrakkaas, Ásmundarstadir and Hraunhafnurtangi that we studied nesting Purple Sandpipers.