

A record Curlew *Numenius arquata*

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It is well-known that Curlews *Numenius arquata*, like many other Scolopacidae, show a marked sexual dimorphism, with females being much larger than males (e.g. Cramp & Simmons 1983). Curlews breeding in Europe are smaller on average than Curlews breeding further east. The latter are usually separated as *N. a orientalis*. Bill length accounts for most of the intersexual variability (10-30% on average; Engelmoer & Roselaar 1998), while bill length clinally increases eastwards, with c. 2 mm per 10 longitude in males, and c. 3 mm in females (Cramp & Simmons 1983). Thus, the largest - and heaviest - Curlews are found in Central and East Siberia.

During a project on waders and other waterbirds in Kneiss, Tunisia, in late winter 1994 (van der Have *et al.* 1997) 19 Curlews were captured in mist-nets between 10-16 February (Zenatello *et al.* 1997). One of these, an adult female caught on the 10th (photo; ring number Museum Tunis D1951), was exceptionally heavy: 1527 gram! As far as we know, this is the heaviest Curlew ever handled. It was even heavier than the heaviest - Far Eastern Curlew *N. madagascariensis* (Higgins & Davies 1996, Piersma *et al.* 1996). Although this extraordinary individual had the longest bill and tarsus of all 19 Curlews captured, it did not have the longest wing (wing 315 mm, bill 187 mm, tarsus 98.7 mm; Figure 1). The bird combined white axillaries with a uniformly patterned inner vane of the outermost functional primary (p10), typical for Curlews of eastern origin (cf Prater *et al.* 1977). Three other birds checked for colour and pattern on the inner vane of p10 showed the same characters, although these were much smaller. Among the other Curlews, four were identified as *N. a. arquata*, while two showed intermediate characters. Although it is believed that Curlews of eastern origin migrate through the Mediterranean (because they spend the winter in western Africa; Wymenga *et al.* 1990), this was never proven. Therefore, the enormous individual depicted here can probably be considered as the first proof of

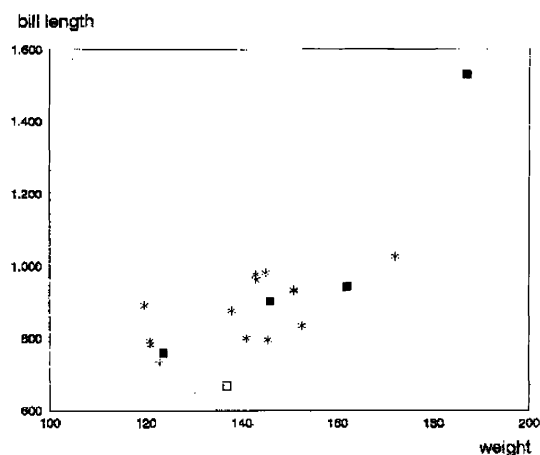


Figure 1. Bill length (in mm) as a function of body mass (in g) of Curlews *Numenius arquata* captured in Kneiss, Tunisia, in winter 1994. Solid square = birds with (mainly) white axillaries and uniform inner vane of p10, open square = a second calendar year bird, asterisk = other individuals.

Curlews of far eastern origin wintering in the Mediterranean basin.

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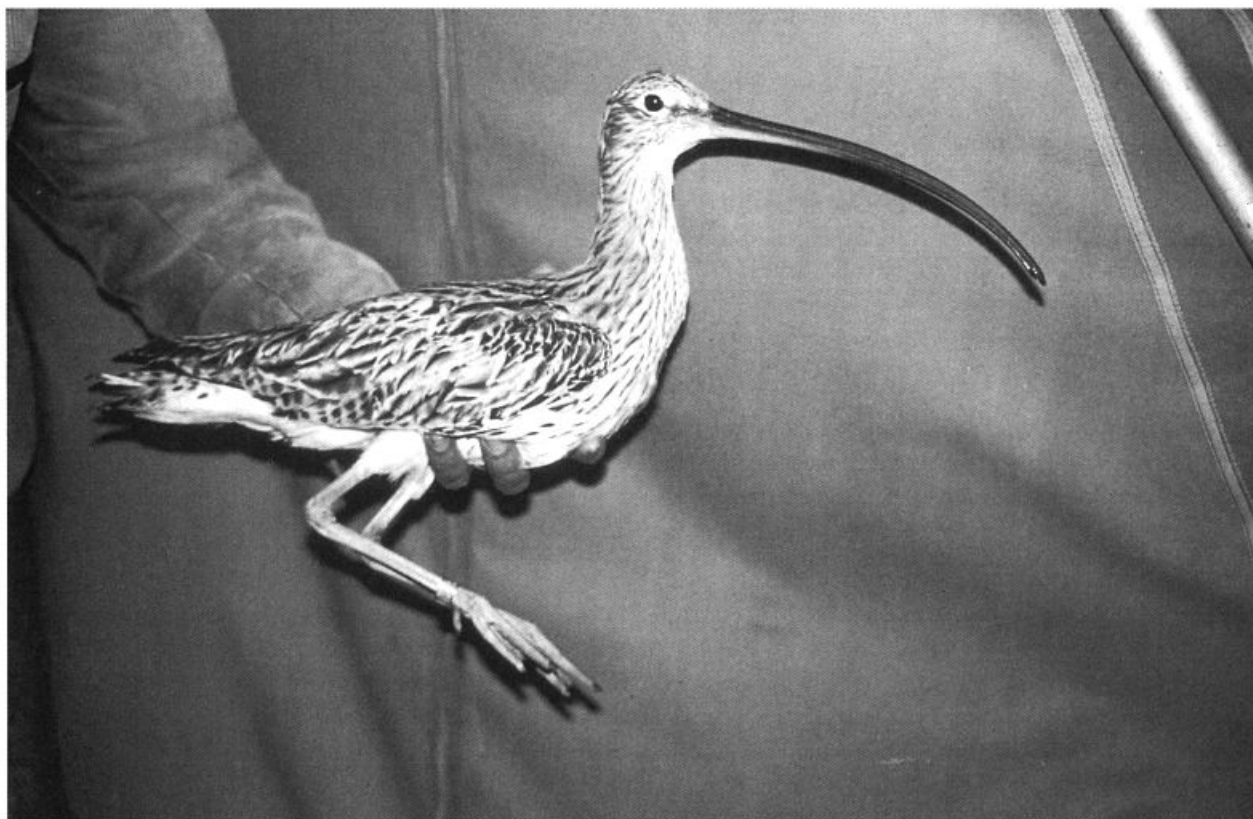
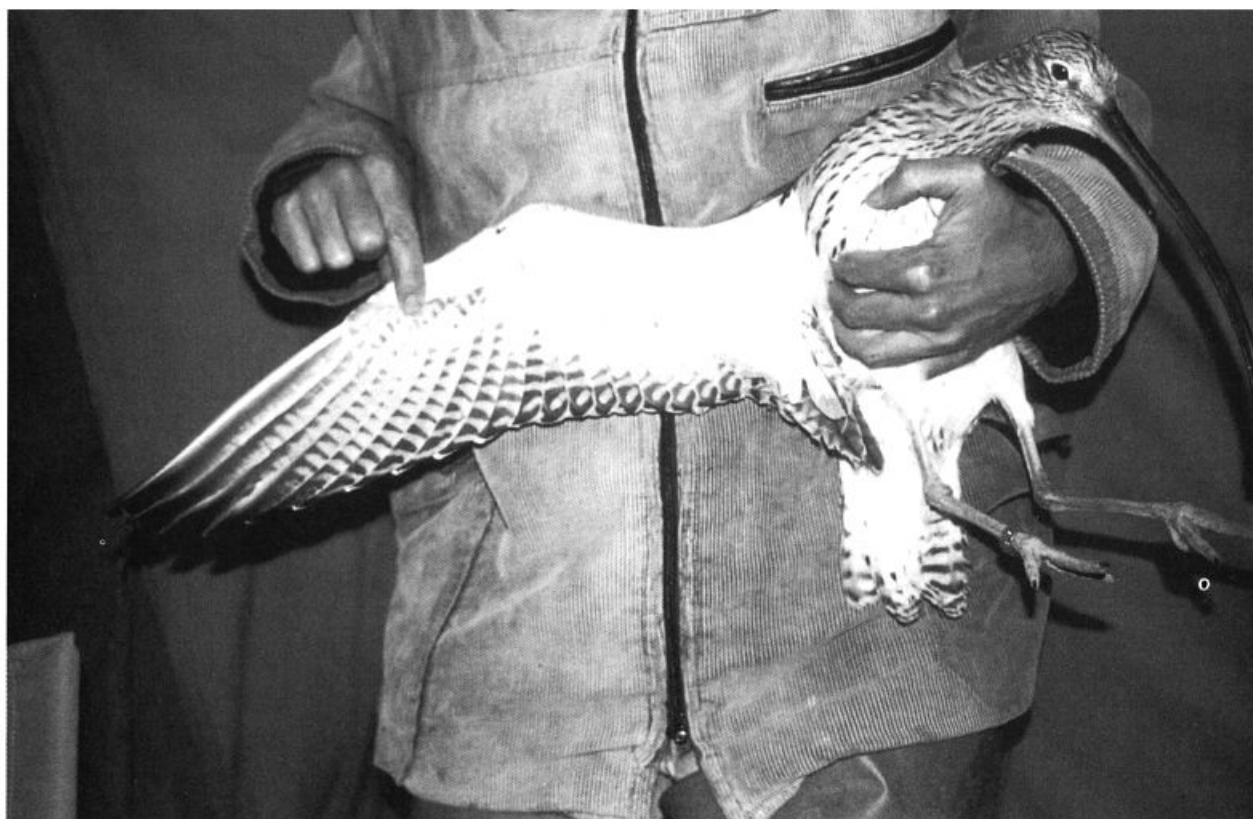


Photo: Adult female Curlew *N. a. orientalis*, captured 10 February 1994, Kneiss, Tunisia. Note uniform white axillaries, uniform inner vane of the outermost primary, and very long bill. (Photo by Paul Reuters).



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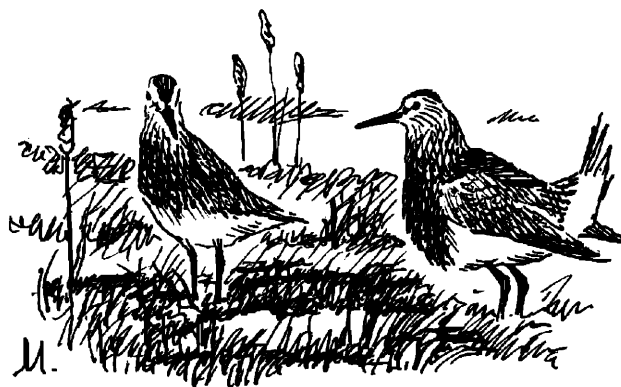


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