

Assuming we can all learn from mistakes (less painfully if someone else makes the error), I shall recount the story behind the October photo. I photographed these birds in Florida in November, for it was the first time I had seen White-rumped Sandpipers on the Gulf Coast. Showing the slides to my mentors at MAS, I described the field marks that I remembered: the elongated body, flecks along the flanks, a white eyebrow, faint wing stripe, and a whitish rump seen in flight; so I let myself in for the drill. HOW BIG? A large hand-spread, 8-9 inches. BILL? Black and sturdy. DID THE TIP DROOP? How should I know? The birds were feeding and I was filming. LEG COLOR? Well, darkish; I often have a problem with leg color. As I then examined my slides closely, I realized that the birds, bodies and necks stretched out feeding, looked elongated but were really rather dumpy and probably thick-necked. And, final disgrace, the wing-tips did not really extend beyond the tail. I then recalled how readily I had identified the birds, immediately rushing for my camera to record them. Taking notes or making a field sketch rather than letting the camera do the observing would have forced me to examine them more carefully. People walking the beach had asked what I was "shooting," and I had confidently replied: "White-rumped Sandpipers."

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPERS? NO! THESE ARE KNOT!

So, why are they knot? To explain this, I sought the help of a master shorebirder, Wayne Petersen. The pictured birds are obviously not plovers. Nor are they peep: the legs are too stout, the necks thick, and the bodies dumpy. The bills are strong and straight as far as can be seen in the picture. We cannot judge the full length of the bill or the nature of the tip. Might these birds be Dunlin or dowitchers? The forward stretch of the neck and the angle of the bill are unlike the vertical alignment of the bill in feeding Dunlin and dows, and the barring on the tail (just visible in the middle bird) eliminates Dunlin from consideration.

What can we discern from this unsatisfactory photo? An undistinguished shorebird with short, heavy legs, a dumpy body and thick neck. The body configuration and short strong legs suggest a medium-sized bird, not a peep. The bill is black and heavy and seems to taper very little. The legs are not black (compare them with the bill). There is a prominent white supercilium and a scaled appearance to the back feathers, seen in the bird on the left. One behavioral clue is apparent: the birds are feeding close together, and the student of ethology might deduce something from that. The rule of thumb of an "old hand" will serve to sum up this identification problem. To wit: if you see a shorebird so nondescript that you can only decide what it is not, chances are, it's a knot!

D. R. Arvidson

PRIZE TO BE AWARDED: National Geographic Society Field Guide

AND THE WINNER IS

At a Glance . . .



Photo by L. H. Walkinshaw

Courtesy of Massachusetts Audubon Society

Can you identify this bird? Identification will be discussed in next issue's *At a Glance*. *Bird Observer* will award a PRIZE to the reader who submits the most correct answers in 1983. Please send your entry on a postcard to Bird Observer, 462 Trapelo Road, Belmont, MA 02178 before the answer is published in the next issue.



**PURE
SEED
BIRD
FEED.**
A Better Way to Feed Birds

Let us show you how to attract a greater variety of birds, feed them better and have it cost no more.

Send Your Name: _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Find Out
Why Birds Love It.

 **Bird'n Hand** Box 801, New Ipswich, New Hampshire 03071