

STATUS OF THE CURLEW SANDPIPER IN MASSACHUSETTS

by George W. Gove

According to Cramp et al. (1983), the breeding range of the Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*) extends along the high-arctic, lowland-coastal belt of Northern Siberia. The wintering range is continental Africa and coastally east to Australia and New Zealand. Terres (1980) describes two instances of nesting of the Curlew Sandpiper in North America, both near Barrow, Alaska. In June 1962, nests of two pairs were found, one with three eggs. All eggs in both nests eventually disappeared, taken, it was thought, by marauding Long-tailed and Parasitic jaegers. The second nesting was recorded during the period of July 7-14, 1972. Seven nests were found, of which two, and possibly six, fledged young.

Bull (1964) noted that the Curlew Sandpiper is a rare but regular visitor to the east coast of the United States and offered the following hypothesis to explain its occurrence here. Bull proposed that the species may migrate in the fall in an easterly or southeasterly direction from Siberia to Alaska and Canada, eventually reaching the East Coast. This is the route taken by such birds as the Long-billed Dowitcher, the Western Sandpiper, and the Buff-breasted Sandpiper. However, Nisbet has speculated that individuals of the species occurring here make a direct east-west crossing from Europe to North America during migration. Eisenmann has proposed that this species, like the Ruff, is carried across the tropical Atlantic by cyclonic storms or hurricanes while en route to Africa during the fall migration. It would then be seen in spring when it came north from Central and South America with other shorebirds.

Bailey (1955) states that the Curlew Sandpiper was of almost annual occurrence in Massachusetts from 1940 to 1954, the most likely times for its appearance being late May through early June and August through September.

In an article dealing with unusual shorebirds in Massachusetts, Petersen (1974) discusses the status of Curlew Sandpiper, noting that it is a rare but regular visitor. Donahue (1974) noted that Curlew Sandpipers were so regular on Plymouth Beach that it suggested the possibility of the same bird returning each year.

The present article updates the status of Curlew Sandpiper in Massachusetts on the basis of field records and notes appearing in *Bird Observer* since 1973 and covering the period since 1970.

The accompanying table shows all the records of Curlew Sandpiper that have appeared in *Bird Observer* from 1970 to May 1987. The records are presented as the number of individuals found at a particular location, followed in parentheses by the range of dates over which the individual was reported; for

example, 1 (May 17) indicates that one individual was seen on the seventeenth of May. The dates are separated by dashes where more than one consecutive day is involved, and these may extend into subsequent months. More than one line of data in one month of a year indicates more than one report for that month and year. For example, there were two reports for May of 1984, each of one individual.

At the bottom of the table, the total number of individuals for each month is given. If an individual was present from one month into another, it is counted separately in each month. The last row gives the number of bird-days in which Curlew Sandpipers were present. This is arrived at by multiplying the number of birds by the number of days the bird was present in a given month and then summing these numbers for each month. This number, bird-days, is an indication of the relative frequency of occurrence of Curlew Sandpiper in Massachusetts for a particular month.

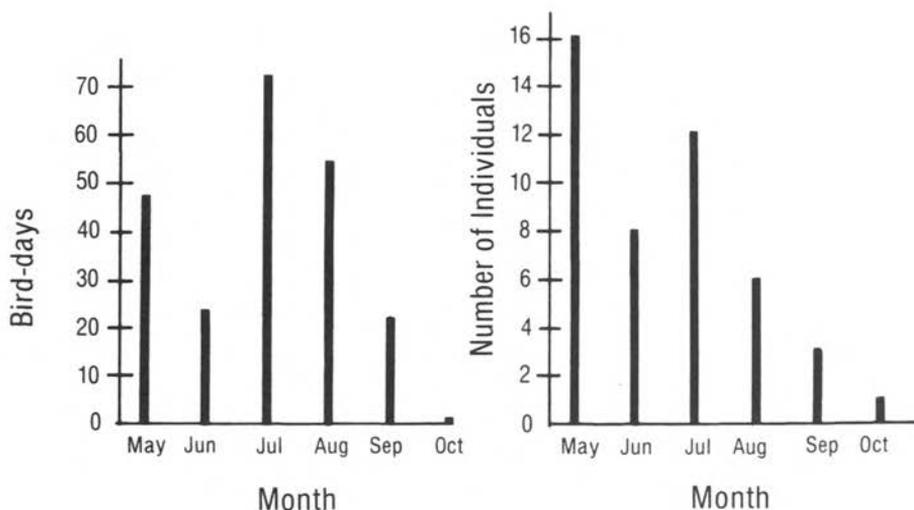
Records of Curlew Sandpiper since 1970

YEAR	MONTH					
	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT
1970	---	1 (Jun 8-15)	---	---	---	---
1971	---	---	---	---	---	---
1972	1 (May 17)	1 (Jun 11)	---	---	---	---
1973	1 (May 30)	---	---	---	---	---
	1 (May 29 through Jun 2)	---	---	---	---	---
1974	1 (May 15)	---	1 (Jul 5)	1 (Aug 1-13)	---	1 (Oct 13)
	1 (May 21)	---	1 (Jul 11-16)	---	---	---
	1 (May 12-15)	---	1 (Jul 27)	---	---	---
1975	---	---	1 (Jul 26-29)	1 (Aug 28)	---	---
1976	---	1 (Jun 15-20)	1 (Jul 9 ...	through ...	1 (Aug 13-19)	---
1977	1 (May 28)	---	1 (Jul 14 through Aug 4)	---	---	---
1978	1 (May 18-20)	---	---	---	---	---
1979	---	---	---	1 (Aug 4-5)	---	---
1980	1 (May 16-19)	1 (Jun 3)	1 (Jul 22)	---	---	---
	1-2 (May 23-28)	---	---	---	---	---
1981	1 (May 16-26)	---	---	---	1 (Sep 13)	---
1982	---	---	---	---	---	---
1983	---	1 (Jun 10)	---	---	---	---
	---	1 (Jun 29 through Jul 2)	---	---	---	---
1984	1 (May 27-28)	1 (Jun 13-14)	1 (Jul 14)	---	---	---
	1 (May 28)	---	1 (Jul 22)	---	---	---
	---	---	1 (Jul 22 through Aug 3)	---	---	---
1985	---	---	1 (Jul 27-30)	---	1 (Sep 21-22)	---
1986	1 (May 25-26)	---	---	---	---	---
1987	1 (May 19-22)	---	---	---	---	---
Total individuals	16	8	12	6	3	1
Bird-days	46	23	72	54	22	1

These sums, the total individuals present in a month and the bird-days, are plotted on the accompanying bar graphs to represent graphically the species' occurrence in Massachusetts. From these, it can be seen that the most individuals appear during spring migration in May and June and in July during the beginning of fall migration for shorebirds or, more precisely, the postbreeding migration. The fall migration period shows the higher total bird-days. The latter may be expected. In the spring, birds do not delay in getting to the breeding areas; whereas in the fall, birds, especially juveniles, tend to linger on their migratory journey to the wintering areas. This may account for the higher number of bird-days during that season.

Note that all the records are in the months of May through October. The earliest date for Curlew Sandpiper in *Bird Observer* records is May 12 and the latest date is October 13. Bailey (1955) gives a late fall date of October 31 and also has a record of January 1, 1950, of a bird found during a Christmas Count. Note also that only one of the records presented here involved more than a single individual. During the period May 23-28, 1980, two birds of this species, both in breeding (alternate) plumage, were seen on at least one occasion in Newburyport Harbor.

Bird-days and Numbers of Curlew Sandpipers per month, 1970-1987



In summary, the Curlew Sandpiper is most apt to arrive in Massachusetts in May and in July. The species tends to linger longest in July and August. These would be the most productive times to look for the species.

The most favored locations to find Curlew Sandpiper are, of course, coastal locations, specifically Newburyport-Plum Island, and Outer Cape Cod, including Monomoy. Other locations where the species has been found more than once include Quincy, Plymouth Beach, and Nantucket. One could expect to find them in other similar and suitable coastal habitats. In addition, one should not overlook inland or locations near the coast. The September 1985 record was of a juvenile at Ipswich feeding in a pasture with Pectoral Sandpipers and Black-bellied Plovers.

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GEORGE W. GOVE joined the records staff of *Bird Observer* in 1981. This report on the Curlew Sandpiper reflects his long-standing interest in shorebirds combined with his experience as a records compiler and his facility with computers. Formerly a resident of Winchester and now living in Ashland, parent of two and grandsire of two, George has had a long career as an environmental biologist and at present works as a technical writer for Prime Computer.

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