

FIELD NOTES: BIRDS OF THE SEASON _____

Bird Observer is pleased to present the following reports of rarities because they demonstrate the value of written field notes—words and phrases jotted down by the observer on the spot or written within immediate memory of the event. This subject has been the theme of repeated editorial comment in this journal. Such written notes, promptly submitted, may be critical in confirming a sighting and may constitute the only record available to committees on rarities or to anyone seeking at some point in the future to learn about the occurrence of the species.

The Terek Sandpiper sighting is a fortuitous example. This bird was in view barely twenty minutes and was observed by only four persons. There was no specimen taken, no photograph, no videotape. There was no time to gather the troops. But thanks to the birding habits and initiative of Dave Stemple, who discovered and recognized this rarity, written reports were submitted promptly by Dave and three independent viewers who happened by at the critical time. The identification must stand or fall on the objectivity and consistency of these reports. This was the first Massachusetts sighting of Terek Sandpiper and constitutes a candidate for the third record of this species in North America outside of Alaska. Is this a valid record? Here is the evidence. What do you think?

Ian Lynch's written report of the White-faced Ibis sighting precisely states the significant field marks to support the identification of the species. It also demonstrates why a telephone call is not an acceptable archival record.

Kyle Jones' belated report of the Sandhill Crane is remarkable for obvious reasons.

Dorothy R. Arvidson

TEREK SANDPIPER AT PLUM ISLAND, JUNE 23, 1990

David Stemple, Hatfield.

At around 3:15 P.M. on the twenty-third of June 1990, I drove to the salt pans at the north end of the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge and parked at the north end of the largest pond, where there is space for parking. Almost immediately I noticed two shorebirds moving actively at the near edge of the water, about forty feet away from me. The first one I looked at was a Wilson's Phalarope, a female I think, though the subsequent moments blur my memory of this bird. The second bird was lighter in tone and slightly smaller, though perhaps as long since the bill was much longer than the phalarope's. The legs looked reddish at first glance, but then I decided they were yellow orange. I quickly decided that the bird was a Terek Sandpiper, a species that I had seen about ten times in Australia in January 1989. I also knew that there were very few records of this species in the lower forty-eight states. I could only think of

the recent record in California. Soon after I saw the bird, it started calling a two-note call that I thought sounded like *tewk-tewk*, a fairly musical sound. It then flew off across the pond and southward, dropping in, as far as I could tell, at the south end of the same pond. I could see that it had a grayish rump and tail and a very noticeable trailing white border to the secondaries. I got back in my car and reached for the nearest paper to take down notes of the probably less than one-or-two-minute observation. On the Refuge's notice of beach closing for Piping Plovers, I wrote

sandpiper-like bird, long dark strongly upcurved bill, gray brownish backed, yellow-orangish legs, size slightly smaller than Wilson's Phalarope next to it, trailing edges of secondaries white, dark rump, barred outer tail, double *tewk tewk* call.

The barred outer tail observation was made as it walked or ran around in front of me, not in flight. The rump observation was made as it flew. I remember that the tail was also dark in flight but did not enter it in my notes at the time. I do not remember a flight call, and I did not note any peculiarity to the flight. The *dark* in the bill observation was added when I observed the bird a few minutes later at the south end of the pond. My impression was that the length of the bill was toward the long extreme for this species, based on my experience with the bird in Australia. I did not note any black marks on the back, which could have been due to lack of attention or the fact that all the other birds I have seen have been in winter plumage and so I was not accustomed to noting this mark. I did not remember this as a mark in the excitement and did not consult my field guide until later.

I then drove to the south end of the parking pulloff and started trying to relocate the bird. I also started thinking about flagging down other birders. The first car to go by was one of the rangers' jeeps. I flagged it down and asked if anyone had reported a Terek Sandpiper. They said no, so I told them that one was there and that they should write it in the log. I then found the bird with my Questar just as a birder went by. I shouted at him, and he stopped. He was Jim Moore from Farmington, Connecticut. I showed him the bird, and he got it in his scope just as Ida Giriunas and Marsha Paine drove up. For the next few minutes I made sure all three saw the bird and urged them to take independent notes of the bird in case we were the only four to see it. I made note of the facial markings and that the bill seemed completely dark. I then added the following to the notes made previously:

dark line through eye bordered by light above and below, white undersides.

I did not have the opportunity for a detailed inspection of the plumage and cannot be sure of the bird's age. The bird was in rough association with three phalaropes, and there were two Killdeers and a dowitcher (I did not take time to

figure out which one) present in the area across the narrow strip of water that makes the pond's southernmost extension about seventy-five yards from us. The birds were moving around a good bit on the edge of the water, occasionally flying for short distances. I do not remember the sandpiper feeding, but it was almost constantly in motion. I observed a black V pattern on the wing of one of the birds as it flew, the sharp part of the V toward the tip of the wing, but I cannot be sure that I was looking at the Terek Sandpiper at the time, since I got only a brief look before it landed behind some grass. After probably five minutes the group of birds flew off to the south, and we did not see the Terek Sandpiper again, though I and some forty-or-so other birders waited until dusk.

The day was overcast, but the light was good. A southerly wind was blowing, I believe. I first observed the bird through Zeiss 10 x 40 Dialyts and later through a Questar at 40-power magnification. Though I am far from expert in shorebird identification, I do have broad experience with the group. I have seen all of the *Tringa* species except for Spotted Greenshank, all of the calidrids except for Long-toed Stint, and most of the other Arctic shorebirds, due to a particular fondness for the group and opportunities to bird in Britain six to seven months in six trips, a January trip to Australia, and a September visit to Sweden.



Terek Sandpiper

Drawing by Barry W. Van Dusen

Ida Giriunas, Reading.

As I was driving along, looking for the Black-necked Stilt reported during the week, I came across David Stemple at the south end of the salt pans. He gestured to me to stop and told me he was looking at a Terek Sandpiper! It was located on the far shore of the pans, accompanied by three Wilson's Phalaropes, which were very slightly larger and were colored more brightly.

The Terek Sandpiper was brownish above, light below with bright, orange yellow legs. Through my 22-power Spacemaster I could see the black scapulars and black edging of the wings against a uniformly smoky brown coloration of the upperparts. The bill was poorly seen in my scope, but in David's Questar, was very long and upturned. In comparison with that of Wilson's Phalarope, the bill was at least twice as long. . . . The bird was working along the edge of the shore on what little exposed mud there was. After we had viewed it for about five minutes, it flew off to the south with the Wilson's Phalaropes.

I saw a few of these sandpipers in Attu in 1986 and again in Kenya in 1989. It would be difficult to confuse this small, elegant sandpiper with orange legs and a long, black, upturned bill with any other bird that I know.

Jim Moore, Farmington Connecticut.

Initial observation with a Bushnell Spacemaster scope with a 25-power eyepiece (side view of bird facing right): (1) long thin upcurved bill; (2) the bill appears black; (3) the head appears small; (4) the head, neck, and wing appear to be gray; (5) slightly darker plumage than a winter Sanderling came to mind; (6) around the same size as the Wilson's Phalaropes viewed along side of it.

Second observation through Dave Stemple's Questar scope at higher power with increased clarity confirmed first observations.

Next observation, the bird turned to a full back view. A black line along the upper (scapular) edge of each wing extends down the back.

Personal Account: Dave Stemple flagged me down . . . about 3:30 P.M. . . . to observe the bird for additional verification. I was not familiar with the Terek Sandpiper. . . . I located the bird in the National Geographic Society's field guide and was pleased to see that it . . . appeared to have field marks that were distinguishable and recognizable. . . . There were two other birders present. . . . We observed the bird for over five minutes. . . . I would classify myself as conservative in my observations. I felt sure we had the right bird. When I arrived home that Saturday night, I went to my *Shorebirds* book to see if I could locate any birds with characteristics similar to the Terek Sandpiper that would question in my own mind the identification we made. I could not find any.

Marsha Paine, Norton.

Only very fortuitous timing afforded me an opportunity to briefly view this bird. I observed it walking along the back reaches of the pannes for all of a thrilling three minutes before it departed. I observed it in the company of a Killdeer. Due to my short-lived observation, I can offer just a few notes: (1) Very light gray colored with a white belly—due to its light coloration it was not that easy to see; (2) very dark orange legs, almost looked red in certain light; legs very short, giving it a somewhat dumpy appearance; (3) long slender upturned bill. Although I did not have the chance to view the Terek long, I still feel privileged and just plain lucky to have seen it at all. You just have to be in the right place at the right time. [Excerpted from a letter to R. A. Forster dated July 1, 1990.]

WHITE-FACED IBIS AT PLUM ISLAND, JUNE 10, 1990

Ian Lynch, Salem.

I was headed north on Plum Island refuge at approximately 5:30 P.M. when I stopped just south of the New Pines. . . . Fred Burrill stopped and asked if we had seen the White-faced Ibis farther up. I followed him to the spot where someone else was observing the bird, just where the marsh comes back toward the road at the south end of the field across from the New Pines. The bird was feeding with six to eight Glossy Ibises, making for a nice comparison. The size, shape, behavior, and overall coloration of the body were very similar to the rest of the ibises present. The most impressive field mark was the bright white band, perhaps half an inch wide, forming a complete loop from the base of the upper mandible behind the eye and back to the base of the lower mandible. The lores showed a rosy red color unlike the other ibises, and the legs were a reddish color, also unlike the neighboring birds. We watched the bird for fifteen minutes or so. It was still feeding when we left. While we were still there, Sonia and Paul Bontemps drove by and asked if we were convinced that it was a White-faced Ibis. All present were.

It is interesting to note that the Voice of Audubon reported the bird first as a possible and finally as a probable breeding-plumage Glossy Ibis based on a conversation with Mark Lynch (who had seen a Glossy in high breeding plumage that morning on Plum Island). Because of a miscommunicated telephone message, Simon Perkins had called Mark. I had left a message, and Simon ended up calling Mark instead of Ian Lynch!

SANDHILL CRANE AT PROVINCETOWN AIRPORT, MAY 11, 1990

PROVINCETOWN AIRPORT 11 MAY 90
HARBOR END - SANDHILL CRANE
IN GRASSY MARGINAL CROSSING
AIRSTRIP TO RECENTLY CUT
MEDIAN.
FIELD MARKS: OBVIOUS GRAY LINE
BODY PROFILE - ROUNDED RUMP
WITH MORE TAIL THAN HERONS.
EXTREMELY LONG NECK, LONG
LEGS + BILL.
BEHAVIOR: FEEDING 95% OF TIME.
FLEW UP IN QUICK CRANE DANCE
ONCE.
CONDITIONS: OBSERVER: 1 KM AWAY
ON DUNE - GOOD LIGHT (STRONG
BACKLIT). 7x BINOC. 65°F
WIND 10-15 MPH
SECOND VIEWING: WALKED INTO
MEDIAN APPROX 60 M. FROM
BIRD GRAY COLOR, RED C. FEW
EASILY SEEN.
COMMENTS: AIRPORT PERSONNEL
REPORT SEEING THE BIRD FOR
TWO WEEKS.

Kyle Jones, Eastham.

September 12, 1990. Enclosed is a brief description of the Sandhill Crane sighting at Provincetown Airport this spring. I misplaced my field notebook just after making this observation [May 11, 1990], so I wasn't able to send you these notes earlier. Fortunately, my notebook was found—it was floating about nine miles out in Cape Cod Bay! Write-in-the-Rain notebooks really work.

Journal entry, May 11, 1990
Page from recovered notebook

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