

## CURLEW SANDPIPERS ON PLYMOUTH BEACH

As might be expected, another Curlew Sandpiper turned up on Plymouth Beach again this spring. Though I cannot speak with authority on the status of this species in Massachusetts in the past, my experience seems to indicate an increasing regularity in recent years. During the past four years there have been four sightings of Curlew Sandpiper on Plymouth Beach. In 1970 a partial breeding-plumage bird was present from June 8-15. In 1971 the species was not seen on Plymouth Beach, but in 1972 two individuals were recorded. The first of the season, another partial breeding-plumage bird, appeared on May 17. On June 11 the second bird, in full breeding plumage, turned up. Both of the 1972 birds were seen on one day only. In 1973, at about the expected date, another partial breeding plumage bird was seen, this one staying from May 30 to June 2.

Curlew Sandpipers seem to be so regular on Plymouth Beach that I am beginning to wonder about the possibility of the same bird returning each year. At least with the Ruff, it seems that some birds on the eastern coast of the United States have developed a kind of migration pattern, going with the native shorebirds north in the spring and south in the fall. Our banding data at Manomet Bird Observatory is beginning to suggest that the same shorebirds stop at Plymouth Beach each year. Possibly this is also true of Curlew Sandpipers. Maybe next year, when a Curlew Sandpiper turns up on Plymouth Beach, we will be able to net the bird and clamp a band on it to find out.

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## WHY GREAT BLUE HERONS TILT THEIR HEADS

A bird that forages over water can increase its hunting efficiency by suppressing glare from the sun that might obscure its prey. Possible anatomical devices are dark patches around the eyes (as used by football players!), colored oil droplets in the retina, or polarizing filters. Behavioral actions include shadowing the water surface with a wing.

While hunting on a bright clear day, a Great Blue Heron often tilts its head and neck (Fig. 1) when it is not facing directly toward or away from the sun. On an overcast day, this behavior is much less frequent. J. R. Krebs and B. Partridge (University of British Columbia) suggest in *Nature* for April 20, 1973, that this action improves the bird's ability to see into the water.

For example, if you stand in a pond and face obliquely from the sun, a glare patch will persist near your sunward side. But by leaning toward the sun, the patch will shift farther away from the frontal direction. For the heron, this action increases its unobstructed strike zone (Fig. 2).

L.J.R.

Diagram adapted from Krebs and Partridge.

