

ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

This is the second consecutive issue that Julie Zickefoose's art has graced *Bird Observer's* cover. Julie worked for six years as a field biologist for The Nature Conservancy before turning to full-time freelance art. She contributes regularly to magazines from *Ladybug* to *Bird Watcher's Digest*, for which she is a contributing editor. Book illustration credits include the Academy of Natural Sciences, for which she is contributing illustrations to the multivolume work *The Birds of North America*.

Julie has shown her work at Harvard University, the National Zoo, the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum, and the XIX International Ornithological Congress. She also sings and plays in a band, The Swinging Orangutans, whose members include her husband, Bill Thompson III, editor of *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Julie can be reached at Indigo Hill Arts, Route 1, Box 270, Whipple, Ohio 45788.

M. Steele

AT A GLANCE *October 1996* _____ *Wayne R. Petersen*

Shorebirds are always interesting, and when they are seen at dusk (or underexposed in printing!), they can be especially difficult to identify. Because of the obvious darkness of October's mystery photo, identification needs to be based on a series of soft impressions rather than one or two obvious field marks.

Many identification possibilities can be eliminated at once on the basis of structural characteristics. The slim, slightly tapered bill, rounded head, and long-winged appearance remove all of the plovers as options. Bill shape and the shortness of the bird's legs eliminate yellowlegs and their allies, curlews and godwits, and species such as Ruddy Turnstone, Dunlin, Stilt Sandpiper, and the dowitchers.

So what choices remain? Spotted Sandpiper, Upland Sandpiper, Red Knot, Sanderling, all the peep, and Pectoral, Purple, and Buff-breasted sandpipers should come to mind. Spotted Sandpiper is out because of its uniform back pattern, and Red Knot never displays the boldly fringed, dark-centered tertials of the mystery sandpiper. This tertial pattern, along with the long-winged aspect of the bird, also eliminate Sanderling. Both Pectoral and Purple sandpipers have notably longer, more decurved bills. In addition, a Purple Sandpiper would appear darker and more uniform on the back and chest. A Pectoral Sandpiper would display more prominent streaks on its breast and back. Upland Sandpiper can be ruled out by its longer neck, streaking on the sides and flanks, and long