

## SPOTTED REDSHANK: THE ONE THAT NEARLY GOT AWAY

by Dorothy R. Arvidson, Brookline

As we approached the dike at Hellcat in the late morning of July 28, people rushed past us shouting, "Redshank at the salt pannes! They photographed it."

"They" proved to be two visitors from New Jersey on the last day of a birding holiday who stated to us that they had indeed seen, identified, and photographed a Spotted Redshank around 7:30 that morning. They seemed confident, were well-equipped with telescopes and long-lens camera, and quickly provided a description which we noted down. When asked if it might have been a Ruff, they acknowledged that that possibility occurred to them, but when the bird emerged from the water and revealed its legs, they had no question about the identification. About 8:15, the bird had flown to the back of the tidal pool and they could see it no longer. A promise was extracted that any pictures resulting would be sent to Dick Forster at Massachusetts Audubon, and the visitors departed.

Two months later, color slides arrived with a letter from which the following amplified description has been excerpted. The bird photographed was seen in the first large tidal pool close to the road in the salt pannes. It was in the company of Greater and Lesser yellowlegs and approximated the larger bird in size. The bill was long, slightly narrower than that of the yellowlegs, red at the base to about one-half the length and black towards the tip which showed a noticeable hook. The legs were dark red. The bird was dark gray to black with very mottled plumage overall and the wing-linings were white, the bird being in mid-molt between summer and winter plumage. A narrow white eye-ring was present and the tail was narrowly barred.

Congratulations should be extended to Joyce Cloughly and Peggy Bayer, the competent birders who identified and reported the bird. Joyce, who generously shared her color slides (see Field Records section), is staff artist and naturalist at the Somerset County Environmental Education Center in Basking Ridge, New Jersey. She became interested in birds at Beloit College where she majored in biology (in a department developed by Dr. Joel Carl Welty, author of The Life of Birds, a leading ornithology text). The slides sent to us attest to her skill in photography, and she is also very interested in wild orchids.

The sighting of a Thayer's Gull on July 26 had produced an influx of birders to the Plum Island area during the ensuing week so that on Tuesday, July 28, a number of experienced observers were canvassing the island, senses sharpened by a determined search for the Thayer's Gull and keener still after learning of the rare visitor. Despite the number of

people actively birding, the Spotted Redshank was only spotted by the camera-ready ladies from New Jersey. Furthermore, without the pictures, this bird would have passed through one of the most intensively birded areas on the coast noted only by two people--a "non-record" report to use Dick Forster's term. Instead, it is a first record for the state and the second regional record verified by photographs. (See Am. Birds, March 1979, p.161, for the report of a bird seen and photographed at Brigantine N.W.R., September 14, 1978.)

Tringa erythropus (from the Greek for white-rumped shorebird with red feet) is a Eurasian bird with a breeding range mostly north of the Arctic Circle in northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The winter quarters range through the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions, Africa north of the equator, and south Asia, including India, Burma, Malaysia, Sumatra, southern China, and Japan. During migration, the birds flow overland rather than just hugging the coast, the Scandinavian breeders apparently using Great Britain as a late summer staging area with an occasional bird overwintering there. The Siberian breeders follow an easterly route south and overwinter from Pakistan south to Sumatra.

How does such a bird reach Plum Island? Several theories to explain the occurrence of Curlew Sandpiper on our northeast coast (see John Bull: Birds of the New York Area, Dover, 1975, p. 207) might presumably apply to other Old World shorebirds: (1) a direct east-west crossing during migration, (2) being swept across the tropical Atlantic by fall hurricanes when en route to Africa, and (3) a migration from Siberian nesting grounds east via Alaska and Canada to the Atlantic seaboard. Whatever the route taken, the Spotted Redshank has not made it to this continent very often. This species, not included in Bent or the 1957 A.O.U. Checklist, has been reported about ten times in the last quarter century. The most recent appearance of this redshank (see Am. Birds, May 1981, p.276) occurred this winter in South Carolina on February 21 and in Oregon on February 21 and 23 to March 1. (An interesting sidelight is that a Spotted Redshank was also seen at 11:30 AM, March 1, in Vancouver, B.C., which might mean that the Oregon bird, last seen at 8:30 AM, skedaddled 200 miles over the Olympic Mountains in three hours!) The South Carolina sighting may be more relevant to our story. Dick Forster speculates that this bird might have moved north with migrating flocks in the spring in search of breeding ground and then returned with them in late July, stopping at the Plum Island staging area en route. If this reasoning should prove true, we can hope the bird may repeat its route (as some people feel the Chatham Fork-tailed Flycatcher did) and will visit Massachusetts again. Picture with me, please, this redshank's dismay when, after a cold winter in South Carolina and a hapless search for a mate in the Nearctic, the bird landed at Plum Island amid a flock of yellowlegs, nary a red- nor a Greenshank in sight. He may have buried his head neath a weary wing and sighed in Tringan dialect: "Good Grief! I've boarded the wrong flight again!"