

First Record of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*) in Maryland

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On 30 August 2017, I went to the Cox Creek Dredged Material Containment Facility (locally known as Swan Creek) in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, on my lunch break to look for shorebirds. Since the creation of the dredge ponds at Swan Creek, it has attracted thousands of shorebirds and hundreds of birders as one of the most easily accessible shorebirding locations in the Baltimore region. I made dozens of lunch break trips there in the spring, summer, and fall, while the site was open to visitors.

On this day, Swan Creek held a number of amazing birds that can be seen in my eBird checklist (Hafner 2017a), and included 8 Hudsonian Godwits (*Limosa haemastica*), 25 Stilt Sandpipers (*Calidris himantopus*), 6 White-rumped Sandpipers (*C. fuscicollis*), 1 Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*), and 4 Red-necked Phalaropes (*P. lobatus*). In fact, the numerous interesting species made it hard to focus on the intriguing looking bird that was moving around in front of me.

I first noticed the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*) early in my hourlong stay, but the light was poor and the bird was distant. As I repeatedly scanned the shorebirds, my attention was continually drawn to this sandpiper with very worn feathers. I attempted a few digiscoped photos, but the poor lighting conditions made the photos less than ideal. Still, I sent the photos to Mikey Lutmerding and Marshall Iliff to see if they also thought the bird was interesting. Mikey responded almost immediately that it was interesting and to try for better photos.

At this point, I really needed to return to work, but Dan Haas and Ryan Johnson arrived to see the godwits and phalaropes that I had reported from the field. I told them to take a quick look at those, but that they should look at and try to photograph this unusual bird I thought might be a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.

As I was driving back to work, Marshall Iliff responded to my text saying he thought my photos were good enough to confirm Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. When I got back to my computer, I immediately wrote a post to the Maryland & DC Birding Google Group (Hafner 2017c) and the Maryland Notable Bird Sightings and Discussion (Facebook) Group (Hafner 2017b) encouraging people to

photograph the bird. Over the next two days, over one hundred birders saw the bird and many wonderful photographs were taken conclusively documenting the identification (Figure 1). Many of the visitors were also treated to a Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) which hung around the area for several days.

The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper stayed for at least three days, 30 August to 1 September 2017. Swan Creek then closed for the weekend. There were reports of the bird the following week, but no diagnostic photographs were obtained.

The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was a medium-sized shorebird, similar in size and shape to the juvenile Pectoral Sandpipers (*Calidris melanotos*) also present (Figure 2). There were no noticeable differences in primary projection, bill length and shape, or leg color. The feathers on the bird were very worn, identifying it as an adult, which made it stand out among the fresh juvenile Pectorals. The cap was slightly redder and showed a more prominent supercilium than expected in an adult Pectoral. The chest streaking was similar to Pectoral with one significant difference. In Pectoral, the streaking is densest at the bottom center of the chest, many times creating the illusion of a dark spot there. In the Sharp-tailed, the densest streaking was on the sides and upper chest, and under close observation, did not have the sharp cutoff of streaks on the lower chest. The streaks then continued down the flanks, in more of a chevron shape, and on the undertail coverts. Some Pectoral Sandpipers could show light markings on the rear flanks, but none to the extent of the Sharp-tailed. The Sharp-tailed also showed pale golden tram lines down the back, similar to a juvenile Pectoral. This feature is not consistent on adult Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, but is not seen on any photos of adult Pectoral Sandpipers that I could find.

Swan Creek has a large dredged material containment area similar to projects at Hart-Miller and Poplar Islands in the Chesapeake Bay which have also attracted high numbers of shorebirds. The location opened to the public circa 2007 and has been regularly visited by birders for survey purposes for many years. In addition to high numbers of migrating shorebirds and waterfowl, rarities are regularly found at the site and have included: Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*), Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*), Black Rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*), Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*), Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*), American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*), Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*), Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus*), Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*), Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*), and Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*). As of 4 September 2018, the site has been temporarily closed to the public during the Cox Creek expansion project (Carney 2018). Regardless, the area will still be surveyed regularly and have occasional field trips, thereby continuing to produce new and exciting records for the region.



Figure 1. Adult Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*). Cox Creek Dredged Material Containment Facility, Anne Arundel County, Maryland. Photographed by Jared Fisher, 1 September 2017.



Figure 2. Adult Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (left) and a Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*). The Sharp-tailed differs from the Pectoral by having a reddish cap, strong supercilium, dense upper chest streaking, and flank streaking. Cox Creek Dredged Material Containment Facility, Anne Arundel County, Maryland. Photographed by Linda Chittum, 1 September 2017.

REGIONAL STATUS SUMMARY

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is an Asian shorebird that breeds in Siberia and primarily winters in Australia (O'Brien et al. 2006). It is relatively common in its native range with Birdlife International (2019) ranking the conservation status as a species of "Least Concern." Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is a regular and annual vagrant to the West Coast of the United States, but occasionally appears on the East Coast (O'Brien et al. 2006). East Coast records between Massachusetts and North Carolina (Table 1) are split between adults and juveniles in contrast with West Coast records, which are predominately juveniles (O'Brien et al. 2006). Most records are of fall migrants at areas with large congregations of shorebirds, with most adults appearing in August and most juveniles in September and October. These vagrants have been found in a variety of habitats ranging from beaches to mudflats to sod farms.

Table 1. Northeast and Mid-Atlantic Regional Records: Massachusetts to North Carolina. Records are ordered north-to-south by state and chronologically per state. (A = adult; J = juvenile)

State	Date	County	Age	Records Committee Acceptance Number	Citation
Massachusetts	30 JUN 1971	Plymouth	A	1971-02	MARC 2019
Massachusetts	3 NOV 1973	Essex	J	1973-04	MARC 2019
Massachusetts	3-9 OCT 2010	Barnstable	A	2010-35	MARC 2019
Connecticut	15-16 OCT 1985	Fairfield	J	86-9	ARCC 2018
Connecticut	11 AUG 1999	New Haven	A	99-34	ARCC 2018
New York	18-24 JUL 1981	Queens	A	1981-12	NYSARC 2018
New York	10-13 OCT 2002	Monroe	J	2002-38	NYSARC 2018
New York	3-4 AUG 2008	Queens	A	2008-43	NYSARC 2018
New York	23 SEP 2012	Monroe	J	2012-74	NYSARC 2018
New Jersey	8 OCT 2002	Cape May	J	2003-057	NJBRC 2017
New Jersey	3-5 SEP 2003	Cumberland	J	2004-073	NJBRC 2017
Delaware	8 AUG 1993	Kent	A	95/45	DBRC 2018
Delaware	5-6 AUG 2002	Kent	A	02/20	DBRC 2018
Maryland	30 AUG-1 SEP 2017	Anne Arundel	A	2017-045	MD/DCRC 2018
Virginia	14 SEP 1983	Fairfax	J		VARCOM 2013
Virginia	14-21 SEP 1984	Accomack	J		VARCOM 2013
Virginia	16 SEP 1989	Fairfax	J		VARCOM 2013
North Carolina	31 AUG 2009	Craven	J	09-12	LeGrand et al. 2011, 2018
North Carolina	15 OCT 2010	New Hanover	J	10-21	LeGrand et al. 2011, 2018

In 2009, many of Maryland's top birders voted on a "Next 10" list, attempting to guess the next species to be added to the state list. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper placed 7th on this list, likely due to Virginia and Delaware having multiple records. It

was the only shorebird to appear in the Top 10, well ahead of 20th place Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) (Hafner and Hubick 2009).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the Maryland Port Administration and Maryland Environmental Service for facilitating birder access to the Cox Creek Dredged Material Containment Facility and extending visitor hours during the bird's stay. I thank Tim Carney for his regular surveys of the facility which encouraged me to take long lunch breaks. I thank Dave Czaplak, Mikey Lutmerding, Marshall Iliff, and Clive Harris for thoughtful identification discussions of this bird. Thanks are extended to Jared Fisher and Linda Chittum for use of their photos for this article.

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