

Western Sandpiper in North Mississippi

By James N. Sappington  
Department of Zoology  
Mississippi State University  
Mississippi State, Ms. 39762

On 17 May 1973, while conducting a breeding bird survey, I collected a Western Sandpiper (Ereunetes mauri) on the Mississippi State University South Farm in Oktibbeha County approximately 3 miles southwest of the main campus. The bird, which evidently was migrating to its breeding grounds, was fluttering as it jumped and ran ahead of me along a gravel road and was hit by my automobile. Two hours of close scrutiny of the surrounding area that day, plus 12 other visits during the next 12 days, did not reveal additional birds of the same or similar species. The bird is presently in the ornithological collection at Mississippi State University catalogued as skin number 715.

The specimen, a female with a well-developed ovary, had very little fat and weighed only 19.0 grams which is between 3 and 4 grams below the lower limit of the expected range of 4/5 to 1 1/2 ounces (Stout, 1967). The stomach was practically empty, containing five small rocks and a mere trace of an almost-completely digested substance that was not readily identifiable. Certain statistics are: wing length, 93 mm; bill length, 18.8 mm. Overall length could not be obtained because all tail feathers, including coverts, were missing. The bird was in summer plumage, with rusty back and crown produced by feathers with very dark centers with somewhat lighter margins. Underparts were white to very light buff with small triangular markings on the breast. This plumage endures from about April to July or even September (Stout, 1967).

The range of this species in North America, Central America, West Indies, Northern South America, and extreme Northeastern Asia (Bent, 1962), but it breeds only along the coasts of Northern and Western Alaska and Northeastern Siberia (Stout, 1967). It migrates mainly along the Pacific Coast with a few into

rd  
arm  
t  
as  
and  
t-  
r  
i-  
bird  
is-  
r  
er

the interior and some all the way to about Massachusetts southward. Stout, 1967 reports that the spring migration lasts from early April into June, and the fall migration begins in early July and continues into late November. The spring movement of those birds which wintered in the southeastern states is imperfectly known because of the scarcity of records (Bent, 1962).

Gandy and Turcotte, 1970 report a sight record in Mississippi for March 31, 1962 in Jackson County, and the latest collected specimen was a female taken in Hancock County near Bay St. Louis on May 8, 1940. However, literature surveyed indicates that the Western Sandpiper is very common on the coasts of southern states where it spends the winter. I do not know of any inland records for Mississippi.

The Western Sandpiper is the western counterpart of the abundant Semipalmated (Ereunetes pusillus) (Stout, 1967) with which it is generally found in the migratory grounds (Bent, 1962). Perhaps this species is in greater abundance, especially in the coastal region of our state, than reports lead us to believe. Even experts agree that it is very hard to identify.

h-  
s  
ic-  
t  
ht  
even  
n-  
:  
ern  
i-  
nto

It should not be confused with the Least Sandpiper (Erolia minutilla) since the Western Sandpiper has blackish legs, but those of the Least are yellowish. Also, it is somewhat larger than the Least. When in its rusty summer plumage, it is fairly easily distinguished from the Semipalmated Sandpiper, but its winter plumage presents a problem. Some field marks which show how the Western differs from the Semipalmated are somewhat larger size, longer, heavier bill with a slight drop at the tip and often carrying it pointing more downward and a more squeaky highly-pitched call (Robbins, Bruun and Zim, 1966).

Literature Cited

- Bent, A. C. 1962. Life histories of North American shore birds. Dover Publications, Inc., New York. 420 p.
- Gandy, B. E. and W. H. Turcotte. 1970. Catalog of Mississippi bird records. Mississippi Game and Fish Commission, Jackson, Mississippi.
- Robbins, C. S., Bruun, B., and H. S. Zim. 1966. A guide to field identification of birds of North America. Golden Press, New York. 340 p.
- Stout, G. D. (Ed.). 1967. The shorebirds of North America. The Viking Press, New York. 270 p.

\*\*\*\*\*

Further Information on Mass Movements of Blue Jays on the Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana Coasts in October 1972

By Gordon Gunter  
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory  
Ocean Springs, Mississippi 39564

In October 1972 considerable interest along parts of the central Gulf (Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana) was engendered by large flocks of blue jays flying along the coast, falling emaciated into the water and some ending up on oilwell platforms off the Louisiana coast. Newspaper stories were published in The Mobile Press and The Daily Herald (Biloxi-Gulf - port) and accounts were published in the Mississippi Ornithological Society Newsletter (Gunter 1972) and in The Mississippi Kite (McGraw et al. 1973). Since that time other ideas and information have come to light.

Stevenson ( ) gathered data on summaries of field counts of blue jays in the Southeast during a series of years extending from 1938 to 1972 but not necessarily concurrent years, in seven localities in Alabama, Mississippi and Florida. These counts cover the southern blue jay and the northern subspecies as