GENERAL NOTES

Recent records of the Eskimo Curlew.—This note records four hitherto unpublished observations of the Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*) and cites seven published records. Of these together, nine were made within less than 20 years (1945–1963).

As long ago as 1910, W. W. Cooke ("Distribution and migration of North American shorebirds," *U. S. Dept. Agric., Biol. Surv. Bull.* no. 35, 1910) wrote of this species in the past tense, and stated that it was "rapidly approaching extinction, if indeed any still exist." A. C. Bent ("Life histories of North American shorebirds," part 2, *U. S. Natl. Mus., Bull.* 146, 1929) made the positive statement: "It is now but a memory of the past." Although J. Van Tyne (*Wilson Bull.*, 60: 241, 1948) reported upon a specimen taken in Newfoundland Labrador on 29 August 1932, and four were reported as observed under good conditions about a week later, at Montauk Point, Long Island (R. C. Murphy, *Auk*, 50: 101, 1933), later writers evidently regarded the species as extinct. Thus when two Eskimo Curlews were reported as seen on Galveston Island, Texas, 29 April 1945 (J. M. Heiser, Jr., *Auk*, 62: 635, 1945) ornithologists throughout the country were free with skeptical comments. Nevertheless, it seems that the end is not yet for the species.

On 15 July 1956, the authors had an Eskimo Curlew under observation for 30 minutes (0745 to 0815 hours) on the west end of Folly Island, about 12 miles south of Charleston, South Carolina. The bird was on a small sand bar about 100 yards away. We were using a 48× telescope, the sun was behind us, and there was no wind to shake the instrument or to cause a distracting ripple on the water.

Points noted at the time were: small size, smaller than the Whimbrel (*N. phaeopus*), a species with which both of us are familiar through long experience; relatively short and slender bill, only slightly decurved; superciliary line far less conspicuous than in the Whimbrel and no central crown stripe; leg color bluish gray (not greenish, as described by some writers). The bird was an adult in (seemingly) full nuptial plumage, with buffy underparts in marked contrast with the dark back. The telescope did not have sufficient resolving power for us to distinguish the small arrow-shaped marks on the breast and we were not able to check the color of axillars or wing linings.

Early writers stress the difficulty of separating this species in the field from the Whimbrel. That may be valid for Eskimo Curlews in winter plumage but it positively does not apply to birds in nuptial plumage with their buffy underparts. Our only available reference specimens were two skins in the Charleston Museum, taken in the early years of the present century. One, taken in spring, shows a few flecks of buff on the underparts, indicating the incidence of prenuptial molt. The other, taken in October, is in winter plumage and shows no sign of buff. Our bird, appearing on the same day as the first other southbound shorebird migrants (Sanderlings, *Crocethia alba*, still in full nuptial plumage) showed no indication of postnuptial molt.

All the time we had the bird under observation, it fed actively on the small sand bar. It would walk or run for a few feet and apparently pick up objects along the edge of the water. It was never seen to probe into the sand as do so many beach birds. The rising tide soon forced it to take flight and, as it flew away from us, we had a clear view of a dark, unmarked back.

While we withheld this record from publication in the near certainty of stirring up another round of incredulity, we heard of two other observations of Eskimo Curlews, also withheld for the same reason. E. Milby Burton, Director of the

Charleston Museum, Charleston, South Carolina, had seen a single bird on the South Carolina coast in 1946; and Conger N. (Mrs. Jack) Hagar, had seen one near Rockport, Texas, in 1950. We prevailed upon both observers to let us combine their notes with ours in this résumé of recent records of the species.

Mr. Burton reports, in part (essentials paraphrased by the present authors): In June, 1946, I saw under the best possible circumstances of light and visibility what I took to be an Eskimo Curlew. While I was on a Museum trip to the Cape Romain Wildlife Sanctuary, about 35 miles northeast of Charleston, South Carolina, our boat flushed a group of four curlews about 100 yards away, near the inner point of Raccoon Key. The birds flew directly across in front of us, going to the left. The three leading birds were clearly Whimbrels, while the fourth and last was a much smaller bird. It was not until they were lost to sight in the distance that I realized I had seen the very rare Eskimo Curlew. [End of paraphrase.]

This record is not as convincing as any of the others cited or described in the present paper, principally because Mr. Burton failed to give several desirable details. He makes no mention of the color or markings of his curlew and does not compare these with those of the Whimbrels. The Whimbrels he knew, of course, from long familiarity, but the fourth bird—the small one—he recognized as a curlew, presumably, by the shape of its bill and as an Eskimo by its small size. The presence of curlews on the South Carolina coast in "June," without a specific date, seems abnormally early for autumnal migrants. If the date were late in June, their presence would not be badly out of line with Sprunt and Chamberlain's statement (*South Carolina bird life*, Charleston, Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1949; see pp. 225–226) that southbound migrant Whimbrels appear early in July. We have no recourse but to present the account as given.

Mrs. Hagar writes, in part: "On 27 April 1950, I had an Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*) under observation for 30 minutes—and saw it again on 28 and 29 April—as it fed on a salt flat of Aransas Bay, Texas, about a mile south of Rockport. It was in company with feeding Long-billed Curlews (*N. americanus*) and Whimbrels (*N. phaeopus*) and I was struck by the smaller size, shorter bill and color differences between this bird and the Whimbrels. I am thoroughly familiar with both the larger curlews, which occur in great numbers in this area at certain times of every year. On 29 April, Miss Dorothy E. Snyder, of the Peabody Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, was with me, and she agreed that the small curlew was indeed an Eskimo. Peterson (*A field guide to the birds of Texas*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960; see pp. 99, 278) cites this observation under date of April, 1952 (in error), but it seems well to give the account of it in detail here."

On 22 March 1959, another probable Eskimo Curlew was seen on Galveston Island, Texas, near where Heiser had seen his birds in 1945, and the observation was fully recorded (G. G. Williams, *Auk*, 76: 539–541, 1959).

In the fall of 1959, at Cape May, New Jersey, yet another record was made, this by Lovett E. Williams, Jr., now with the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Mr. Williams generously gave us permission to include his data here.

He writes, in part: "About mid-day on 20 September 1959, I saw a small curlew feeding in a grassy field on the Coast Guard Receiving Center, at Cape May, New Jersey, which I believe was an Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*).

"The curlew's most striking feature was its small size. It was not nearly as large as an average sized Whimbrel (*N. phaeopus*). Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis dominica*) standing nearby seemed nearly as large as the curlew. The curlew's bill looked about two inches long with a relatively slight decurvature and a thinner and more delicate

Figure 1. An Eskimo Curlew, thought to be a male, on Galveston Island, Texas, in early April, 1962. One of three or four seen over six days, this bird was photographed by Mr. Don Bleitz, through whose courtesy this picture was obtained.

appearance compared to a Whimbrel's bill. In color and pattern the individual was light-breasted—its dark, closed wings presented a marked contrast in profile. Its legs appeared greenish blue.

"Subsequent examination of two museum specimens of *Numenius borealis* engendered no doubt as to the probable correctness of my field identification of the bird as an Eskimo Curlew. To the contrary, it was reassuring to learn of the morphological distinctness of *N. borealis* and *N. phaeopus*. Relying on my memory and notes, the Cape May curlew was practically identical in size and markings to the two preserved specimens.

"After watching it for nearly an hour through 6-power binoculars, the curlew was flushed for a glimpse of its underwing coverts. When I approached within about fifteen feet, the curlew flew straight away, making it impossible to see under its wings. As it left, the curlew gave a call, which, although I cannot describe it now, was unlike that which I have often heard from the Whimbrel. It flew to the southeast and disappeared over the Atlantic Ocean.

"In summary, the characters upon which the identification is based were: 1) small size, 2) short bill, 3) bill only slightly decurved, 4) bill thin and more delicate-appearing than the Whimbrel's, 5) buffy coloration, 6) contrastingly dark back, and 7) peculiar call. September 20 is a likely season for the species to occur in New Jersey, since it was known to migrate southward over the Atlantic in the fall when it was plentiful."

Another carefully observed Eskimo Curlew was seen on Galveston Island, Texas, on 3 April 1960, and the observation was recorded in detail (V. L. Emanuel, *Auk*, 78: 259–260, 1961).

For six days in the latter part of March and early April, 1962 (dates not given),

a group of three and perhaps four Eskimo Curlews appeared again on Galveston Island, Texas (Don Bleitz, *Western Bird Bander*, 37: 42–45, 1962, mimeo.). Many observers, among whom was Dr. George H. Lowery, Jr., saw the birds and aided in successful efforts to photograph them. A truly fine example of several photographs secured by Mr. Bleitz is reproduced herewith through his courtesy (Figure 1).

Finally, still another Eskimo Curlew was seen on 11 April 1963 on the same sand flat south of Rockport, Texas, where Mrs. Hagar had seen one in 1950. Many observers saw this bird (Webster, *Aud. Field Notes*, 17: 418, 1963).

Three of the observers named above, George G. Williams, Lovett E. Williams, Jr., and Victor L. Emanuel, realized the possibility that the birds they saw could have been Least Curlews (*N. minutus*), a small Asiatic species that has never been recorded in North America. It was proper to consider that contingency in the case of any one of the curlews observed, but the number of observations reported herein makes such a possibility so remote that it can be discounted. The strongest argument against the possible occurrence of the Least Curlew is the fact that all the curlews reported have followed the ancestral migration route of the Eskimo Curlew, northward through Texas in spring and southward along the Atlantic Coast (or over the ocean) in fall. The probability that any vagrant or vagrants of the Least Curlew had "discovered" and faithfully followed that route is beyond credibility.

Here, then, in 32 years, a species that was considered in 1929 to have become extinct has been observed and recorded eleven times—six times on the coast of Texas and five times on the Atlantic coast. This presents incontrovertible evidence that there is still a small breeding nucleus somewhere in the far north. The Eskimo Curlew may yet escape from danger!—FRANCIS M. WESTON, *2006 East Jordan Street, Pensacola, Florida*, and ELLISON A. WILLIAMS, *27 Limehouse Street, Charleston, South Carolina*.

Records, obtained while banding, of birds unusual in southeastern Oregon.—Bird banding on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge south of Burns, Harney County, in southeastern Oregon has continued to yield unusual records. Some of these were published in 1962 by me and David B. Marshall (*Condor*, 64: 162–164, 1962). Since that time, other noteworthy records have been made and are reported herein. All except that of the Red Phalarope were obtained at refuge headquarters. The last was taken at the Double-O unit of the refuge, an area located about 25 miles west of headquarters. Identification of all specimens was verified by Dr. John W. Aldrich and Mrs. Roxie C. Laybourne of the U. S. Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife at the U. S. National Museum in Washington, D.C., and the skins were deposited in the Bureau collection.

Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*).—On 25 June 1961 a female was taken in a mist net. Although thousands of Wilson's Phalaropes (*Steganopus tricolor*) and several hundred Northern Phalaropes (*Lobipes lobatus*) were in the vicinity, careful scrutiny with a spotting scope and binoculars of numerous phalarope flocks did not disclose any more Red Phalaropes. This species has been found previously in interior Oregon, but always in fall or winter (G. Alderson, *Condor*, 63: 97–98, 1961). Among previous records, that farthest removed from the coast was of one seen by S. G. Jewett near Summer Lake, 70 airline miles west of here (A. Einarsen, *Murrelet*, 22: 36, 1941). This is the first published summer record of the species occurring inland in Oregon, and is also the easternmost report for Oregon.

Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*).—This species was first recorded in southern Oregon in 1960 (Kridler and Marshall, *op. cit.*: 163). In 1961, others were banded