

# Western records of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *Calidris acuminata* in northern Siberia

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were sight records; no specimens were collected. The details are provided below.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper reports the details of western records of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *Calidris acuminata*. The observations were made during expeditions of the Russian Academy of Sciences to the south-east Taimyr Peninsula in the boreal summers of 1994, 1995 and 1996. The study site was about 200 km north-east of the town of Khatanga, at the junction of the Bludnaya and Khatanga rivers (72°51'N, 106°02'E).

## METHODS AND RESULTS

The same site was visited each year. Frequent foot searches were made in the vicinity of the camp. Additional surveys further from the camp were made using boats as transportation. All expedition members kept comprehensive notes on all species encountered, and these were compiled into a log book each evening. No measure of search effort was made, but considerable search effort continued throughout each expedition, and involved all team members (up to nine people at any one time).

### Records

Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were recorded in each year of the expedition in the area around the camp. All records

### 1994

On 22 July 1994, one of us (VG) reported seeing a wader of a species unknown to him, about two kilometres north of the camp. The bird was on a wet marsh and was feeding in a flock of Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* and Dunlin *Calidris alpina*. He reported that he had been able to get good views of the species, and upon his return to camp he identified it as a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in breeding plumage (using Hayman *et al.* 1986). Believing this record to be unusually far west for Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, a particular effort was made to search for any in the area. On 24 July 1994, at 12.20, one of us (MW) located a bird, on a low ridge at the edge of the Bludnaya river lowland. It was immediately recognised as a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in breeding plumage. These records were mentioned briefly in Weston (1994).

### 1995

On 3 July 1995, one Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was seen in a flock of Pectoral Sandpipers *Calidris melanotos* near camp. On 13 July 1995, a flock of three Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were located (by VG) feeding on a flood plain. The timing of the latter record corresponds well with the appearance of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers in 1994,

given that the 1994 season was about ten days later than the 1995 season (unpublished data).

## 1996

On 28 June 1996, a single Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was seen feeding in the area near the camp that was under intense study. The 1996 season was extremely late (Pectoral Sandpipers began incubation in early July), and this record might represent a bird on northern migration. In the 1996 season, three more singles were found (here presumed to be different birds) on 25, 28 and 29 July. In each case a single bird sitting in a marsh was seen.

## Identification

The initial 1994 observation was made using x12 binoculars. The second 1994 observation was made using x10 binoculars and a tripod mounted telescope (Kowa TSN4) with a x25 eyepiece. All observations involved unobstructed views and were made in fine, bright weather. Attempts were made to photograph the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper but we were unable to get close enough with the 200mm lens of the camera.

Field notes taken at the time of the second 1994 record documented a chestnut cap, green legs, green base to the bill and distinct dark "Vs" along the flanks.

The only other species in the area that could conceivably be confused with Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was the Pectoral Sandpiper. Male and female Pectoral Sandpipers were common at the study site. All observers were familiar with Pectoral Sandpipers in breeding plumage. Indeed, we had captured and banded female Pectoral Sandpipers at the study site before the middle of July 1994. In addition, one of us (MW) was familiar with Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Pectoral Sandpipers in non-breeding plumage on the non-breeding grounds.

Subsequent records were made by a team increasingly experienced with field identification of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, and with the avifauna of the area in general. We are confident that all the above records were Sharp-tailed Sandpipers.

## DISCUSSION

There appear to be few references in the literature published in English to Sharp-tailed Sandpipers this far west in Siberia. Standard references such as Flint *et al.* (1984) and Flint & Tomkovich (1982) give the Kolyma river as the eastern boundary of the Siberian range. Hayman *et al.* (1986) and Lane (1987) show a similar range. However, there are recent breeding records in the Russian literature from further east i.e. in the Chaun

Gulf area, north west Chukotka Peninsula (Kondratyev 1982).

There are at least two publications in English that document records of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers from further west than those reported here. Rogacheva (1992) gives several western records on southern migration for the drainage of the upper and middle Yenisei river and there is also a rather doubtful record from early July on the Oktyabr'skoy Revolutsii Islands, Severnaya Archipelago (de Korte *et al.* 1995).

A comprehensive account of records from the breeding range and during southward migration can be found in Tomkovich (1982). The literature published in Russian does, of course, include records of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers from further west than reported here. Among these, one deserves special mention; two birds were mist-netted in 1977 in the vicinity of Alma-Ata (currently Almaty), Kazakhstan. This record involves an adult male captured on 10 July, and an adult female on 8 August (Erokhov *et al.* 1978). Nevertheless, the records reported here appear to be the first from the Taimyr Peninsula (P. Tomkovich in litt.).

The pattern of records observed suggests a brief "pulse" of migration through the study area (seven of the eight records were in July). The timing of the migration suggests that early or failed breeders were involved, except for a single record that could represent northern migration in a very late season. Although disintegration of territories begins in the second half of June (see Flint & Tomkovich 1982), migration at the Kolyma river apparently starts late in August (Dement'ev *et al.* 1951). The numbers involved (and thus the significance in terms of overall migration) are not known because our observations were limited to the general area of the camp. One possible explanation for these observations would involve a westerly movement along the arctic ocean coastline (not necessarily a regular or significant one), from breeding further east. When these birds came to Khatanga Bay, they may have continued to follow the coast and thus turned south-west to move along the shore of the bay, then to the Khatanga river, and through the study site. Subsequent movements would then presumably be over land. Tomkovich (1982) states that adult Sharp-tailed Sandpipers migrate directly from the breeding range to eastern Mongolia. There is apparently no reference to a westerly component in southern migration, although at least some adults apparently move south-west (Tomkovich 1982).

The little documented evidence of waders from the East-Asian Australasian Flyway as far west as Khatanga may not be confined to Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. Indeed, an Australian-banded Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* has been recovered on northern Taimyr (76°05'N 98°32'E, Tomkovich *et al.* 1994).

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