

was ringing a day-old chick beside the Glentress Water, Scottish Borders, the sole parent guarding the chick was giving alarm calls and performing the broken-wing distraction display on the opposite shore, about 6 m away. Suddenly a male Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* appeared and stooped at the adult sandpiper, which promptly dived into the stream, swam

a short distance underwater (water depth ranging from 2 to 30 cm), and emerged unscathed.

Minton, C. 2001. Waders diving and swimming underwater as a means of escape. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 96: 86.

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## Common Sandpipers also dive to escape danger: in England

D.W. YALDEN

*School of Biological Sciences, 3.238 Stopford Building, Victoria University of Manchester, M13 9PT, UK,  
e-mail: d.w.yalden@man.ac.uk*

The note by Clive Minton (Minton 2001) recording diving to escape predation or capture by Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* and a Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* prompts me to report five similar records for Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*.

On 2 April 1992, on our River Ashop study site in Derbyshire, England (Yalden 1986), I heard a pair of Common Sandpipers in courtship, trilling on the river-bank, but obscured by *Juncus* vegetation. One flew upstream, and I started to follow it to read its colour rings, but disturbed a second bird that started to fly downstream, when it almost collided with a male Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* coming upstream. The sandpiper dived vertically into the river where the water was relatively deep and the hawk landed, frustrated, beside the river. For about five minutes, both the Sparrowhawk and I watched for the sandpiper to emerge from the river, but then I moved and disturbed the Sparrowhawk, which flew off upstream. I returned five minutes later, and by circling round, located the sandpiper sitting tight to the ground between clumps of *Juncus* alongside some rippling shallows about 20 m downstream. I presume that it had emerged from the water, using the ripples and *Juncus* as cover. It was very reluctant to fly, but eventually flew off downstream when I got too close.

On 11 July 1993, at Howden Reservoir, Derbyshire, I tried to catch a well-grown chick, estimated at 15 days old, as it tried to hide in the remnants of a dry stone wall right at the water's edge. To my surprise, it dived into the water, and reappeared about 50 m offshore, swimming high in the water like a phalarope *Phalaropus* spp. It swam further away from the shore, evidently concerned at my continued presence. I do not know whether it crossed to the further shore or circled back to the same shore or drowned.

On 20 July 1996, on the River Ashop, I went to catch a fledgling Common Sandpiper that I had seen hide in the bankside vegetation as it landed. It dived into the water at my feet, and swam about 5 m downstream when I caught it underwater as it started to surface. It was, like Minton's Pied Oystercatchers, quite dry. With a bill of 19.5 mm, wing 81 mm and mass 40 g, I estimated it was 20 days old.

On 12 July 1997, also on the River Ashop, a recently fledged bird was retrapped in a mistnet set across the river. On release it flew only about 20 m before flopping into the water and swimming to hide among the roots of a bankside alder tree. At 39 g, and with bill and wing lengths of 22 mm and 105 mm respectively, it appeared to be only 21 days old, but had been ringed at about 5 days old on 13 June 1997, and was therefore actually 29 days old.

On 16 June 2001, at Ladybower Reservoir, Derbyshire, I tried to catch two well-grown chicks; one eluded me by running inland, the other by diving into the water. It surfaced about 20 m offshore and swam round to the shoreline just out of sight, whither I ran and caught it. At 31.5 g, bill 17.5 mm and wing 58 mm, it was about 14 days old.

There have been other, less well remembered occasions when chicks have dived into the water as an escape response, though their usual tactic at 7+ days old is to run for cover and freeze. However, it is clear that, from about 14 days old, Common Sandpiper chicks can dive, swim underwater, and swim very ably on the surface, in order to escape danger and they retain this ability as adults. Long ago, Moggridge (1851) recorded a case of a Common Sandpiper avoiding a Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* by diving into a river. Also, Spencer *et al.* (1951) reported two instances of Common Sandpipers bathing underwater.

As riparian birds, Common Sandpipers perhaps have more opportunity for using the tactic of diving as a means of escape than most waders.

Although waders do not have full webbing, most have some between the third and fourth toes, and the phalaropes swim very competently with not much more webbing than sandpipers.

Minton, C. 2001. Waders diving and swimming underwater as a means of escape. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 96: 86.

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**Line art:** p. 3 M. Dementiev; p. 5 C.M. Wojak; p. 7 E.A. Koblik, p. 14 E.A. Koblik; p. 41 E.A. Koblik; p. 44 M. Dementiev; p. 46 M. Dementiev; p. 50 A. De Faveri.

