

A Possible Wood Sandpiper in Louisiana

by Robert S. Kennedy

Those who read *American Birds* regularly are familiar with the recent increase of Asiatic shorebirds recorded in Alaska and along the Pacific coast of North America. Gibson and Byrd (*American Birds* (1976:877) in their spring account had so many records of these birds that they merely listed the species. The dramatic increase of the Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) and the Long-toed Stint (*Calidris subminuta*) were well documented. Daily totals of the Wood Sandpiper for some of the western islands in the Aleutians exceeded 150, a five-fold increase over the former high count of 31 in the spring of 1975. Despite their increases, many of the Asiatics have rarely or never been recorded elsewhere in North America.

At 1000 on Sept. 22, 1976, Robert J. Newman and I saw an unusual shorebird in a fresh or slightly brackish barrow pit beside Road 3090 about 11 km south of Leesville, Lafourche Parish, Louisiana. The bird was feeding with a Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) and a Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) and was similar to them in shape. We watched it for about five minutes with binoculars at a distance of 25 to 40 meters and flushed it several times. Efforts to collect it failed.

We noticed the following field marks and behavior: 1) size slightly smaller than a Lesser Yellowlegs; 2) legs greenish yellow, about $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ as long as those of the Lesser Yellowlegs; 3) breast streaked and slightly buffy; throat lighter with no prominent streaks; belly, white; 4) wings with no apparent upper wing stripe and their light under-surface with no conspicuous markings; 5) tail with narrow but well defined bars for most of its length and with a small but distinct white rump and upper tail-coverts; 6) bill dark colored or black with no visible markings and similar in shape to but shorter than that of the Lesser Yellowlegs; 7) back similar to that of the Lesser Yellowlegs; 8) eye ring as large as or larger than that of the Lesser Yellowlegs but not as pronounced as a Solitary Sandpiper's (*Tringa solitaria*); a white line from the eye ring to the bill slightly less distinct than similar line in a Solitary Sand-

piper. The bird teetered like a Lesser Yellowlegs, prior to taking off and when landing it held the wings straight up as does an Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*). We did not notice any unusual wingbeat or flight pattern or hear any vocalizations.

At the time, we could not identify the bird. We knew only that we had never seen the species before. The same day, we consulted several references dealing with European birds and I examined specimens in the Louisiana State University Museum of Zoology. The bird we saw most closely resembled specimens and descriptions of the Wood Sandpiper. M. Spindler (pers. comm.), who is familiar with the Wood Sandpiper in Alaska, stated that the teetering and wing lifting are frequently seen in this species.

White, Williamson, and Emison (*Auk* 1974:175-177) summarized the records of the Wood Sandpiper in North America and Gibson and Byrd have updated the information in their seasonal reports for the Alaska Region of *American Birds*. The species has apparently never been recorded in North America outside of Alaska. The occurrence of a Wood Sandpiper in coastal Louisiana thousands of miles outside its normal range would seem odd, except in light of the increase of the species in Alaska and recent sightings of other Palearctic birds in Louisiana. Littlefield and Doubleday (*American Birds*: 31, 140) photographed the first Mongolian Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*) in North America outside of Alaska on 22 April 1975 at Grand Isle, Louisiana, just 24 km to the northeast of our sighting. A male Baikal Teal (*Anas formosa*) was shot by a hunter 1.6 km west of English Lookout near the mouth of the Pearl River in St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana, on November 7, 1974. This record is apparently the fourth for the species in the lower 48 states (Sykes, *Auk* 1961:441, summarizes the first three records). Also, two Curlew Sandpipers (*Calidris ferruginea*) were sighted in Louisiana this fall (see the Fall 1976 report, Central Southern Region), one less than two km from where we saw the Wood Sandpiper. The origin of the Wood Sandpiper and the Curlew Sandpipers will never be known, but if they were from Asia, we can ask what is significant about southeast Louisiana, especially the area around Grand Isle, that these four species should appear there when they have rarely or never been found elsewhere in North America outside of Alaska? Surely, the probability of this happening by chance would be remote. Could the jet stream or some other atmospheric condition be involved somehow in these anomalous records? Additional records and further investigations may yield answers to these and other related questions.