

First Canadian and third North American record of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (*Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*)

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ON JULY 30, 1978, a Canadian Wildlife Service shorebird survey revealed a Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) at the Iona Island sewage treatment plant, Richmond, British Columbia (latitude 49° 13' N; longitude 123° 12' W). As this was only the fourth or fifth Vancouver-area record, several birders gathered at Iona that evening. At about 18:40, Sauppe scanned the southwestern settling pond from the north side, and noticed among the many Western Sandpipers (*Calidris mauri*) present an individual with a distinctly rufous head and neck. The bird was also seen by Suann Hosie, but at that point, birders on the west side of the pond called that they had located the Ruff. After the latter was studied, Sauppe relocated the distinctive "peep", and pointed it out to the group. Some of those present believed that it was another Rufous-necked Sandpiper (*Calidris ruficollis*), a species which had occurred at Iona Island June 24-25 (Roy Phillips *et al.*) and again July 13-15, 1978 (Gerry Ansell *et al.*). Others, however, noted several differences between the present bird and the earlier one(s), namely: a much longer bill, absence of a light superciliary line, presence of a prominent light area around the base of the bill, and a darker crown and back. After about five minutes of telescope study at a range of about 100 m under good lighting conditions, the bird turned its head, and Sauppe and Macdonald simultaneously called "Spoon-billed Sandpiper!" Others present and involved in the original sighting were (in alphabetical order): Gerry and Wendy Ansell,

Suann Hosie, Doug Kragh, David Mark, Roy Phillips, and John and Mike Toochin, all of whom saw the distinctive bill shape and other field marks. The bird was observed for about 45 minutes, during which time it was also seen by Dave Aldcroft, Paul and Rosemary Clapham, and Wayne Diakow.

The sandpiper spent most of its time resting, with legs folded and bill tucked among its back feathers. Occasionally, however, when preening, the bill shape was prominently displayed against the white breast. During infrequent periods of movement, the bird appeared to "rush about" more rapidly than the associated Western Sandpipers. High tides covered the adjacent tidal flats during the sighting period, but at 7:35 p.m., the Spoon-billed Sandpiper flew alone toward the freshly-exposed intertidal area.

IN ADDITION TO the features mentioned above, the following field marks were noted: the total length of the Spoon-bill was about the same as that of the Western Sandpipers, but the bird appeared somewhat "bulkier"; the bill was black with a distinct bluish sheen; generally, the spatulate tip was not visible in side view, and did not show a reflection, and thus the bill appeared "two-toned" (bluish at base, dull at tip); legs dark, flanks, breast, and belly white; area where rufous of neck met white of flank and belly lightly streaked with dark brown; crown rufous, streaked with dark brown; back feathers brown with gray margins. Toward the end of the week, the rufous color and breast streak-



Two views of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Iona Island, Richmond, B.C., August 2-3, 1978. Photos/ Ervio Sian

ing had faded noticeably. An interesting additional field mark (of this individual at least), a tendency to stand with head higher and back more upright than other "peeps", was pointed out by Eugene Hunn. Occasionally, all the shorebirds present would fly and then light again; the distinctive posture and rufous head proved useful in relocating the bird at such times.

THE BIRD RETURNED to the same area during the period of high tide on each of the four following evenings (July 31 to August 3), and was seen by more than 100 observers, including persons from France and Germany (who were, admittedly, already in the Northwest), Washington, California, Illinois, Manitoba, and Alberta. On August 2, excellent 16mm color movies of the bird were obtained by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and black-and-white and colored still pictures were taken on August 2 and 3 by Ervio Sian and others. Copies of photographs and field notes have been filed at the British Columbia Provincial Museum in Victoria as B.C.P.M. File No. 552. The sighting received extensive coverage in the local press, radio, and television, national radio coverage in Canada, and a United Press wire service story. The bird could not be located on or after August 4.

THE SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER'S known breeding range is restricted to the tundra along the shores of the Chukchi Peninsula, easternmost Siberia, and the species normally migrates through Japan and adjacent areas to winter in Indochina, Burma, and India (Dement'ev *et al.*, 1969, p. 212). While not uncommon in its restricted breeding range, it is generally considered "rare" in migration and winter. There are apparently only two *bona fide* North American specimens, two

birds collected from a flock of ten by Fred Granville at Wainright Inlet, northwestern Alaska on August 14, 1914 (Dixon, 1918). Earlier specimens attributed to Alaska were apparently collected in Siberia (see Dixon, 1918). Although listed in the A.O.U. Checklist (A.O.U., 1957) as "casual" in Alaska, and even thought to breed "probably on the Alaska coast between Bering Strait and Point Barrow" (Pough, 1957, p. 100), the species apparently went unreported from North America for more than sixty years. Thus, a June 1977 sighting from Buldir Island, Alaska, was considered as "astounding" (Gibson, 1977), despite being more or less along probable migration routes. The Iona Island sighting constitutes the first record of the species for Canada, the first for North America south of Alaska, and only the third record anywhere in North America.

References:

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- Gibson, D.D. 1977. Alaska Region, The Spring Migration. *Am. Birds* 31:1035-7.
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