

NOTES

FIRST NORTH AMERICAN NEST AND EGGS OF THE RUFF

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The nest of a Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*), containing four eggs, was discovered at Point Lay (69°44'N 163°00'W), on Alaska's arctic coastal plain, on 21 June 1976. It was a completely canopied cup at the edge of a dry hummock, 30 cm above a very wet, natural drainage. It was placed deep in a clump of sedge and was completely concealed from above and from 300° of the compass at a height of 30 cm above nest level. The four eggs were olive with dark brown splotches, most heavily marked about the large ends, and measured 45.4 x 30.5 mm, 43.5 x 30 mm, 44 x 30.3 mm, and 42.2 x 31 mm.

In late morning a large sandpiper that was clearly a Ruff flew across 15 m in front of me and 5 m up. My first impression was that the bird was a male, since it seemed large and quite dark about the head, neck, breast, and back (with orange feet projecting beyond the tail, large oval white tail-side patches extending from flank most of the length of the rectrices, and long pointed brown wings with a moderately prominent wing-stripe). It flew quickly across the 500 m of wet tundra between the DEW Line Site and the runway and landed, barely in view, in a very wet area next to the runway. I pursued to get a better look, but it was not to be seen when I reached the runway. After looking about for several minutes, I started back toward the Site, when the bird was all-of-a-sudden in fast-paced distraction display 10 m away. It shuffled very quickly, low, from one hiding place to another, wings fluttering akimbo, and I was not able to get a good look at it motionless and upright until it had moved off 50-70 m, at which point, by its lack of ruffs and wattles, it was identifiable as a female. It never uttered a vocalization. I returned to the area later and promptly flushed the bird, at a distance of 3-4 m, from the nest and full clutch, and it went into another fast-moving distraction display.

Stephen O. MacDonald and Brina Kessel arrived later in the month, and we continued to watch the bird, nest, and eggs. By this time, however, we were perplexed that there was not only no lek in the area, but we could not find a single male either. From then through 6 July we checked the nest regularly and observed the female incubating, and also feeding, alone, several times in a wet sedge runoff area 500-600 m from the nest. We had to leave Point Lay late on 6 July, and, knowing that we would be unable to return, we took one of the four eggs with us, hoping to hatch it ourselves. On 7 July it was accidentally broken and found to be infertile. The eggshell is on file at the University of Alaska Museum.

Ruffs breed north in the Old World to about 71° to 72°N on the Yamal and Gydan peninsulas, perhaps to these latitudes on the Taimyr Peninsula, on the coast of the Arctic Ocean farther east, and as close to Alaska as the Anadyr River

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basin (Vaurie, The birds of the palearctic fauna, Non-Passeriformes, H. F. & G. Witherby, London, 1965:405). Apparently-breeding females have been collected at Uelen, on the Bering Strait coast of the Chukotski Peninsula, 17 and 30 June 1961 (Portenko, Ptitsi chukotskogo poluostrova i ostrova vrangelya [Birds of the Chukotski Peninsula and Wrangel Island], Vol. 1, Izdatel'stvo "Nauka", Leningrad, 1972:400). The species is a regular migrant in small numbers in western and southwestern Alaska (Kessel and Gibson, Recent status and distribution of some Alaska birds, Condor in prep.), but there is no previous northern Alaska record.

Species nesting in proximity to the Ruff at Point Lay included Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*), Western Sandpiper (*C. mauri*), Pectoral Sandpiper (*C. melanotos*), Dunlin (*C. alpina*), Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*), Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*), and Lapland Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus*).

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Sketch by Tim Manolis