

## A BRISTLE-THIGHED CURLEW AT LEADBETTER POINT, WASHINGTON

RALPH S. WIDRIG, Box 43, Ocean Park, Washington 98640

On 1 May 1982 I found a Whimbrel-like shorebird feeding alone at the high tide mark on an exposed sandy beach at Leadbetter Point, Pacific Co., Washington (Figure 1). The bird closely resembled a Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*), but seemed to be more warm brown in color and to have a more erect posture. When flushed at about 30 m the bird gave a slurred call somewhat like that of a Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*), but lower in pitch. The call was given only once as the bird flushed.

As it circled low over the water in bright sunlight its rump and tail appeared to be a light tawny or buff color. After it resettled on the beach I approached the Whimbrel-sized bird from the sand dunes and observed it from a distance of about 25 m. Its bill was like that of a Whimbrel but somewhat more decurved; its legs were blue-gray, and its posture rather erect. When I rose, it flushed giving the same short, three-note call heard before, which seemed to say "chi-u-it" as described by Peterson (1961). Again, the rump and tail were a striking buff or light tawny color in flight, the rump being the lighter. This pattern was clearly visible for some distance as the bird flew down the beach. The observations were made with 7x 35 Nikon binoculars. The bird was unquestionably a Bristle-thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*). It was almost identical to



Figure 1. Leadbetter Point, Washington. The x marks location of Bristle-thighed Curlew observation on 1 May 1982. Leadbetter Point is the northern terminus of Long Beach Peninsula, which separates Willapa Bay from Pacific Ocean near mouth of Columbia River. The habitat is protected, being part of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge.

## NOTES

Peterson's field guide illustration (1961: Plate 26), except that the tail pattern could only be seen in flight.

This rare species breeds locally in western Alaska (Allen 1948, Gibson 1979). Its normal migration route is directly south over the Pacific Ocean by way of the Hawaiian and other central Pacific islands, although at least six records have been reported for the Gulf of Alaska from Kodiak to Yakutat (Bent 1929, Gibson 1978, Isleib and Kessel 1973). A single bird was collected at Grant Bay, near the north end of Vancouver Island, on 31 May 1969 (Richardson 1970). The first reported occurrence of *tahitiensis* in the contiguous 48 United States was of two observed at close range in low, northward flight at Leadbetter Point on 18 May 1980 (Ulrich Wilson pers. comm.). A light rump and brick-red tail pattern was clearly noted on both birds as they flew by together. No call was given. Most of the above sightings were on sandy ocean beaches during May, and the birds were not associating with Whimbrels or other shorebird species.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The manuscript was reviewed by Dennis Paulson and Terry Wahl, who made helpful comments.

## LITERATURE CITED

- Allen, A.A. 1948. The curlew's secret. *Natl. Geographic Mag.* 94:751-770.
- Bent, A.C. 1929. Life histories of North American shore birds. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 146.
- Gibson, D.D. 1978. The fall migration. Alaska region. *Am. Birds* 32:244.
- Gibson, D.D. 1979. The nesting season. Alaska region. *Am. Birds* 33:889.
- Isleib, M.E. & B. Kessel. 1973. Birds of the North Gulf Coast-Prince William Sound region, Alaska. *Biol. Papers Univ. Alaska*. No. 14.
- Peterson, R.T. 1961. A field guide to western birds. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
- Richardson, F. 1970. A North American record of the Bristle-thighed Curlew outside Alaska. *Auk* 87:815.

*Accepted 15 October 1983*