

## FIRST RECORD OF THE TEREK SANDPIPER IN CALIFORNIA

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On 28 August 1988, while birding at Carmel River State Beach, Monterey County, California (36°32' N, 121°57' W), we discovered an adult Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*). We watched this Eurasian vagrant between 1110 and 1135 PDT; we saw it again, along with local birders, between 1215 and 1240 as it foraged on the open beach. Wilson observed the bird a third time on 5 September 1988 between 1000 and 1130; others saw it regularly until 23 September 1988.

During our first observation a light overcast sky resulted in good viewing conditions, without glare or strong shadows. The weather was mild with a slight breeze and some offshore fog. We found the Terek Sandpiper feeding in the Carmel River's shallow lagoon, separated from the Pacific Ocean by sand dunes. Its long, upturned bill, quite out of keeping with any small wader with which we were familiar, immediately attracted our attention. We moved closer and tried unsuccessfully to photograph it. Shortly thereafter all the birds present took to the air. The sandpiper flew out over the dunes but curved back and landed out of sight on the open beach. We telephoned Robin Roberson, and half an hour later she, Brian Weed, Jan Scott, Bob Tintle, and Ron Branson arrived, the latter two armed with telephoto lenses. We quickly relocated the Terek Sandpiper on the beach, foraging at the surf line.

The following description is based on our field notes, with color names taken from Smithe (1975). Our bird was a medium-sized sandpiper resembling a winter-plumaged Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) but distinguished by bright yellow-orange legs and an upturned bill (Figure 1). The evenly curved, dark horn bill, 1.5 times the length of the bird's head, had a fleshy orange base. Narrow white rings encircled the dark eyes. Above the dark lores there was a broad white supercilium; it narrowed over and behind the eye. The dark loreal line extended behind the eye as a thin, dark eye stripe. The rest of its head, including the crown, nape, and cheeks, was smoke gray to drab gray; its chin and throat were white. Its upperparts were the same smoke gray, with six black-tipped scapulars on each side forming two lines down the back. The scapulars and coverts were worn and lacked bright edgings (Figure 2).

The underparts were pure white from vent to breast. The upper breast was washed evenly with drab gray, dark near the shoulder and pale near the center. When the bird was standing, its wingtips were even with the end of its tail. In flight its tail was rounded, and both tail and rump were smoke gray. On the upper wing, its primaries, primary coverts, and outer lesser coverts were black. The inner wing was drab gray, but the secondaries were broadly tipped with white (Figure 3). This contrasting wing pattern was not so bold as in a Willet (*Catoptrophorus semi-palmatus*) but was striking nonetheless. The wing linings were white.

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When first located the Terek Sandpiper was picking items off the surface of the water and adjacent mud. It moved quickly back and forth along the shore and occasionally went back to rework the same area. During our second observation it was picking items from the beach surface, working close to the surf line along with two Sanderlings (*Calidris alba*). On 5 September 1988 Wilson saw it foraging in the same area of the lagoon where we first found it, as well as out on the beach and even farther out on the rocks.

Others who submitted field notes to the California Bird Records Committee recorded the bird feeding or roosting in a variety of habitats. It foraged in the lagoon's shallow waters, along the upper beach, on wet sand, among seaweed-fringed rocks, and out on the floating kelp beds behind the breakers. It foraged alone, although often close to other waders using the same substrate. It took flies from the surface of the kelp and the beach, captured a small crab and various invertebrates, and probed deeply into wet sand. It rested and preened on the beach, along the edge of the lagoon, atop large rock outcrops, and on the kelp beds. The sandpiper's behavior was well documented on video by Neal Williams.

The flight of the Terek Sandpiper consisted of rapid, stiff wingbeats, deeper than those of Spotted Sandpiper, although, like the latter, it did not raise its wings above the horizontal. It flew in loose zigzags and in straight lines, often high overhead, in contrast to the low-over-the-water



Figure 1. Terek Sandpiper, Carmel Beach State Park, 28 August 1988. Note the evenly upturned bill, bright yellow-orange legs, and the black edging at the bend of the folded wing.

Photo by Peter LaTourette

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Figure 2. Terek Sandpiper, Carmel Beach State Park, 2 September 1988. Note the black tips on the scapulars and the flesh-colored base of the bill.

*Photo by Greg W. Lasley*



Figure 3. Terek Sandpiper, Carmel Beach State Park, 6 September 1988. Note the broad white trailing edge of the secondaries and the contrasting black primaries.

*Photo by Don Roberson*

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flights of the Spotted Sandpiper. The Terek Sandpiper almost always curved down on set wings to land.

The only vocalization we heard from the Terek Sandpiper was a single, thin call note as it flew past us along the beach. Most other observers reported that it was silent, but Jon Dunn heard it give a "ringing three-note whistle on one pitch" on several occasions.

This first documented California record was unanimously accepted by the California Bird Records Committee on its first circulation. In addition to field notes from sixteen observers, the documentation includes video footage, color slides, and prints. It is estimated that several hundred birders from sixteen states, Canada, and England saw the Terek Sandpiper between 28 August and 18 September 1988, the last date for which there is a first-hand report (D. Roberson pers. comm.).

### DISTRIBUTIONAL SUMMARY

The Terek Sandpiper breeds from Finland, northern Russia, and northern Siberia south to central Russia, Lake Baikal, and Anadyrland. It winters from the Persian Gulf, southern Red Sea, southeast Asia, and Hainan south to South Africa, Madagascar, India, Sri Lanka, the Andaman Islands, the East Indies, New Guinea, and Australia (A. O. U. 1983).

Vagrants have occurred widely in Europe and North Africa (Cramp and Simmons 1983) and in New Zealand (Hayman et al. 1986). Pugnali et al. (1988) recorded one in January 1988 in Buenos Aires Province, Argentina. Roberson (1980) summarized the documented North American occurrences, at that time restricted to Alaska's islands and coast. He also cited two records outside of Alaska, an unconfirmed report from Dungeness, Clallam County, Washington, and from Alberta, Canada (the latter is probably an error, referring to the Manitoba sighting below, Roberson pers. comm.). There is a Canadian sight record from Churchill, Manitoba, for 13 July 1972 (A. O. U. 1983, Godfrey 1986). The first photographic documentation of the Terek Sandpiper outside of Alaska was of a breeding-plumaged adult near Sooke, on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, between 21 July and 6 August 1987 (Tweit and Mattocks 1987, Zurowski 1987, Goodwill and Goodwill 1988).

Records in Alaska have almost tripled since 1980 (Gibson 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, Gibson et al. 1987, 1988). Taken with the previously cited records, these occurrences now extend from late spring to early fall (Figure 4). Cramp and Simmons (1983) indicated that spring migration ends by mid-June, with egg-laying and hatching being most common in mid-to-late June, and fall migration beginning by the first of July for non-nesting birds.

### IDENTIFICATION SUMMARY

Terek Sandpipers are easy to identify. The strongly upturned bill, medium size, and yellow-orange legs distinguish this species in all plumages. The bill is more strongly and evenly upturned than that of any

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other sandpiper, including yellowlegs and their allies (*Tringa*) and godwits (*Limosa*). Terek Sandpiper has an unusual upperwing pattern of black primaries, primary coverts, and outer lesser coverts, coupled with broadly white-tipped secondaries, that is not shared with any North American species. Many waders have white stripes across the wing, but these are due to white-based flight feathers, white-tipped coverts, or a combination of these two patterns, rather than white-tipped secondaries. The Willet has white-tipped secondaries, but the white extends into the bases of its primaries.

In structure and posture this bird reminded us of an oversized Spotted Sandpiper. It teetered like *Actitis* as it foraged, although not so consistently, and maintained a horizontal body posture. The Terek Sandpiper combined feeding strategies seen in both species of yellowlegs (daintily picking from the water surface and making rapid, erratic dashes), but it used a much wider variety of substrates (quiet lagoon, open beach, rocky shores, and kelp beds) than do most waders. Winkler (1980) noted some of these same foraging techniques in his study. He found that Terek Sandpipers usually began a feeding bout by picking items from the surface but then turned to deep probing as their main foraging strategy.

Determining the age of waders in fall migration requires close observation of feather wear, feather markings, and overall plumage pattern. Our first impression was of an adult because we saw black scapular lines on the back and did not see cinnamon-fringed brown scapulars or buff-fringed brown coverts that would have indicated a juvenile. Examination of the slides and photographs of this Terek Sandpiper showed that its scapulars and wing coverts were heavily worn.

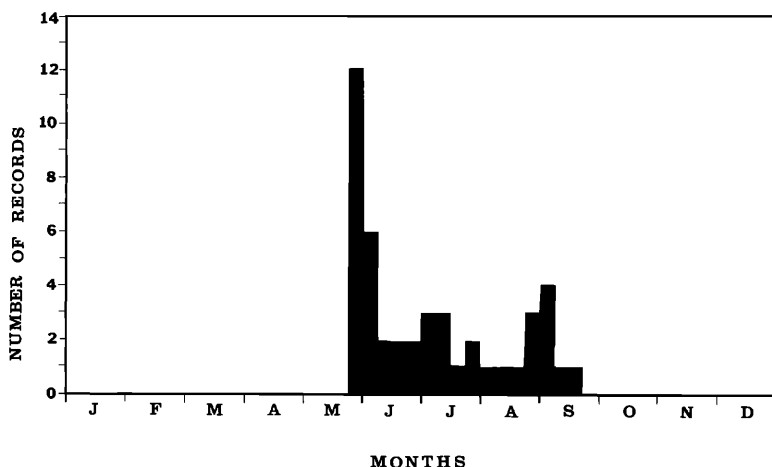


Figure 4. Records of Terek Sandpiper in North America. Birds present for more than one quarter/month are indicated for each quarterly period.

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The scapulars were brownish gray with dark shafts and whitish fringes, although the fringes were so worn that they were easily overlooked. The black scapular lines consisted of feathers with black shafts and black, downward-pointing wedges near the heavily worn tips. Cramp and Simmons (1983) stated that some individuals begin their post-breeding molt before leaving the nesting areas but that most begin molting during halts on migration from late July onward. On the basis of the plumage and dates, we judge that our bird was an adult.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank California Bird Records Committee members J. L. Dunn, J. Morlan, and D. Roberson for their helpful comments when reviewing this record, D. R. Paulson and C. P. Wilds for critical comments on the manuscript, and the other observers, especially N. Williams, who submitted documentation to the committee.

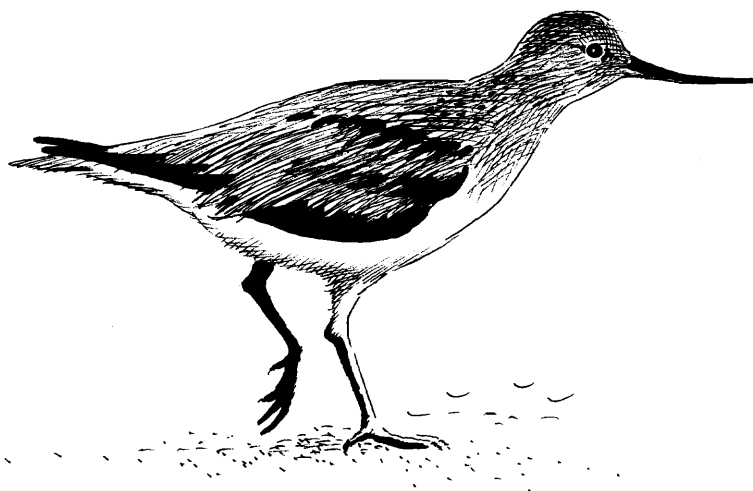
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*Accepted 11 July 1989*



Terek Sandpiper

*Sketch by Rae Johnson*



Elf Owl  
70

*Photo by Alan B. Meyerfeld*