

May 15, 1994

Ella Sorensen  
3868 South Marsha Drive  
West Valley City, UT

Dear Ella:

This letter is being written at your request, to provide further information regarding the possible sighting of a Curlew Sandpiper by us yesterday on Antelope Island Causeway. This occurred on May 14, 1994 at about 11:00 am.

We were parked on the shore, watching large flocks of sandpipers. The male birds were darker on the head and shoulders than either the Western or Semipalmated sandpipers in our National Geographic guide; they were also a bit bigger than we expected. You have confirmed for us that they were probably Sanderlings. Having looked at them in our guide, we agree that this is probably what they were.

While scanning a large flock of these birds, we spotted an individual that was clearly different from the others. The characteristics we noted were as follows:

1. Larger than the other birds by about ten percent.
2. Darker on head, neck, chest, and belly, which were a uniform reddish brown ("chestnut") color. He was much darker than even the darkest of the sandpipers, and his color was uniformly dark essentially all over.
3. We saw no eyeline or eye ring.
4. Longer bill (about twice as long as the other birds), clearly curved downwards.
5. Whitish coloring at the base of the bill and face. His eyes were set closer together, and closer to the front of his face, than the Sanderlings.
6. Legs were black.
7. When the flock flew, he exhibited a white rump patch that was square.

Scanning through our guide while he was in sight, we picked out the Curlew Sandpiper as being the exact bird we were looking at, before noticing that he was a Eurasian species occasionally seen in the US. After reading his description, we looked for all the field marks described, and saw them all.

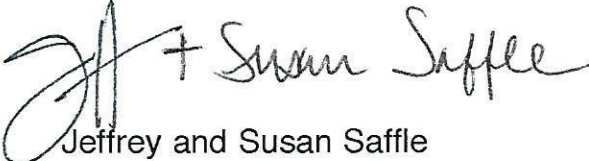
We did not think he was a Dunlin, because his bill was longer and more curved, and he was uniformly dark brown on the belly (without a dark patch). He was not a Sanderling, because the birds around him had white flanks and bellies, which he did not. His bill was much longer than the other birds, and strongly curved downwards. He was not a Red Knot, because his bill was much longer and curved, and he was darker in color. He was not a long-billed Dowitcher, because his bill was long and curved, and he was darker, without an eye line. He was shorter and stockier than the Dowitcher. In addition, the rump patch on the bird we saw was squared off.

We later looked up this bird in the book Shorebirds: An Identification Guide, by Hayman, Marchant, and Prater, and agree with the description in this book as well.

I know it's hard to believe that a couple of ignoramuses like us could spot such a rare bird, and identify it correctly. However, we can find no other bird that resembles the very peculiar bird we saw.

Please let us know what you think of this sighting, and if there is any confirmatory evidence. Thanks for taking the time to talk to Susan about this.

All best wishes,

  
Jeffrey and Susan Saffle  
(582-6603)