

12-1999

Rare Bird Report

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*

11 June 1999, 6:30 p.m.

Ouray National Wildlife Refuge, Utah

Description:

This bird was approximately intermediate in size between Least Sandpiper and Killdeer, both which were in attendance for direct comparison. Overall proportions were similar to Least Sandpiper, placing it clearly in the genus *Calidris*, with some notable exceptions. The black bill was rather slender, finely pointed, and drooped slightly throughout as in the Least but it was also slightly longer in relation to head size. The black legs were relatively longer, and, most noticeably, the primary tips were very long, projecting well beyond the tail tip. In all, the size and proportions were virtually identical to those expected for Baird's Sandpiper.

The following plumage characters helped me clearly identify this as a White-rumped and eliminated Baird's Sandpiper. Overall, the bird was rather plain, with much black and white, and very little buff or rufous anywhere. The breast and throat were white and densely covered in fine, black streaks. The black streaking continued up on to the entire face and sides of the neck, and even the crown. The streaking was denser on the ear coverts and crown, both of which were also slightly browner. The streaking continued down the sides, breaking up at the bend of the wing and becoming isolated, chevron-shaped spots down to the flanks. The back was also black and white streaked, but there did not appear to be a prominent white "V". The scapulars did have some slight rufous edging, producing a pattern similar to that found on breeding-plumaged Western Sandpiper. The wing coverts and tertials were dark gray or black centered with pale gray or white edges.

The bird did flush once, flying only a few meters, but I did get my binoculars on it and very clearly saw the white "rump", formed by the solid white upper tail coverts. The effect was virtually identical to that seen on flying Curlew Sandpiper.

This bird did not vocalize.

Viewing conditions:

We were able to view the bird for approximately 10 minutes at a distance of 40 to 50 meters, using 8 to 10X binoculars and a 32X Leica spotting scope. The sun was at first directly behind the bird, making for poor light, but we were able to move to make the angle more or less 45°.

Experience with the species:

I have seen breeding-plumaged White-rumped Sandpiper only once before, two years earlier. I am much more familiar with virtually every other *Calidris* and other potentially confusing species. The size and proportions could lead to confusion with Baird's Sandpiper, but that species has very different colors and streaking patterns. The overall color and pattern is similar to a dark and plain Western Sandpiper, but the size and proportions eliminate that species (it would be much smaller, with a stouter and longer bill, and much shorter primaries). All eight other observers were familiar with this species and agreed with my identification. I am certain of my identification.

At the time of observation, we consulted the National Geographic Society's Birds of North America (3rd edition). This report was made from memory on July 14, 1999.

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Other observers included the participants on the WINGS tour that I was leading. Their names and addresses are available from the WINGS office, if they are needed, at (520) 320-9868.

