THE RED-BACKED SANDPIPER.

†TRINGA ALPINA, *Linn.*

PLATE CCCXXXII.—MALE IN SUMMER, AND ADULT IN WINTER.

In autumn and winter, this species is abundant along the whole range of our coast, wherever the shores are sandy or muddy, from Maine to the mouths of the Mississippi; but I never found one far inland. Sometimes they collect into flocks of several hundred individuals, and are seen wheeling over the water near the shores or over the beaches, in beautiful order, and now and then so close together as to afford an excellent shot, especially when they suddenly alight in a mass near the sportsman, or when, swiftly veering, they expose their lower parts at the same moment. On such occasions a dozen or more may be killed at once, provided the proper moment is chosen.

There seems to be a kind of impatience in this bird that prevents it from remaining any length of time in the same place, and you may see it scarcely alighted on a sand-bar, fly off without any apparent reason to another, where it settles, runs for a few moments, and again starts off on wing. When searching for food they run with great agility, following the retiring waves, and retreating as they advance, probing the wet sands, and picking up objects from their surface, ever jerking up the tail, and now and then uttering a faint cry, pleasant to the ear, and differing from the kind of scream which they emit while on wing.

When I was in the Floridas in winter, I found this species abundant, and my party shot a great number of them, on account of the fatness and juiciness of their flesh. They all appeared to have their plumage greyer than those shot in the Carolinas at the same season, and not one exhibited the least redness on the back, although that colour is so conspicuous in spring before they leave us for the north. They usually take their departure from the south about the first of April, reach the Middle Districts by the fifteenth of that month, and in a few days assume their summer plumage. I have observed that at this season the male birds are frequently in the habit of raising their wings and running in that position for a few steps, when they close them, and nod to the nearest female. None of the other sex, however, seemed to take the least notice of this homage. On our way to Labrador

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10. 2011

Drawn from Nature by J. Audubon 1825

Red-bellied Woodpecker
Summer Plumage - Male

Printed & Colored by J. P. Bowen 1825

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Their flight is not a direct one, but a series of bounds, and that prevents it from sustaining any length of time in the same place, and you may see it scarcely alighted as a snail, fly off without any apparent reason to another, where it alights, and for a few moments rest some parts of its wing. When ascending the flock rises with great agility, following the retiring waves, and retreating as they advance, probing the wet sands, and picking up objects from their surface, ever jerking up the tail, and now and then uttering a loud cry, pleasant to the ear, and differing from the kind of scream which they emit while on wing.

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Drawn from Nature by J. Audubon, 1838.

Red backed Sandpiper
Summer Plumage - Winter

Published by G. & J. T. Bowen, Phila.

we saw flocks of these birds passing, but we found none breeding in that country. My friend Mr. MACGILLIVRAY has given me the following account of the habits of this species during the breeding season.

“About the middle of April, the Purres betake themselves to the moors, in the northern parts of Scotland, and in the larger Hebrides, where they may be found scattered in the haunts selected by the Golden Plovers, with which they are so frequently seen in company that they have obtained the name of Plovers’ Pages. In the Hebrides, from this season until the end of August, none are to be found along the shores. The nest is a slight hollow in a dry place, having a few bits of withered heath and grass irregularly placed in it. The eggs, four in number, are ovato-pyriform, an inch and four-twelfths in length, eleven-twelfths in breadth, oil-green or light greenish-yellow, irregularly spotted and blotched with deep brown, the spots becoming more numerous toward the larger end, where they are confluent. The young, like those of the Golden Plover and Lapwing, leave the nest immediately after exclusion, run about, and when alarmed, conceal themselves by sitting close to the ground and remaining motionless. If at this period, or during incubation, a person approaches their retreats, the male especially, but frequently the female also, flies up to meet the intruder, settles on a tuft near him, or runs along and uses the same artifices for decoying him from the nest or young as the Plover or Ring Dotterel. When the young are fledged, the birds gather into small flocks, which often in the evenings unite into larger, and join those of the Golden Plover. They rest at night on the smoother parts of the heath, and both species, when resting by day, either stand or lie on the ground. When one advances within a hundred yards of such a flock, it is pleasant to see them stretch up their wings as if preparing for flight, utter a few low notes, and immediately stand on the alert, or run a few steps. At this season, however, they are not at all shy. Towards the end of August, the different colonies betake themselves to the sandy shores. On a large sand-ford in Harris, I have at this season seen many thousands at once, running about with extreme activity in search of food. This place seemed a general rendezvous, and after a few weeks the host broke up and dispersed, few if any remaining during the winter.”

TRINGA CINCLUS and ALPINA, Linn. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 251, 429.

RED-BACKED SANDPIPER, *Tringa alpina*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. vii. p. 5.

TRINGA ALPINA, Bonap. Syn., p. 317.

TRINGA ALPINA, *American Dunlin*, Swains. and Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 383.

DUNLIN or OX-BIRD, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 106.

RED-BACKED SANDPIPER, *Tringa alpina*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iii. p. 580.

Male, $8\frac{1}{2}$, 15.

From Nova Scotia to Texas, along all muddy or sandy shores, during autumn and spring. Common. Breeds in great numbers on the Arctic coasts.

Adult Male in summer.

Bill longer than the head, slender, sub-cylindrical, nearly straight, being slightly curved towards the end, compressed at the base, the point rather depressed and obtuse. Upper mandible with the dorsal line nearly straight, slightly sloping at the base, and slightly decurved towards the end, the ridge narrow, towards the end flattened, at the point convex, sides sloping, edges rather blunt and soft. Nasal groove long, extending to near the point; nostrils basal, linear, pervious. Lower mandible with the angle long and very narrow, the dorsal line slightly concave, the sides sloping outwards, towards the end convex.

Head rather small, oblong, compressed. Eyes rather small. Neck of moderate length. Body rather full. Feet slender, of moderate length; tibia bare a considerable way up, anteriorly and posteriorly scutellate, as is the compressed tarsus; hind toe very small and elevated, anterior toes of moderate length, slender; inner toe slightly shorter than outer, middle toe considerably longer, all scutellate above, marginate with prominent papillæ, and free. Claws small, slightly arched, extremely compressed, blunt; edge of middle claw dilated and thin.

Plumage very soft, blended; on the back the feathers rather distinct. Wings long and pointed; primaries tapering, obtuse, the first longest, the second a little shorter, the rest rapidly graduated; secondaries rather short, obliquely cut at the end with a recurved blunt point, the inner elongated and tapering. Tail rather short, even, but with the two middle feathers considerably longer, of twelve feathers.

Bill and feet black. Iris dark brown. The upper part of the head, the back and the scapulars, are chestnut-red, each feather brownish-black in the centre, and the scapulars barred with the same colour. The wing coverts greyish-brown, as are the quills, the bases and tips of the secondaries and part of the outer webs of the middle primaries white. Tail light brownish-grey, the two middle feathers darker. Forehead, sides of the head and hind neck pale reddish-grey, streaked with dusky; fore neck and anterior part of breast greyish-white, streaked with dusky; on the breast a large patch of brownish-black; abdomen and lower tail-coverts white, the latter with dusky markings.

Length to end of tail $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches, to end of wings $8\frac{7}{12}$; extent of wings 15, wing from flexure $4\frac{1}{12}$; tail $2\frac{5}{12}$; bill along the ridge $1\frac{7}{12}$, along the edge of lower mandible $1\frac{6}{12}$; tarsus 1; middle toe $\frac{1}{12}$, its claw $\frac{2}{12}$. Weight 3 oz.

Adult in winter.

The bill, feet and eyes as above; the general colour of the upper parts is brownish-grey, varying in different individuals in intensity of tint. The wings and tail are as in summer. Throat greyish-white, sides of the head and neck, and fore part of the latter, pale brownish-grey, faintly streaked with darker, as are the sides; the rest of the lower parts white, with a few streaks on the breast.

THE CURLEW SANDPIPER.

+TRINGA SUBARQUATA, *Temm.*

PLATE CCCXXXIII.—ADULT AND YOUNG.

In the course of my extensive rambles along our coasts and in the interior, I have seen only three birds of this species, all of which I have kept with care, considering the Cape Sandpiper or Pigmy Curlew as the rarest of its genus with us. It appears to resort to particular districts; two of my birds were shot at Great Egg Harbour in New Jersey, in the spring of 1829, the other on Long Island near Sandy Hook. No other birds were near them, and I approached them without much difficulty. They were wading along the shores up to the knees, picking up floating garbage and sand-worms. In their stomachs I found fragments of minute shells, slender red worms, and bits of marine plants. The one killed on Long Island was a fine male in full plumage, and from it I made the figure that has been engraved in the plate. The others were females or young birds of the preceding year. One, in plain plumage, was drawn; the other, mottled beneath with patches of white and dull rufous, I considered as a female which might perhaps have perfected its colouring that season. I have seen a few specimens in New York, and two in Boston; and my friend JOHN BACHMAN has one or two in his possession.

TRINGA SUBARQUATA, Bonap. Syn., p. 317.

CAPE CURLEW OR SANDPIPER, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 104.

CURLEW SANDPIPER, *Tringa subarquata*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iii. p. 444.

Accidental on the Florida coast in winter, rare on those of the middle districts. Breeds in high latitudes. Migratory.

Adult Male.

VOL. V.

Drawn from Nature by J. Audubon, 1838.

Red backed Sandpiper

Summer Plumage - Winter

Published by G. & J. T. Bowen, Phila.

Audubon, John James. 1842. "The Red-Backed Sandpiper, *Tringa alpina*, Linn. [Pl. 332]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 5, 266–269. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319445>.

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