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NEW BIRD RECORDS FROM ALASKA AND THE ALASKA HIGHWAY

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THIS PAPER PRESENTS RECORDS of unusual interest obtained on two trips to Alaska. On the first of these, in August-September, 1956, I was accompanied by my brother Anthony, and visited Hooper Bay, the Pribilofs, and Mount McKinley Park. On the second, in July-August 1965, I was accompanied by my wife, and visited Nome, Wales, and Mount McKinley Park. On this latter trip we drove up the Alaska Highway. Detailed notes were taken, but only the most significant are here presented for publication. Further notes of lesser interest have been deposited with Dr. Brina Kessel, of the University of Alaska.

I am indebted to many people in connection with this paper. I am doubly indebted to Dr. Brina Kessel of the University of Alaska, both for help while in Alaska and for critical reading of the manuscript. Dr. Dean Amadon also read the manuscript and made suggestions. Dr. Walter J. Breckenridge kindly allowed me to incorporate his notes on the White Wagtail and Red-throated Pipit. For help in the field in Alaska I am grateful to many people, and in

particular I should like to thank Dr. Adolph Murie (McKinley Park); John J. Burns, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (Nome); and the Rev. Henry Hargreaves, S. J. (Hooper Bay).

LIST OF SPECIES

Erolia acuminata Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

A brief and inaccurate note in Gabrielson and Lincoln (1959, p. 372) records that "A. Stuart Keith (ms) reported it to be common at Hooper Bay September 5-14, 1957". The dates are right, but the year was 1956.

The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is a little-known bird with a curious migration route. It breeds in eastern Siberia east to the delta of the Kolyma River, and according to Vaurie (1965) it has been taken in summer, but breeding not proven, on the Chukotski Peninsula (the peninsula opposite Alaska on the west side of Bering Strait). There is no breeding record for North America. It migrates down the coast of eastern Asia to winter in the Southwest Pacific from New Guinea and the Tongas to Australia and New Zealand.

The curious fact is, however, that quite large numbers of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers turn up in North America during fall migration. Extreme dates given by Gabrielson and Lincoln (1959) for Alaska are August 19 and October 26, with most records being for September. A wide variety of localities is listed, and in some places the bird was evidently common. E. W. Nelson (*in* Gabrielson and Lincoln, 1959) found it common in the fall at St. Michael, 1877-1880. St. Michael is on the Bering Sea coast of Alaska about 200 miles north of Hooper Bay. Fair numbers have been taken on St. Lawrence Island, Nunivak Island, and on the Pribilofs. There are also records for southeast Alaska and Munro and Cowan (1947) record it as a fall transient on the coast of British Columbia, occasionally plentiful. South of the United States-Canadian border, however, it becomes rare, and the birds evidently do not winter in North America, nor anywhere in the eastern Pacific. In Hawaii it is listed as casual by the A.O.U. Checklist (1957), but judging from repeated occurrences reported in *The Elepaio* recently, it may be regular there.

My own experience at Hooper Bay in September 1956 gives further evidence that the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is a regular, not an accidental, fall visitor to Alaska. I noted in my diary that, "Three out of every four shorebirds is a sharp-tail". On a walk between the village and the sea, a distance of about a mile, one might easily encounter about two dozen of these birds. They were found with other shorebirds around the small pools on the tundra.

The intriguing question arises, why should some Sharp-tailed Sandpipers cross over to North America during their fall migration, instead of following the others down the coast of Asia? A regular eastward drift during fall migration is a phenomenon well known for certain North American land birds, but I can find no parallel for an Asian bird regularly drifting east to North America during fall migration. The large numbers seen by me and others rule out the possibility that these are casual, storm-drifted birds.

In view of Gabrielson and Lincoln's remark (*loc. cit.* p. 372) that the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper looks so much like the Pectoral Sandpiper that it can be easily overlooked, and that about the only recognisable field character is

the more ruddy general color of the upper parts (statements with which I do not agree), I include some remarks on field identification.

I have never seen a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in breeding plumage in the field, but judging from museum specimens it should not be hard to tell from the Pectoral. The breast is spotted, not streaked, and is washed with rufous buff. The spots taper off into V-shaped markings which cover the flanks and part of the belly (flanks and belly plain white in Pectoral). The belly is buff, not white, and there is no sharp demarcation between the spotted and the unspotted parts, as there is in the Pectoral. The upper parts are much ruddier, and in particular the cap is rich rufous. In fall and winter the situation is much easier, because whereas the Pectoral retains its heavily streaked throat and breast, the Sharp-tailed loses all marks on the underparts except for a few streaks on the lower throat and the sides of the breast. In addition, young birds have the breast rufous and a very noticeable white superciliary stripe, contrasting with the rusty cap.

Apart from plumage characters, there is a very distinct difference between the calls of the two species. The Sharp-tail has a plaintive "chew" or "wheep", quite different from the dry "prrrt" of the Pectoral. The rendering in Peterson (1961) of the call of the Sharp-tail as "trrit-trrit", *fide* B. W. Tucker, is misleading, as this suggests a Pectoral, and I never heard any such note from a Sharp-tail. The only Pectoral we saw at Hooper Bay was immediately picked out from the Sharp-tails by its call. Pough (1957) does better in giving the Sharp-tail's call as "A soft, metallic pleep, pleep".

All my birds from Hooper Bay were in the rufous immature plumage. Ridgway (1919) states that all Alaskan specimens examined by him were also in immature plumage.

Motacilla alba White Wagtail

Occurrences of the White Wagtail in Alaska through 1961 have been summarised by Peyton (1963).

Dr. Walter J. Breckenridge saw a White Wagtail on Little Diomed Island in Bering Strait on June 14 and 15, 1965.

The village of Wales has perhaps more records of White Wagtails than anywhere else in Alaska, and it is quite probable that the bird nests there every year. Bailey (1948) saw one near the school in June, 1922, and Dwight Tevuk, a former collector for Bailey and now Postmaster of Wales, tells me he sees White Wagtails around the village nearly every year. Peyton (*loc. cit.*) found a nest with eggs in an abandoned house in the village in June, 1961. Breckenridge saw a pair carrying nest material into a house near the school on June 19, 1965, and Mr. Coy Horton, of the U.S. Navy Station, Wales, confirms that a pair nested near the school that year. Breckenridge also reports that he saw a pair repeatedly near Horton's house at the opposite end of the village from the school, and says (*pers. comm.*) "I assumed they had pretty well established a nesting territory." Horton tells me the birds were seen frequently near his house all summer.

My own observations of the White Wagtail at Wales cover the period July 28-August 10, 1965. On July 28, a juvenile was seen near the school-

house, and six adults were seen together at the deserted military encampment at Belmezok, about a mile north of the village. Two adults were also seen at Horton's house on my way up to Belmezok, but these could possibly have been among the six at Belmezok, having passed me on the way.

On July 31 two juveniles were seen near Horton's house. They were in slightly different plumage to the one seen earlier near the schoolhouse, so this gives a total of seven birds for Wales village, four adults and three juveniles. On later visits to Belmezok only one pair of adults was seen, so I think it safer to assume that the four extra adults there on July 28 were the two pairs that nested at Wales, even though they were a mile from the village, rather than that they were two additional pairs.

On July 31 I discovered the nest of the pair at Belmezok. It was placed above the door of one of the deserted Quonset huts, resting on a 2 x 4, sandwiched in between the outer wall and the inner paperboard insulating layer. The nest was of grass, and lined with insulating wool, of which there was an abundant supply in the wall near the nest. Three large juveniles were in the nest, and a fourth was hopping around on the ground on the floor of the hut, being fed by an adult as I approached.

On August 9 the nest was deserted, and there were no White Wagtails in the Belmezok area.

To sum up, three pairs of White Wagtails nested in the Wales area in the summer of 1965, and at the time of my visit seven juveniles could be seen, for a total of 13 birds.

Anthus cervinus Red-throated Pipit

Gabrielson and Lincoln (1959) say that "This Siberian species has appeared in Alaska three and possibly four times," and as the most important record for it they cite the nest found at Wales by Dwight Tevuk in 1931.

Dr. Breckenridge states (pers. comm.) that he saw "at least half a dozen" Red-throated Pipits at Wales in 1964, and collected a male in breeding condition (testes 9 mm.) on June 1. In 1965 he saw even more Pipits, and collected a female on June 11, with slightly enlarged ova. (largest 2 mm).

On July 29, 1965, I saw three Red-throated Pipits in three quite separate areas on Wales Mountain. On August 2, I collected a pair and a juvenile which was full grown except for a very short tail, and well able to fly. The location was on Wales Mountain about half a mile above the village, at a point where the high tundra ends and the rocks begin.

This is the first juvenile Red-throated Pipit collected in North America, and the second proven breeding record for the continent. I suspect, though, in view of the numbers of birds seen by Breckenridge and myself, that the Red-throated Pipit may be a regular nester at Wales.

Recent literature has provided further evidence of the occurrence of the Red-throated Pipit in North America. Watson (1963) records a bird collected on St. Lawrence Island in 1938 but not previously published on. McCaskie (1966) describes a flock of at least 17 birds at Imperial Beach, California, in October, 1964.

Piranga ludoviciana Western Tanager

On July 11, 1965, I saw a male in full breeding plumage at Wonder Lake Campground, Mt. McKinley National Park. It was observed at a distance of 15 feet in good light, and is in any case unmistakable in this plumage.

This is the fourth record of the Western Tanager for Alaska. Gabrielson and Lincoln (1959) mention two records only of its occurrence. One of these is quite predictable, being from the Stikine River in southern Alaska, just over the border from British Columbia, where the bird is known to occur. The other record is far more surprising, being from Barrow in far northern Alaska. A third bird was recently seen by Stewart (1964) at Petersburg in southern Alaska. This, again, is a locality where the bird might be expected. My bird from McKinley Park is so far from its known breeding area in British Columbia that it should be classed with the Barrow bird as purely a straggler.

Chondestes grammacus Lark Sparrow

A single bird was flushed from the roadside of the Alaska Highway at mile 190 on Trutch Mountain on July 2, 1965. This is in northeastern British Columbia about 100 miles south of Fort Nelson. I recognized the bird immediately from the distinctive tail pattern in flight. It landed in the road enabling me to see the chestnut face patch and other distinguishing marks at close range for several minutes.

This locality is far north of the bird's known range. It nests in extreme southern British Columbia and southern Alberta, and according to Munro and Cowan (1947) wanders casually north to the Cariboo Parklands Biotic Area, roughly 400 miles south of Trutch Mountain in British Columbia. Salt and Wilk (1958) state that the Lark Sparrow has been recorded in Alberta as far north as Botha, which is still 600 miles southeast of Trutch Mountain.

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