

First Record of White-rumped Sandpiper for the Central Valley

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On 17 May 1986, Yee discovered a White-rumped Sandpiper (*Calidris fuscicollis*) at the Stockton sewage ponds, San Joaquin County, California. This large tertiary wastewater treatment complex has a history of attracting large numbers of waterbirds, including many rarities, especially during periods of migration and winter. This particular spring, the facility's staff had drained one of the ponds for maintenance purposes, creating extensive mudflats during the month of May and producing a most impressive list of shorebirds.

On this particular clear, calm morning at about 0730, Yee observed 25 peeps (*Calidris* spp.) at a distance of about 150 yards. His initial observations were made through 10x35 binoculars with the sun shining from the side. From this distance and under these lighting conditions, his initial impression was of the expected Western Sandpipers (*Calidris mauri*) and Least Sandpipers (*Calidris minutilla*). However, after looking over the flock again, he noted one appeared to be quite different. It was slightly larger than the two Western Sandpipers next to it, had a proportionately shorter, straighter bill, and had wingtips that extended well beyond the tail. Yee's initial assumption was of a Baird's Sandpiper (*Calidris bairdii*), a casual spring migrant through the Central Valley. However, upon bringing out a spotting scope, he noticed that there was streaking on the underparts that extended well onto the flanks, which ruled out Baird's Sandpiper. Considering the possibility the bird might be a White-rumped Sandpiper, Yee drove around on the levee road to a position where the sun was at his back and he was about 50 yards closer to the bird.

After extensive observations for about 90 minutes, Yee returned home to inform others of his find. At about 1400, he returned to the Stockton sewage ponds with his wife, Sue. They were joined shortly thereafter by Keith Hansen, Kirk Hopkin, and Sally Walters, and relocated the bird after about 45 minutes of searching. They then watched the sandpiper for 45 minutes. A visit by Yee to the ponds on 19 May failed to produce the bird. The following description is based on field notes from both Yee and Hansen:

A *Calidris* sandpiper that was large, long-bodied, and short-legged for a peep. It was larger than accompanying Western and Semipalmated (*Calidris*

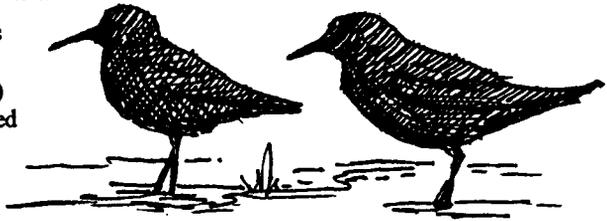
(*Calidris alpina*). The elongated appearance was due to very long wings which extended well beyond the tail. The long wingtips also tilted slightly upward, giving the bird a high-ended look. The bill appeared dark and proportionately shorter than that of a Western. [Though not observed on this bird probably because of the distance of observations, the lower mandible of White-rumped Sandpiper usually has some color at the base (Hayman et al. 1986)]. The bill was rather thick at the base and tapered to a point with the upper mandible straight and the lower mandible slightly decurved at the tip.

The crown and ear coverts were a light reddish brown with the crown finely streaked. The supercilium was rather broad, appearing bolder than on a Western. There was a slight grayish loreal stripe. The entire upperparts including the wings were quite evenly colored a light tawny brown, giving the bird an overall pale appearance. Darker areas on the center of the back feathers produced an evenly streaked or mottled pattern to the upperparts. A very faint "V" was formed on the back by some white feathers along the scapulars. The rump area was clearly seen on several occasions, both when the bird was preening and briefly when in flight. It appeared solidly white. [It should also be noted that it is the uppertail coverts that are white on this species and not the rump (Hayman et al. 1986).]

The base color of the underparts was white. There were bold, dark streaks across the breast that extended along the sides to the flanks and were patterned somewhat in rows. The throat, belly, and undertail coverts were white. The outer tail feathers were grayish with the center most rectrices blackish. The wings had a very faint white wing stripe along the base of the secondaries. The legs were blackish.

Yee heard the bird vocalize several times when it was in flight; it gave a very high "tsit-tsit-tsit."

Figure 1. Silhouettes of Western (left) and White-rumped (right) sandpipers as observed at the Stockton Sewage Ponds, San Joaquin County, 17 May 1986.



Sketch by Keith Hansen.

Identification of White-rumped Sandpiper is fairly straightforward in any plumage. Only Baird's Sandpiper shares the long-winged, short-legged appearance of White-rumped Sandpiper, but their plumage differences are significant. In breeding plumage, White-rumped Sandpiper probably most closely resembles Western Sandpiper, but the more upright stance of a Western along with wings that barely reach the tip of the tail create a very different profile compared to a White-rumped. That this bird appeared very pale above with few bright colors on the upperparts is apparently within the normal range of variation in the species (Paulson 1993).

White-rumped Sandpiper breeds on the tundra from northern Alaska to southwestern Baffin Island. It winters extensively in South America and spring migrants move primarily through the interior of North America east of the Rockies (A.O.U. 1983). The species is a late migrant both in spring and fall, spring passage through the U.S. extending from late-April to mid-June (Hayman et al. 1986).

On the west coast of North America, White-rumped Sandpiper is one of the rarer "eastern" shorebirds. As of 1997, the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC) had accepted the identification of 12 records of White-rumped Sandpiper (Roberson and Patten 1997). An additional 15 records have been published from the Pacific Northwest (Paulson 1993). It is interesting to note that only ten of the above mentioned 27 records are for the immediate coast. Spring is the predominate season (16 records for spring versus 11 for fall). In California the spring bias becomes even more extreme with nine in spring versus three in fall. The span of spring dates for California is 17 May - 16 June, the Stockton bird being the earliest spring record for the state. The CBRC accepted the Stockton White-rumped Sandpiper as the ninth record for the state and the first for the Central Valley (Langham 1991). To date, it remains the only record for the Central Valley.

LITERATURE CITED

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