

Curlew Sandpiper (alternate, presumably a female) (*Calidris ferruginea*)

5 May 1990 mostly overcast; 15 knot north breeze; low 60's 9:30 -10:30 am
 Vincent Refuge, off LA 35, Vermilion Parish, Louisiana

Description by Curtis Marantz

other observers: JV Remsen, SW Cardiff, DL Dittmann, D Muth, D Purrington, M Swan
 J Kleiman, D Pashley, HD Pratt, and D Hunter

Upon hearing of this bird's presence, a number of us went out to try to find it among the thousands of shorebirds present in the general vicinity on the next day. The bird was found on 4 May by Ken Rosenberg during one of his regular rice fields censuses. On this day, I managed to oversleep and luckily missed the first two hours of the grim search that followed the eventual conclusion, of the other observers, that the bird was not still in the field that it was seen in on the previous day. Personally, I had only been present about a half hour before Mark Swan drove up saying that he probably had the bird but was not able to relocate it, nor show it to any of the people he was with. We all decided to check out this tip and were lucky we did. Upon returning to where Mark had the bird, about 100 meters in from Hwy. 35 about half way between Hwy. 699 and the southern edge of the refuge, I quickly relocated the bird foraging with a number of Dunlin (*C. alpina*) and other smaller peep, primarily Semipalmated (*C. pusilla*) and White-rumped sandpipers (*C. fuscicollis*). The Curlew Sandpiper typically probed into the wet mud and, in general, seemed to forage in about the same manner as the Dunlin. Its odd coloration with respect to the other birds present made the Curlew Sandpiper relatively easy to pick out for most people present. On a couple of occasions, we had the bird in flight, when its characteristic white rump was easily evident. We left after losing the bird the second or third time the flock of birds flew. I was primarily using my 22X wide-angle scope to make the observations. The subdued mid-morning sun was at our backs and we were able to approach to within 100 meters of the bird at one time, however, most observations were from 150-200 meters. The bird was too distant for us to discern any calls it may have given.

The Curlew Sandpiper was obviously different in comparison to all other species of shorebirds that were present in the rice fields on this day. The odd pinkish-rust coloration of the head and underparts was immediately separable from the brown tones of most of the peep, the orangish backs of the Dunlin, the barring of the Stilt Sandpipers (*C. himantopus*), and even the other coloration of the alternate-plumaged dowitchers (*Limnodromus* spp.). Overall, the Curlew Sandpiper looked somewhat larger and plumper than the Dunlin that it was with; however, this effect appeared to be due to its being fluffed up, giving it a rotund appearance that I have not previously noted in this species. It also appeared to have slightly longer legs than the nearby Dunlin, these appearing dark. The bill was relatively long and decurved; at the distance we were from the bird, I could probably not have separated this bird from a Dunlin based solely on the bill shape, but the bill of this bird seemed a little longer than that of a Dunlin. The head, breast, sides, flanks, and upper belly were all the same pinkish-rust coloration noted above; however, as one proceeded down the underparts from the breast through the belly, there was progressively more

white in the plumage. The breast was relatively unmarked, merging into the noticeably speckled/barred upper belly, and finally the lower belly and undertail coverts which appeared white with dark speckling. Barely visible to me at the distance we were from the bird was a whitish throat; however, I was easily able to see a whitish eyering and what appeared to be a short superciliary projecting backward from the eye. The crown and nape appeared a little browner than the face and clearly were finely streaked blackish. The mantle was a tan color with fairly bold black streaking. The scapulars appeared quite mottled with dark and light brown; no real pattern was discernable here. During our closest views, after most people had left, I believe I could detect a noticeably "washed out" panel in the wing coverts; presumably, this appearance was caused by worn feathers. The remiges appeared dark on the resting bird. In flight, and once when I saw the bird raise its wings, the white rump was clearly visible. The rump of this bird did not contrast as strongly with the tail as in the White-rumped Sandpipers, but rather, the tail appeared to be a medium brownish color. The tail pattern in flight looked almost like that of Stilt Sandpiper but the tail seemed a little darker than the tail of that species. In flight, a faint, but noticeable, wingbar was evident across a dark wing.

I did not consult any field guides between the time of the observation and the time of writing this account. I have seen a number of these birds in Europe in addition to a single bird coming out of alternate plumage in New Zealand and a juvenile in California and have no doubt that this bird was a Curlew Sandpiper. The most similar species with which this bird could be confused would either be alternate-plumaged Red Knot (*C. canutus*) or Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicaria*) but these species are eliminated by the combination of black, long, and decurved bill and white rump, not to mention the eyering, streaked back, and odd underpart coloration. This description was written from memory on 13 May 1990.



Curtis A. Marantz
Museum of Natural Science
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803

Louisiana Ornithological Society's

LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

Report Form

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC) Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or a similar format when submitting records for review (to assure that all information involving an observation is accounted for). Attach additional pages as necessary. Please print or type. Attach xerox of fieldnotes, drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos for more obscurely marked species. When completed mail to Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216.

1. **English and Scientific names:** Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)
2. **Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage** (e.g. 2 ad.in breeding or alternate plumage): 1 in alternate plumage, perhaps a female or first year bird.
3. **Locality: LOUISIANA:** Vermilion
(parish)
Vincent Refuge, ca 4 mi. N Kaplan on hwy. 35
(specific locality)
4. **Date(s) when observed:** 5 May 1990
5. **Time(s) of day when observed:** 10:00-10:30 AM
6. **Reporting observer and address:** Donna L. Dittmann & Steven W. Cardiff
Museum of Natural Science
119 Foster Hall
LSU, Baton Rouge, LA 70803
7. **Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird(s):**
David Hunter, Doug Pratt, Mark Swan, Curtis Marantz, Dave Muth, Dan Purrington, Mac Myers, J. V. Remsen, and Joe Kleiman were also present.
8. **Other observers who independently identified the bird(s):**
Ken Rosenberg discovered the bird the previous day.
9. **Light conditions** (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): good
10. **Optical equipment** (type, power, condition):
primarily 15-40 x Balscope Sr. in good condition; we were comparing our old scope to all the other scopes during the observation. It was still better than most of the others for color and clarity.
11. **Distance to bird(s):** 200 m +

12. **Duration of observation:** actual observation time, about 15 min.
13. **Habitat:** wet, partially flooded plowed field.
14. **Behavior of bird/circumstances of observation** (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation):

The bird was observed feeding on the wet mud or barely flooded sections of the field. It fed by picking off the surface or shallowly probing into the mud. Most of the time it moved with a somewhat "hunched" posture, with the feathers of its back fluffed up. This gave the bird a decidedly plump appearance. It was also seen by DLD in flight a few times. Flight was direct, reminiscent of a Dunlin.

15. **Description** (include only what was actually seen, *not what "should" have been seen*; include if possibly: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species, body bulk, shape, proportions, bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species):

Slightly larger than nearby Dunlin, with somewhat similar overall shape, except that the Curlew had its feathers fluffed up and looks more plump. Bill was black, about the length, give or take of a male Dunlin, and decurved slightly from base to tip. The throat, chin, and area in front of the eye (similar to a Ruff) was white. The breast was light brownish-orange, similar to the color of a washed out Short-billed Dowitcher. This coloration blended to a mottled orange and white on the belly and the remainder of the underparts were dingy off-white. The crown and nape were similar in color to the breast, a darker area offset the face, giving the bird a masked appearance. The back feathers were dark brown with paler edges. This scaly look also included the scapulars and tertials. The folded wings were brown (appearing somewhat faded). Legs were black. In flight the rump was white, but the white was not as distinctive as that of a White-rumped Sandpiper, because the Curlew had a lighter-colored tail, much like that of a Stilt Sandpiper. The bird appeared to be in alternate plumage, rather than in the process of molt between basic and alternate plumage, based on the uniform feathering of the back and underparts. The duller coloration is suggestive of a female, or perhaps a first alternate plumage (which may have been indicated by the more worn appearance of the primaries.) Without closer examination of plumage or bill length, a definitive age and sex determination is not possible.

16. **Voice:** not heard
17. **Similar species** (include how they were eliminated by your observation):
From the bird's coloration, Red Knot is the only species for which it could possibly be confused. The bill, general body size, and shape differences between a Curlew Sandpiper and Red Knot are quite different. The knot is a larger, plumper bird with proportionately shorter legs, and a short stout bill.
18. **Photographs or tape recordings obtained?** (by whom? attached?):
photographed by Ken Rosenberg on the previous day.

19. **Previous experience with this species:**
DLD has seen one in juvenal plumage in California; SWC had no experience
20. **Identification aids:** (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):
a. **at time of observation:** none
b. **after observation:** looked at Holarctic Waders & Birds of the Western Palearctic to see if the bird could be aged or sexed based on plumage observed during the observation.
21. **This description is written from:** ___ notes made during the observation;
XX notes made after the observation (date: 5/5/90); ___ memory.
22. **Are you positive of your identification if not, explain:**
yes *Steven W. Cardiff 6/24/91*
23. **Signature of reporter:** *Donna L. Dittman* *6/24/91* *1⁰⁰ pm*
(date) (time)

1990-038

Carlow Sandpiper

TO

May 5, 90
1000-10-24

Slightly larger
more plump
smaller bill

bill black
slightly dec.

back feathers
dark br. of pale
orange
fluffed up

wing brown

white
throat chin

light br-orange
breast - like
washed out SBDD

1
legs black

white rump
tail not
so
contrast
none

dark
as per



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LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE
REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of unusual birds. It may be used flexibly and need not be used at all. Leave blank any details not observed. Attach additional sheets if necessary. Please print or type. Attach drawings, photographs, etc.; include all photos if an obscurely marked species. When completed, mail to the Secretary of the LOS Bird Records Committee.

1. Common and scientific name:
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g. 2ad. in breeding plumage):
3. Locality: Louisiana: Vermilion Parish: Vincent mini-refuge,
ca 4 mi. N Kaplan
4. Date(s) when seen: 4 May 1990
5. Times of day when seen: 10 AM ~ NOON
6. Reporting observer and address: Kenneth V. Rosenberg: LSUMNS
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird: NONE
8. Other observers who independently identified the bird: Everyone; next 2 days
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): Bright, hazy sun
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition):
11. Distance to bird: as close as 50 ft.
12. Duration of observation: ~ 2 hr
13. Habitat (general and specific):
Ricefield/Agriculture
- shallow flooded field with drier, muddy margins
14. Behavior (flying, feeding, resting, etc.; include and stress any habits used in identification):
- stayed mostly by itself, loosely associated with other peep - mostly Semipalmated & white-rumped Sandpipers.
- probed in shallow, muddy water; spent much time preening + resting.
- seen in flight several times as the birds flushed, + wheeled around over field.
15. Description (Include only what was actually seen, not what "should" have been seen. Include if possible: total length; body bulk; shape, bill, eye, and leg characteristics; color and pattern of plumage, etc. Stress field marks):

- See attached transcription of notes dictated into microcassette, while watching bird.

- See attached photos

16. Voice: None heard.

17. Similar species (include how they are eliminated by your observations):

- At first, I considered Red Knot, because difficult to judge size + bill shape. Only at close range could I be positive of bill curvature - did not seem as curved as pictured in books.

18. Photographs (Was it photographed? By whom? Attached?):

19. Previous experience with this species: I've seen sev. breeding plumage adults in spring in Northeast, one basic plumage adult there, and 1 juv. in California.

20. Aids: List books, illustrations, birders, etc. used in identification
a) at time of observation;

b) after observation: I looked in all available guides, but mainly to compare illustrations - did not influence I.D.

21. This description written from: X notes made during observation; X notes made after observation; memory.

22. Are you positive of your identification? YES. If not, explain:

23. Signature of reporter:

24. Date and time of writing this account:

Kenneth V. Rosenberg

6/7/91

Curlew Sandpiper - 4 May '90 - Vincent Wild. Ref.

Dictated while viewing through 40X scope

- twice size of SESA; slightly larger, chunkier than WRSA (next to it)
- Mostly breeding plumage: brick red on breast + neck, white blotches (ledges?) remaining on center of breast, increasing towards belly.
- Chin white, white just in front of + above eye - "white-faced" look.
- Crown + nape grayish, w/ rows of dark spots
- belly + underbelly white, undertail coverts spotted
- back lt. brown, spotted, wing coverts mottled blackish, gold, gray feathers
- underwing linings pure white
- bill longer than head; slightly decurved throughout length; thin, uniformly curved.
- wings not projecting beyond tail
- legs dark
- probing in mud in shallow, muddy water; staged mostly by itself.
- At closer range - broken eye-ring or "salmon-colored" face; crown w/ fine rows of dots extending right to base of bill; Auricular patch brick red, slightly darker + set off from neck; dk line through lores to bill; whitish marks above lores; slightly paler above auricular, set off from "cap".
- In flight, w/ peep: same size as Dunlin; silvery-looking upperparts w/ diffuse silvery white wing stripe all the way down wing
- clear white rump set off from grayish tail + back
- spent much time sleeping + preening (seemed tired)