

Curlew Sandpiper In Alabama

The Curlew Sandpiper was added to the Alabama list when one was seen on Friday, April 28, 1972. This sandpiper breeds in northern Siberia and migrates throughout the old world. It is rare, however, in North and South America.

We had been observing shorebirds of various species (10 Semipalmated Plovers, 1 Piping Plover, 6 Wilson's Plovers, 6 Black-bellied Plovers, 10 Ruddy Turnstones, 3 Whimbrels, 10 Willets, 20 Least Sandpipers, 40 Dunlins, 10 Short-billed Dowitchers, 20 Semipalmated Sandpipers, 3 Sanderlings, 2 Black-necked Stilts - the Stilts are uncommon, the others common on Dauphin Island) when one bird stood out from all of the rest. The russet neck, chest and back, and the down curved bill immediately suggested the Curlew Sandpiper.

The unusual bird was observed three times (for a total of about 20 minutes) with 7 power binoculars and a scope of 15-60 power. The scope was primarily used at 15 power because the bird was first sighted at about 100 feet, and this was reduced to about 40 feet by the bird feeding in our direction.

The field marks were:

a) Russet red-orange color of head, neck, chest and back was bloched with white as if the bird was in 75% summer plumage and 25 % winter plumage. The russet was most pronounced on the neck and chest; there was progressively more white nearer the tail, and the under tail coverts were whitish.

b) Black markedly down curved bill of the same size as the Dunlin.

c) The bird was about the same size as the Dunlin, except its legs were a little longer and its body was longer and slimmer looking. The Dunlin looked fatter and dumpier.

d) White rump - We flushed the bird three times.

e) The legs and the bill were black.

Time, place, tide, weather were:

Friday, April 28, 1972, 5:45-6:15 A.M. Central Standard Time, sunrise was 5:10 A.M., western end of Dauphin Island on bayside - 1 mile west of Holiday Inn. The temperature was about 55°; there was a strong (25 mph) southeast wind; a heavy overcast until about 5:30; a storm seemed imminent; full moon; tide was rising at 6:00 A.M. with an unusually high tide around 10:00 A.M. - 12:00 A.M. with the road to the West End under water in places.

1949 Record by Thomas A. Imhof.

On March 3, 1949, a winter plumaged Curlew Sandpiper was seen in a flock of Dunlins on Cochrane Causeway near where the Battleship "Alabama" is now exhibited. This bird was white-rumped and of the same size as a Dunlin, but the observer failed to notice anything unusual about the bill. The observer was not certain of his identification until after reading and reviewing the possibilities, especially of White-rumped Sandpiper. Because of the belated identification, the record was not published (until now) since the observer felt that it should not stand alone.

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