

**DOCUMENTATION FORM**  
For Unusual Bird Sightings in Iowa

**Species:** RUFF, molting, most likely female.

**Number:** 1.

**Location:** Pinchey Bottoms, Marion Co. (Red Rock W.R).

**Date and time:** 28 June 2002, 5:15 to 6:00 p.m.

**Name and address:** Mike Dooley, 1811 B Ave. NE, Apt. 2, Cedar Rapids IA 52402-5464.

---

**Habitat:** Large expanse of shallows and mudflats.

**Viewing conditions:** Sunny, with slight breeze, temperature around 90°. Closest range obtained was approx. 150 yards. Sun generally to one side, not too far forward, overall very good light conditions, using spotting scope.

The intention was to approach still closer to this bird and get down to the business of systematic field notes. However, a lengthy distraction arose related to the comings and goings of two other parties; by the time we turned back to the Ruff, it had disappeared and could not be relocated anywhere in the area. Ultimately I'm not sure I could have identified this bird without having anticipated it from the original IA-BIRD report.

**Appearance:**

Plump, hunchbacked, disheveled-looking shorebird. About equal in size to nearby Short-billed Dowitcher, perhaps just slightly larger. Mantle and scapular feathers raised up in shaggy fashion from back; similar impression to forward part of lowers. Breast mottled with black patches against white. Otherwise generally dark brown-to-charcoal look to uppers, white for lowers; subtleties of feather-edgings not well-observed. The color discerned to the uppers may have been the effect of distance and, somehow, the bright sun; I'm aware it is in contrast to every field guide's description. Bill was black, stouter than those of surrounding Pectoral Sandpipers, very slightly decurved, about length of Pectoral Sandpiper's; bill not characterizable as long or thin. Legs not seen (see Behavior). Best approximation to bird overall in field guides is NGS, "summer molting female," p. 179 (3d ed.).

**Behavior:** Feeding up to belly in water, head usually half submerged. Twice strode quickly a yard or two in purposeful fashion, posture upright (leg color not noted). Stride quite distinctive, almost a run; not like scamper of peep, or waddle of dowitcher.

**Similar species eliminated:** Too plump and ruffled for yellowlegs or Stilt Sandpiper; bill not right for either; mottled breast not right for either. Bill certainly not right for dowitcher. Much too large for Pectoral Sandpiper. Not large enough and bill not right for godwit. Too large and bill too short for Dunlin, nothing like smooth gray coloring of basic Dunlin. Not quite as compact and short-necked a look as Red Knot, bill not straight or quite as hefty-looking (though heftier than guides would suggest, compared to Pectoral Sandpipers at least); plumage colors and distribution not right for any molt of Red Knot.

**Previous experience with this species and similar ones:** None with Ruff. Countless Pectoral Sandpipers; numerous Stilt Sandpipers, Dunlins, and dowitchers, including basic plumages; a few godwits; one fall juvenile Red Knot with several visits.

**References and persons consulted before writing description:** Hayman, Marchant, and Prater, *Shorebirds*, before viewing bird. Sibley before viewing bird, and afterward mainly to review details of alternate species possibilities. NGS after most of writing done, looking for closest match in guides for determining sex.

Others with you: Mark Proescholdt, Chris Caster.

Others before or after you: Discovered by Jim Sinclair, earlier same day.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about the identification? No.

How long before field notes made: No field notes.

How long before this form completed: Seven hours.