

DOCUMENTATION OF SIGHTING

Western Sandpipers
Calidris mauri

Date: 1 September 1991

Time: 14:30 - 16:00

Location: Sand Point on Coralville Reservoir, Johnson Co., Iowa

Description: Three individuals in basic plumage, probing mud and wading edge of lakeshore cove. Not in a group together. Peeps 1/2 to 2/3 the size of nearby Pectoral Sandpipers (C. melanotos) and slightly larger than nearby Semipalmated Sandpipers (C. pusilla). Bills clearly longer than in semipalmateds, particularly one individual with bill suggestive of a Dunlin's (C. alpina) but slighter throughout its length. Bills with slight droop at tip. Folded wing-tips extended to but not beyond tail-tip. Upperparts including folded wings mottled, grayish with pale feather edgings. No suggestion of dark bend of wing seen in basic-plumaged Sanderling (C. alba). One individual displayed a distinct line of bright rust down the length of the scapulars, contrasting nicely with the remainder of the gray dorsum. This same individual showed a wash of rust on the crown. The other two birds displayed only a distinct patch of rust in the anterior scapulars. Heads and auriculars otherwise nondescript, grayish. Underparts clean white with grayish wash at sides of upper breast. No dark flecking on the sides and/or flanks of any of the three birds. Hindparts and tail mostly white divided by dark rump. Legs proportionately longish, grayish above "ankle" joint and black below it.

Observed off-and-on for 1½ hours from as close as 10 meters in bright sun with Zeiss 10 x 40 binoculars and 25 x 60 telescope. No vocalizations heard.

Similar Species: Some 30+ Semipalmated Sandpipers observed in same area simultaneously: Less robust and proportionately shorter-legged, bills clearly the shorter in all individuals with less distinct or no droop at tip, cold grayish coloration with no hint of rust in scapulars or crown. Sanderling larger with proportionately shorter bill, always shows dark bend of wing in basic plumage. Basic-plumaged Dunlin comparable in size to Pectoral Sandpiper with more substantial and drooped bill, gray wash across entire breast.

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Note: I am unable to determine the age(s) of these three birds (immatures in first basic vs. adults in subsequent basic plumages) based on the information in my field guide references, including Kaufman's "Advanced Birding".