

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Western Sandpiper; **Number:** 1 basic

Location: Amana L., Iowa Co., IA.

Date: 28 Oct 1994; **Time:** 2:00-2:20 p.m.

Name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

Others before/with/after: Dick Tetrault with me.

Habitat and circumstances: large shallow lake with low water and extensive mud flats.

Description of bird: Shortly after I started scanning the shorebirds that were present, I noticed a peep with black legs that appeared to be about half the size of Pectoral Sandpipers by direct comparison. In addition to the black legs, the overall gray color suggested that it was a Semipalmated or Western Sandpiper, both of which would be unusually late. We watched this bird of and on while also looking a godwit and other shore birds. The bird appeared very gray to me, darker above and with indistinct darker gray marks in the bib area. The wing coverts seemed to have light edging. I saw no rufous coloration anywhere. My initial impression was that the bill was short, but when we got the scope on the bird at close range in profile view, the bill had a definite droop at the tip and tapered to a fine point. The bill still did not look "long" to me, but I did not measure it in reference to head length. While typing this documentation, and after having transcribed my notes as above, I am looking at a photo of a Western Sandpiper from the VIREO collection taken in New York on 6 Oct 1985 (Kent, T. H. 1957. Bird identification quiz. Iowa Bird Life 57:124-126). This bird very accurately depicts the bird that we saw. If anything, the bill had slightly more of a droop and appeared slightly more pointed. The bill length in this photo also looks rather short to me. The bird fed mostly in very shallow water rather than on the mud.

Voice: not heard.

Similar species: Separation from Semipalmated Sandpiper rests on the bill. The behavior is a bit supportive. Based on records for Iowa, we do not yet know which species is more likely. Having to travel to South America, it would seem that semipalmateds would pass through Iowa earlier, but pectorals go just as far south and some are late migrants.

Any one have reservations?: Having questioned other records of these two species, I also harbor some degree of skepticism of my own.

Light: We were looking east and northeast with soft light; **Distance:** 25 yards (est); **Optics:** 10x binocular; 20x scope.

Previous experience: I have seen many Westerns and Semipalmateds and considered the problem of identification in basic plumage.

References before/after viewing: None until typing this documentation (see above).

Time of notes: during observation; **Final typing:** 1 week.