

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Dunlin; **Number:** 1 molting

Location: Coralville Res., Babcock Access, Johnson Co., Iowa

Date: 30 July 1995; **Time:** 2:00 to 2:45 p.m. (approx.)

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

Others before/with/after: none

Habitat and circumstances: mud flats

Description of bird: A plump shorebird intermediate in size between Pectoral and Least sandpipers in same field of view. I first noticed the long black bill which was decurved at tip. My first impression was Dunlin, but the date and plumage didn't seem to fit. The bill was about 25% longer than the distance from the base of the bill to the back of the nape and at least twice as long as that of the Least Sandpiper. The body was plump and legs were short and placed back of the middle of the bird. The wing/tail extension was relatively short. The upper parts were gray/brown with worn fairly prominent white edging on the greater coverts and tertials. The median and lesser coverts and back were relatively plain and darker. I saw no rufous in the wing or scapulars. The crown was light brownish and appeared very finely streaked. There was a soft white line from above the eye extending down and back to the nape. The under parts were light gray (no black on the belly) with very fine short streaks on the sides of the breast and smudged indistinct streaks across the breast. The legs were black and relatively short compared to the Pectoral. Because of the streaking on the sides I thought this might be a White-rumped Sandpiper. I watched the bird for a long time. When it preened I could see bright white on the sides of the tail proximally. Finally it flew and I could see a dark line up the center of the tail with white on the sides only. The bird was feeding most of the time on the edge of the mud or in the water.

Voice: not heard

Similar species: The bill and body proportions were those of a Dunlin, but the date and plumage were new for me. The streaks on the underparts, worn edging on some wing feathers, and eye line appear to be retained alternate features, while the lack of black on belly and rufous in wing are features of basic plumage. I assume that this was an adult partially molted to basic plumage. Although Dunlin is usually a late fall migrant, both Iowa and Minnesota have a few July records. According to Prater et al. (1977), nearctic birds molt before migrating; therefore, a bird in mostly basic plumage would not be unusual. White-rumped Sandpiper is excluded by the tail pattern, body proportions and bill length. Baird's Sandpiper has a shorter bill, longer tail/wing extension, slimmer profile, and browner and scaly upperparts.

Any one have reservations?: It took me a while to be sure of the ID.

Light: sun behind me; **Distance:** 30 yards; **Optics:** 20x scope.

Previous experience: a common bird in uncommon plumage

References before/after viewing: National Geographic Guide, Prater et al., Hayman et al.

Time of notes: none; **Final typing:** 20 hours