

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Baird's Sandpiper, 1 in alternate plumage, 19 March 1988, Sandy Beach,  
Coralville Res., Johnson Co., IA

Observer: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52240

Other observers: Jim Fuller told me about seeing a bird of this description at  
this location on 13 March.

Time: 9:45 to 10:00 a.m. for a few minutes at each of three locations on the  
mud flats (I think the eagles flushed it, not me.

Habitat: Bird was away from water with Killdeers on extensive mud flats  
created by very low reservoir.

Description: "The bird was first seen with a Water Pipit. It was slightly  
longer and definitely heavier-bodied than the pipit. Later when seen  
flying with killdeer, it appeared to be about half the body size of a  
killdeer and perhaps two-thirds the wingspan. The bird was buffy-brownish  
on white background. The legs were distinctly black. The bill was quite  
long and thin, longer than the head perhaps. Bill thinner and longer than  
I would expect on a Semipalmated Sandpiper and not as tapered as I would  
expect on a Western Sandpiper. The eye was black and beady. The face was  
rather uniform pale. The top of head and naped appeared to have very fine  
streaking. The area across the upper breast and throat was buffy-brown,  
sort of a high bib. I didn't get a good head-on look to see if there were  
streaks in this area. It definitely had a bib effect, but not as sharply  
cut off as in a Least Sandpiper and higher. The rest of the underparts  
were all white as far as I could tell. The scapulars had a very distinct  
scaled pattern with dark centers and light edges. The light edges were the  
same buffy-brown as the rest of the bird. The wing coverts were not as  
sharply marked--they were definitely plainer. In the sitting bird the tips  
of the primaries appeared black and extended past the tip of the tail (I  
couldn't really see the tip of the tail). The bird had a rather elongated  
appearance, rather than upright like a Pectoral Sandpiper. In flight, the  
bird definitely did not have a white rump."

Song: not heard

Behavior: Standing and running on mud flat and flying with killdeer

Conditions: overcast, 30-60 yards (guess), 10x binoculars.

Similar species: Black legs, size, and markings exclude both Least and  
Pectoral Sandpipers. Brownish color, bib, and bill don't fit Semipalmated  
or Western. Lack of white rump and markings exclude White-rumped  
Sandpiper.

Agreement: Jim Fuller presented it to me as a Semipalmated Sandpiper, but the  
description he gave me over the phone fits the bird I saw.

Previous experience: An uncommon shorebird in eastern Iowa and I see more  
juveniles in fall than alternate plumage adults in spring. I don't recall  
seeing a basic-plumaged bird.

References/time used: I dictated the description before looking at the  
National Geographic Guide and looked at Shorebirds by Hayman, Marchant and  
Prater at home later.

Time of notes/typed: 10:05, about five minutes after last viewing. Typed 4  
hours later.