

Long-billed Curlew 1
4 Jul 1990
IPL Ponds, Pottawattamie Co., IA
R. Silcock, T. Bray
IBL 60:101, 103, 62:21, Silcock 1991

Record Number: 90-11
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATIONS

Ross Silcock
Tanya E. Bray

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:101, 103
Records Committee: IBL 62:21
Silcock, W. R. 1991. Long-billed Curlew in Pottawattamie
County. IBL 61:120-121.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D A good pair of supporting documents that are quite acceptable.

A-D: Descriptions eliminate other species very nicely. Good work on the part of both observers.

A-D: As one of the observers, I can only reiterate that I remain convinced that this bird was a Long-billed Curlew.

A-D: Excellent description and beautifully typed.

A-D: Excellent documentations which corroborate each other.

A-D: Excellent documentations that clearly eliminate possibility of any other species.

A-D: Good documentations and descriptions!

LITERATURE CITED

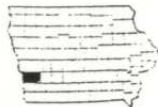
- Dinsmore, J. J., T. H. Kent, D. Koenig, P. C. Petersen, and D. M. Roosa. 1984. Iowa Birds. Iowa State Univ. Press, Ames. 356 pp.
Livingston, J. R. 1985. Mountain Bluebird in Decatur County. Iowa Bird Life 55:19-20.
Thelen, E. 1989. Mountain Bluebird in Palo Alto County. Iowa Bird Life 59:124.

1800 Sycamore, Atlantic, IA 50022

LONG-BILLED CURLEW IN POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY

W. ROSS SILCOCK

On 4 July 1990, I visited the Iowa Power and Light (IPL) ponds in extreme southwestern Pottawattamie County. Very few birds were present, most notably the resident Piping Plovers, but my attention was drawn to a large shorebird preening near the water's edge. Closer examination by telescope showed that the bird had a very long decurved bill, no head stripes overall evenly and finely barred brownish-gray plumage, and long bluish legs. During preening, the wings were often extended to exhibit diagnostic cinnamon wing linings. These features identified the bird as a Long-billed Curlew, a conclusion concurred with by Tanya Bray, who arrived soon after I did and also saw this bird. It did not stay long, however, allowing a total viewing time of only about 20 minutes. The Records Committee of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union has accepted this record.



This is only the third record of this species in Iowa in the last 50 years. Carl Priebe observed one with a Marbled Godwit at the Riverton area in Fremont County 11 April 1989 (Priebe 1990), and one collected 12 November 1968 in Emmet County is now in the Iowa State University collection (Priebe 1990).

Long-billed Curlew breeds throughout the interior western United States and adjacent Canada in its preferred habitat of moist grasslands. Populations on the high plains sections of the Great Plains are doing well, but populations further east are not. The species has not bred for many years in Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois (Johnsgard 1981). The most easterly populations still doing well are in the Nebraska Sandhills, western South Dakota, and southwestern Kansas.

Considering the disappearance of eastern breeding populations, the paucity of records of migrants in Iowa is not surprising. Most Great Plains long-bills presumably migrate west of Iowa to their wintering grounds in interior Texas and the western Gulf Coast. Also strong flyers like Long-billed Curlew probably are non-stop migrants. It is also possible that the very few recent records east of the current breeding and wintering ranges are referable to the very small population which winters on the southern Atlantic Coast.

The three Iowa records cited above illustrate the timing pattern of this species' migration. Spring migration occurs in April and early May, with most egg laying in May and June (Johnsgard 1979). The 11 April 1989 Fremont County record appears to have been an off-course spring migrant. As in many North American shorebirds, fall migration timing differs by age-class (with varying amounts of overlap). Females abandon the young when the latter are two or three weeks old, leaving the males to

care for the brood (Johnsgard 1981). The Eurasian counterpart, the Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), considered part of a superspecies with *N. americana* (Mayr and Short, 1970), shows similar behavior. Females leave the brood to the males 10-20 days after the young hatch and join other females to migrate (Cramp and Simmons 1983). Given egg dates as early as 1 May in South Dakota (South Dakota Ornithologists' Union 1991) and 3 May in Saskatchewan (Bent 1928), and an incubation period of about 28 days (Johnsgard 1979), the 4 July bird in Pottawattamie County was probably a female which laid eggs in late May, close to the peak laying date for the species, and thus not at all unusual as a date of occurrence for a migrating female. The Emmet County record probably is of a very late juvenile migrant, the last age class to migrate. Such late dates (those in October and November) are unusual, and probably indicate a tendency for juveniles to disperse before migrating south. Most migration to wintering areas takes place in August and September. Indeed, all birds have left the Nebraska breeding grounds by early August (Johnsgard 1979).

LITERATURE CITED

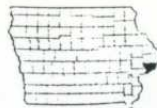
- Bent, A. C. 1929. Life Histories of North American Shore Birds. U. S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 146, 412 pp.
Cramp, S., and K. E. L. Simmons (eds.). 1983. Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, vol. 3. Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford. 913 pp.
Johnsgard, P. A. 1979. Birds of the Great Plains. Univ. Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE. 539 pp.
Johnsgard, P. A. 1981. The Plovers, Sandpipers, and Snipes of the World. Univ. Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE. 493 pp.
Mayr, E., and L. L. Short. 1970. Species Taxa of North American Birds. Publ. Nuttall Ornithol. Club 9, 127 pp.
Priebe, C. 1990. Long-billed Curlew in southwestern Iowa. Iowa Bird Life 60:20.
South Dakota Ornithologists' Union. 1991. The Birds of South Dakota, 2nd ed. South Dakota Ornithologists' Union. Aberdeen, SD. 411 pp.

P. O. Box 300, Tabor, IA 51653

CALIFORNIA GULL AT DAVENPORT, FIRST ACCEPTED IOWA RECORD

PETER C. PETERSEN

On Thanksgiving afternoon, 23 November 1989, Louise Augustine of Peoria, one of Illinois' top birders, called to say she had just seen a California Gull on the ice at Credit Island harbor in west Davenport. Mary Lou and I hastened to South Concord Street which provides an unobstructed view of the harbor. We located the bird standing on the ice at 4:25 p.m. It was intermediate in size between Herring and Ring-billed gulls which were standing with the California. We noted the head and body were white with some brown streaking on the head. The bill was yellow with a small dark area near the tip of the lower mandible. The legs were gray green. The mantle was slightly darker than nearby Herring Gull mantles. The head was very rounded, but eye color could not be determined. We observed the



11-06

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

90-11

What species? LONG-BILLED CURLEW How many? 1

Location? IPL PONDS, POTTAWATTAMIE CO.

Type of Habitat? COOLING PONDS FOR POWER PLANT; GRAVEL BANKS.

When? date(s): JULY 4, 1990 time: 4.30 to 5.30

Who? your name and address: ROSS SILCOCK, BOX 300, TABOR, IA 51653

Others with you: NONE AT FIRST

Others before or after you: TANYA BRAY

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

I ARRIVED AT 4.30 AND WAS SURPRISED TO FIND WHILE SCOPING THE GRAVEL BANKS A LARGE SHOREBIRD WITH DECURVED BILL. AFTER DECIDING IT WAS A LONG-BILLED CURLEW I WENT TO CALL IN REINFORCEMENTS ie TANYA BRAY. TANYA ARRIVED ABOUT 4.45 PM AND CONFIRMED MY ID, AT WHICH TIME I WENT TO CALL OTHERS. HOWEVER WHEN DOUG AND BJ ROSE AND LOREN AND BABS PADEFORD ARRIVED ABOUT 5.30 THE BIRD HAD JUST LEFT.

MY FIELD NOTES (SEE ATTACHED PHOTOCOPY) INDICATED A LARGE SHOREBIRD, BASICALLY BROWN IN COLOR. BACK WAS DARK BROWN WITH FEATHERS EDGED PALER, PRIMARIES AT REST COULD BE SEEN TO BE DARK BROWN, AND WING COVERTS WERE RATHER PALE BROWN, ALMOST GRAY. UNDERPARTS WERE INDISTINCTLY BARRED ON FLANKS, WITH BARRING REDUCED AND ABSENT TOWARDS BREAST. BREAST, NECK, AND FACE WERE PALE BROWN, WITH NO DISCERNABLE MARKINGS EXCEPT FOR A DARKER CAP-LIKE AREA ON THE CROWN. THE EYE WAS VERY PROMINENT. THERE WERE NO HEAD STRIPES. BILL WAS ENORMOUS, ABOUT THREE TIMES WIDTH OF HEAD, ESSENTIALLY STRAIGHT FOR PROXIMAL TWO-THIRDS, THEN STRONGLY DECURVED. BILL WAS UNICOLORED, AND DARK TO BLACK. LEGS WERE BLUISH-GRAY-GREEN. THE BIRD BRIEFLY RAISED ITS WINGS WHILE PREENING TO EXPOSE BRIGHT CINNAMON WING-LININGS. AT ONE POINT IT FLEW AROUND CALLING AND LANDED AGAIN. PROMINENT IN FLIGHT WERE THE DARK OUTER PRIMARIES AND THE BRIGHT CINNAMON WING LININGS. CALL WAS A TWO-NOTED "PUR-WE" WITH SECOND SYLLABLE HIGHER.

Similar species; how eliminated:

POSSIBILITIES ARE WHIMBREL, ELIMINATED BY ABSENCE OF HEAD STRIPING AND PRESENCE OF CINNAMON WING LININGS AND DISTINCTIVE CALL; MARBLED GODWIT, ELIMINATED BY STRONGLY DECURVED BILL AND CALL; AND OTHER RARER CURLEWS, ALL ELIMINATED BY THE COMBINATION OF FIELD CHARACTERS NOTED ABOVE (BRISTLE-THIGHED ELIMINATED BY ABSENCE OF RUFOUS RUMP).

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? NO
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.

EXCELLENT; 100 DEGREE TEMP, SUNNY, LOOKING EAST. SOME HEAT DISTORTION, BUT NO PROBLEM WITH 25X BALSCOPE SR and 10 X 50 BINOCULARS. DISTANCE ABOUT 250 YARDS ESTIMATED.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

HAVE SEEN AND HEARD HUNDREDS IN CENTRAL NEBRASKA: CALL FAMILIAR TO ME. HAVE SEEN MANY WHIMBRELS IN TEXAS AND TWO IN IOWA.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

NONE. TANYA BRAY CAME TO CONFIRM OBSERVATION.

How long before field notes made? AT SCENE this form completed? 6 HRS LATER

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).

LPL July 4

200-300 yds
25x5 scope
4x called light

4:30 - pm +

LB Culew

large brown shrike

Back feathers dark brown
edges pale. Primaries
darker than. Head neck
under parts pale to medium
brown. No facial stripes.
Dark eye ^{paler face & throat.}
downward bill. ^{on pale brown face.} S-shaped
head with thick strongly
downward dorsal 1/3.

Tom Tauke

U.S. Senate

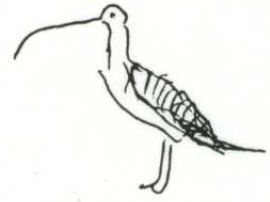
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Dark brown
cap, not very
large.

legs bluish green appearance -
different to her ex. ex. ex.
Dunderings wing wings lighter
cinnamon when wings lifted
to preen.

90-11

Carved itself more
upright than Whitebird



Spent time preening, drinking water,
kept wings away from body - prob due
to extreme 100° heat.

Tom Tauke

U.S. Senate

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Flew & returned - prominent
dark brown primary (like
Am. Bitter) + very light
cinnamon wing wings i.e.
coverts. Also calling
pur wee pur wee

I have &
(heard this many times -
No Sandhill) ~~ca~~

When perched - grayish wing coverts
contrast with brown back & dark
brown primaries.

Tom Tauke

U.S. Senate

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bird left at
about 5:30 pm

Long-billed Curlew (Numenius americanus) (1)

4 July 1990

Approximately 5:40 - 6:15 p.m. Actually was too excited to note time-- Ross's documentation will be more accurate in this regard.

IPL Ponds, South, Pottawattamie County

Observer: Tanya E. Bray, 1107 Ironwood Ct., Apt. 186, Bellevue, NE 68005

Others: Ross Silcock first observed the curlew and was still present when I arrived.

Description:

Generally a very large shorebird with extremely long, decurved bill. Only Killdeer and Great Blue Heron were nearby for size comparison, neither very helpful.

The head was plain with no broad stripes; the crown a light brown, just slightly darker than the face and cheeks, which were a rich buff. The eye was dark, appeared large in the plain pale head, no eyestripe. Foreneck was also rich buff. The bill was very long, straight for much of its length, curving downward for approximately the distal third of its length. Bill was dark in color.

The mantle and wings were brown mottled with a lighter brown. The distance precluded seeing what pattern made this mottled appearance. The outer primaries were much darker brown and appeared unmarked.

The entire underparts were pale cinnamon-buff, lightly speckled with brown.

The legs were gray-green, and appeared quite thick; large feet.

In flight, the bright cinnamon wing linings were clearly evident. The upperwing in flight, showed the dark brown plain outer primaries and mottled appearance of rest of wing and back. The tail, to the best of my memory was mottled and colored similar to rest of upperparts. When the bird flew, I was concentrating on observing the underwings.

Behavior and Voice:

When I arrived, the bird was standing in a shallow puddle about three feet from the shore of the pond. It would walk strongly through the shallow water lifting its feet up and down. Then it appeared to pick insects or some food from the surface of the water with the tip of its bill.

Later it turned its head and neck sideways submerging the entire bill, and then began preening. This afforded an excellent look at the crown and side of head which were definitely plain with no stripes.

After feeding and preening for about 10-15 minutes, the curlew flew up circled, and called cur-lee several times and then landed about 100 feet north of the original site. The cinnamon wing linings were clearly seen, and the call which I have heard so often in the Nebraska sandhills were distinctive of Long-billed Curlew.

OVER

The curlew then walked along the shore back to the original area. At this time a brief but intense thunderstorm occurred; much lightning and heavy rain for 5-7 minutes. The curlew was clearly nervous, walking rapidly back and forth and raising its wings often. During this time, it called almost constantly--either cur-lee or a series of long weep notes, usually four in succession. When the rain ended, the curlew flew up, circled a few times, and flew out of sight to the southeast. Contributing to its nervousness perhaps, was the presence of an adult Peregrine Falcon, sitting on a sand mound on the shore. This bird was banded in such a way as to indicate it was the Peregrine which returned to downtown Omaha this spring from previous hacking programs.

Similar species:

- Whimbrel: Eliminated by lack of crown and eye stripes, cinnamon wing linings, larger size, longer bill length, and call.
- Eskimo Curlew: (Fat chance!) Eliminated by much larger size, longer bill.
- Marbled Godwit: Eliminated by decurved bill, call, and completely different "jizz"

For a change, I am in complete agreement with Ross Silcock on the identification of this species.

Viewing conditions:

For first 15-20 minutes, partly sunny with sun over left shoulder. Later cloudy and heavy rain, but by this time all major field marks had been noted, and observations confined to behavior.

25-power spotting scope, 7 x 26 binoculars

Distance was estimated to be 250 yards.

Previous experience: Lots of experience with this species in Nebraska.

References used: None at time of sighting; later checked Nat'l Geo. for wing lining color of exotic species, i.e., Far Eastern Curlew.

Field notes taken during observation. This report typed 18 hours later. (This would have been sooner but the storm also knocked out all power in this area for several hours).