

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Printed: 11/22/00

Red Knot

25 Aug 1996

Union Slough N.W.R., Kossuth Co., IA

\*Matthew Kenne

IBL 67:21, 81; Kenne 1997

Record Number: 96-48

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Matthew Kenne, 719 N. Phillips, Algona [4/6/97]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 67:21

Records Committee: IBL 67:81

Kenne, M. C. 1997. Red Knots at Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge. IBL 67:97-98.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Good description of two different looking birds. Nice to see one in Iowa with some color.

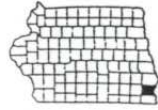
A-D, The retained alternate plumage on one bird made this easy, although the other details are also convincing.

96-48

RED-THROATED LOON IN NORTHWESTERN IOWA

JOHN VAN DYK

In the early afternoon of 19 April 1996, I discovered a Red-throated Loon in a large gravel pit five miles south of Sioux Center in Sioux County. The gravel pits, located just east of Highway 75 and north of Highway 10, form relatively large bodies of water and are good places for migrant waterfowl.



As I approached the quarry from the west, I noted from a distance that a variety of birds was present: about 45 Double-crested Cormorants, several Pied-billed Grebes, some Lesser Scaups and Gadwalls, a small flock of Franklin's Gulls, and six American Avocets along the shore. I scanned the water with my binoculars, and noted the loon some distance away from the cormorants. As soon as I saw the bird, I recognized it as a Red-throated Loon: a slender loon smaller than the cormorants, with grayish upturned bill and its head tilted upwards, as if it were scanning the sky. Every few minutes or so the bird would dive and come up some distance away. I parked my car at the edge of the gravel road alongside the lake, and used my Zoom Baliscope through the lowered car window. The sky was overcast, and the water calm. The light was excellent. The loon at times would emerge only 30 yards from my car, allowing me an excellent view. I observed it for about 40 minutes.

The loon was noticeably smaller than the nearby Double-crested Cormorants. Its upturned bill was distinctive, even from a distance. The slender profile gave the bird a snake-like appearance. Whenever its head was slanted upwards. The back was gray flecked with many white spots. The back of the neck and head were gray. The face was white. The reddish eye was located at the juncture of the white face and the gray crown. A light spot in front of the eye gave the eye a distinctly separated appearance. The bird's flanks, just above the waterline, were mottled light and dark.

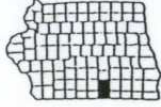
After about 35 minutes of close observation, a large piece of road machinery came rumbling by, obviously spooking the bird. It first took off, paddling the water with its feet, but returned to rest on the water. A few minutes later, however, the bird took off again, this time heading directly for me and flying low over my car. It circled the lake as it gained altitude, and at first I thought it might land again. But then it headed to the northwest. I followed the bird in my binoculars as long as I could. As it disappeared from sight, I could not help but mumble: Happy landings! Thanks for stopping by!

736 East 1st Street, Sioux Center, IA 51250

RED KNOTS AT UNION SLOUGH NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

MATTHEW C. KENNE

I arrived at the little bridge one mile north of the headquarters of Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge in Kossuth County, at about 9:00 a.m. on 25 August 1996. The sheewater and mudflats there had been the best location for migratory shorebirds on the refuge for several weeks. Almost immediately, I noticed two large, pale shorebirds with approximately 200 other mixed species 100-150 yards away.



bird was probably a juvenile. Because of the slightly paler nape and underparts, I concluded the bird was an intermediate phase. The bird was likely a Pomarine Jaeger for two reasons: the large size and the large-billed appearance.

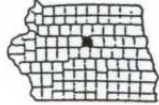
Using differences in plumage, I tried to determine the total number of birds present. At Saylorville, there were at least three birds: the possible dark subadult and two intermediate phase juveniles. There was also the dark phase juvenile present at Red Rock from 16-30 November. That makes a minimum of four birds between the two areas. There may have been more as it is not known if the intermediate phase juveniles seen at both reservoirs were in fact the same individuals. However, the possible dark subadult seen at Saylorville moved to Red Rock Reservoir later in November. These records represent the second and third reports of Pomarine Jaeger in Iowa. The only other record is of two juveniles from 28 September-2 October 1988 at Saylorville Reservoir (S. J. Dinsmore, *Iowa Bird Life* 59: 20-21, 1989).

612 112 W. Magnolia, Fort Collins, CO 80521

RUFF IN POLK COUNTY

BERY ENGEBRETTSEN

We tend to view our agricultural monocultures of corn and soybeans as not particularly good birding habitat, but on 10 May 1996 I stopped briefly to view some shorebirds near the road in a wet, last year's beanfield between Grimes and West Des Moines in Polk County. In the mixed flock, one bird immediately stood out because of what appeared to be a rather smallish head on a plump body. It was clearly larger than the Pectoral Sandpipers and somewhat larger than the Lesser Yellowlegs nearby. The bill was black, a bit longer than the head with the slightest downward curve. All of the back and tertial feathers were light tipped with dark and then lighter brown bands away from the tips. The tertials were long, obscuring the tail and seemed to blow about loosely in the breeze. The underparts were mostly white except for some scattered dark bars. The legs were pale yellow. I was somewhat puzzled by this rather nondescript shorebird until it obligingly stretched its wings above its head revealing white underwings and a U-shaped patch of white around the base of the tail. At this point I knew I was observing a Ruff (or was it a Ruff?).



As noted previously (Sinclair, *Iowa Bird Life* 66:65-66, 1996), this species is highly variable, even in basic plumage. After reviewing field guides, I finally concluded this was actually the male of the species (Ruff), but noted that upon review the Records Committee could not agree as to its sex. It probably must remain nature of this species. This is the eighth record of this species to be confirmed in Iowa. I suspect that a fair number may pass through our area undetected, since this bird was quite plain, in a mixed flock, and not in a highly birded area—a soybean field.

12825 NW 127th Court, Des Moines, IA 50325

The good news was that I thought these birds could be Red Knots. The bad news was that my spotting scope was locked in my Jeep in an auto-repair shop 25 miles away! After a nerve-wracking stop-and-go stalk down a dike, I was finally able to view the birds from about 30 yards away.

The two birds were larger than adjacent Pectoral Sandpipers, about the same size as Killdeer, but they looked fatter with shorter legs. They had straight, black bills about the same length as their heads. One bird was pale gray above and white below with a pale supercilary line. I couldn't see any subterminal feather markings from this distance with binoculars. The other bird was brownish on the back with no eyeline and a pale rusty "robin-red" below. The bird appeared to be molting to basic plumage as its face was grayish and the belly color was mottled.

Once, as the knots flew briefly, I saw a paler rump on the gray bird and a narrow white wing stripe along the base of the primaries and secondaries. They made calls in flight unlike those that I am familiar with. Later, I called the Birdline, but no one else got to see the knots. A strong cold front with thunderstorms that night triggered their departure. These were the first Red Knots at Union Slough since one (also molting from alternate plumage) on 31 August 1989, and about the fifteenth fall record from Iowa.

709 North Phillips, Algona, IA 50511

### BLACK-NECKED STILTS IN WASHINGTON COUNTY

MARK PROESCHOLDT

On 18 May 1996, Beth Proescholdt, Russ Widner, and I were heading to the spring I.O.U. meeting at Burlington and watching flooded farm fields for shorebirds. In Washington County, just south of highway 92 along highway 218, we saw a large shorebird in a flooded creek valley. We stopped, and were surprised to see three Black-necked Stilts in the field.

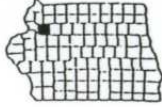
These large, distinctive, slim-bodied shorebirds were black on the head, back of neck, back, and wings. They were white on the underside of the body—the chin, sides of the neck, belly, and undertail coverts. They had very long, bright pink legs and a long, straight black bill. Two of the stilts had dark brown backs while one had a very black back. The National Geographic field guide states that the females are browner above.

Many people saw them on 19 May while at the spring I.O.U. meeting. According to *Birds in Iowa* (Kent and Dinsmore, 1996), this sighting is one of six recent well-substantiated records with five records from the spring and one from the fall.

P. O. Box 65, Liscomb, IA 50148

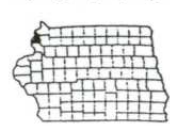


Black-necked Stilt near Ainsworth, 18 May 1996. Photo by Thomas H. Kent



### BROWN PELICAN IN DES MOINES COUNTY

JIM FULLER



On 1 November 1996 Chuck Fuller was amazed to see a Brown Pelican fly from below Lock and Dam #18 on the Mississippi River north of Burlington. The only access to this area is from the Illinois side of the river, and I was there shortly after sunrise the morning of 4 November. I immediately located a Brown Pelican close to the Illinois shore just below the lock. During the next 20 minutes, I watched the bird as it drifted downstream about 300-400 yards until it was in the middle of the river. Since the main navigation channel at this location is through the lock along the Illinois shore, most of the river here is considered to be in Iowa.

There were also American White Pelicans in the vicinity and, in comparison, the Brown Pelican appeared to be 20 percent smaller. This was generally a drab, dull brown and gray bird with an enormous bill. The back and wing were a dull brown with light mottling. The back of the neck, head, and crown were also brown. The underparts, including the front of the neck, were a light gray mottled color. From these features I concluded that this was the plumage of a juvenile bird. The very long, and the eye was dark. The light gray bill, which was huge both in width and length, appeared rounded on the end. The bird kept the bill tucked against its breast. The tail was short and brown. I never did see the bird fly, and it was silent during the viewing period.

Brown Pelican is a resident of salt water habitats from the mid-Atlantic to the Gulf states as well as the Pacific coast of California. Vagrancy inland, particularly in the spring, and to Midwestern states is well documented. There are seven previous Iowa records for Brown Pelican, only one of which occurred in the fall, but that October sighting was also from the Mississippi River in Lee County. There are five sightings (March-May) records and one summer record from July. All of these sightings were from the southern half of the state.

6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, IA 52240

### IN MEMORIAM: PHILIP A. DUMONT

On 12 February 1996, Philip Dumont passed away in Chapel Hill, Carolina. He had been a member of the I.O.U. since 1924 and at the time of his death, had been a member of the organization longer than any other member. Phil was born on 9 July 1903 in Rochester, Minnesota but his family soon moved to Davenport and then Des Moines where he attended high school. He completed a B.S. degree in Biology at Drake University in 1926. In 1927 he joined the American Museum of Natural History in New York City where we worked in the bird department until 1931. During that time he spent 16 months in Madagascar studying birds as part of a museum expedition.

In 1931, he returned to Iowa and completed his manuscript on Birds of Polk County Iowa which was published in 1931. He spent part of 1932 attending the University of California at Berkeley but returned to Iowa that fall and worked on the bird collection at the University of Iowa. That project expanded into a monograph, A revised list of the Birds of Iowa which was published in *University of Iowa Studies in Natural History* (volume 15, number 5, 1933). This is the second complete survey

96-48

DOCUMENTATION FORM  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

96-48

What species? Red Knot How many? 2  
Location? USNWR 1 mile N. of Headquarters, N. of road on mudflats  
Type of Habitat? mudflats from receded large pool  
When? date(s): August 25 1996 time: 9:00 AM to 9:30 AM  
Who? your name and address: Matthew Kerne 709 N. Phillips, Algona  
Others with you: NA  
Others before or after you: NA

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.

2 large, pale shorebirds were seen with mixed species from road. Not having my scope with me (a long, unpleasant story), I had to approach birds on foot along dike. I reached closest spot without spooking 200+ birds present; about 30 yds. away.

The pair of birds were larger than adjacent Pectoral Sand., about the same size as adjacent Killdeer, but fatter with shorter legs. They had straight, black bills about as long as the head. 1 bird was pale gray above ~~and white below~~ and white below. It had a pale supercilious line. I could see no subterminal feather markings from this distance. The other bird was light brownish on the back with no eyeline and pale rusty-red below "robin colored". The face was grayish and the belly color was light and mottled, obviously molting.

The flock got up once and the knots circled ~~away~~ away from me and returned to about the same place. I saw a paler rump on the gray bird and a similar species; how eliminated: ~~one~~ narrow white wing stripe along the base of the secondaries and primaries as I followed it with binocs white, banked around. They made calls while in flight unlike those that I am used to. it I left the birds.

The reddish underside of one bird was reminiscent of Dowitchers, but the back pattern in flight and bill differences are way off. Sanderling's feeding habits are different from the simple pecking these birds did and the gray one didn't have the "black shoulder" or big wingstipe. Curlew Sandpiper's bill is curved.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? NA  
If yes, explain:

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

Full sun from over right shoulder, 7x binocs from approx. 30 yards, paced equivalent distance on dike.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Red Knot seen at USNWR in Fall 1989.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

none

How long before field notes made? none this form completed? 4 hrs.

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