

Ruff

Record Number: 96-17

10 May 1996

Classification: A-D

s. of Grimes, Polk Co., IA

*Bery Engebretsen

IBL 66:103; 67:81; Engebretsen 1997

DOCUMENTATION

Bery Engebretsen, 12825 NW 127th Ct, Des Moines 50325 [4/6/97]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 66:103

Records Committee: IBL 67:81

Engebretsen, B. 1997. Ruff in Polk County. IBL 67:96.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, (female). A male ruff should show signs of alternate plumage by this date.

A-D, U-shape at base of tail is diagnostic. Other substantiating marks noted.

A-D, Detailed description of probable male. White V on rump seen.

A-D, Could also be a reeve approaching breeding plumage.

A-D, Observer probably correct in ID as male -- may not achieve full breeding plumage until second summer.

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.

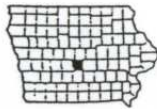
Using differences in plumage, I tried to determine the total number of birds present. At Saylorville, there were at least three birds; the possible dark subadult and two intermediate phase juveniles. There was also the dark phase juvenile present at Red Rock from 16-30 November. That makes a minimum 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 ENGBRETSSEN

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 Reeve (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 *Philomachus pugnax*, sex unrecorded. This once again confirms the highly variable nature of this species.

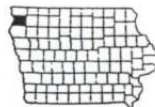
This is the eighth record of this species to be confirmed in Iowa. I suspect that a fair number may pass through our area undetected, since this bird was quite plain, in a mixed flock, and not in a highly birded area--a soybean field.

12825 NW 127th Court, Des Moines, IA 50325

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 Balscope 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 snakelike appearance. Whenever it emerged, 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.

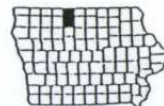
After about 35 minutes of close observation, a large piece of road machinery came rumbling by, obviously spooking the bird. It first took off, paddling the water with its feet, but returned to rest on the water. A few minutes later, however, the bird took off again, this time heading directly for me and flying low over my car. It circled the lakes 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 sheetwater 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.



DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

96-17

What species? Ruff How many? 1

Location? S. of Grimes

Type of Habitat? minimum-till corn field with standing water, old stacks

When? date(s): 5/10/96 about time: 5²⁰ to 6³⁰ PM

Who? your name and address: Bary Engbretson; 12825 NW 127th Ct, DSM, 50325

Others with you: Armstrongs & D. Thompson arrived; Allens may have missed bird

Others before or after you: _____

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.

Picked from mixed flock because of small head, clearly bigger than Pectorals, slightly bigger than L. Yellowlegs in side-by-side comparison. Black, slightly downcurved bill, perhaps a bit longer than head. Bird stretched tail, revealing all white underwing & U-shaped patch of white around base of tail (Also noted when bird flew). All of back and tentails were same pattern of light tip and dark. (See attached sketch) Belly mostly white, as were all of underparts, except for dark bars, as shown on sketch. Legs were pale yellow. The tentails were long, obscuring tail, and seemed to blow about loosely in the wind. A couple of times it raised its head from position low on back, revealing a longish neck.

This is a highly variable species and I initially took it to be a female. Upon study, I now wonder if this was a male, based on feather pattern of sketch, and billowy tentails which look much like picture of male in NGS Guide, though it did not have full breeding plumage.

Bird flew to north as human numbers increased on roadway

Similar species; how eliminated: white underwings, U-shaped white tail patch, small head, & size seem to eliminate other species. Too large for White-rumped

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

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.
about 10-30 yds, bright overcast, 10x50 B. view, 10-30 Zoom scope

Previous experience with species and similar ones: life bird

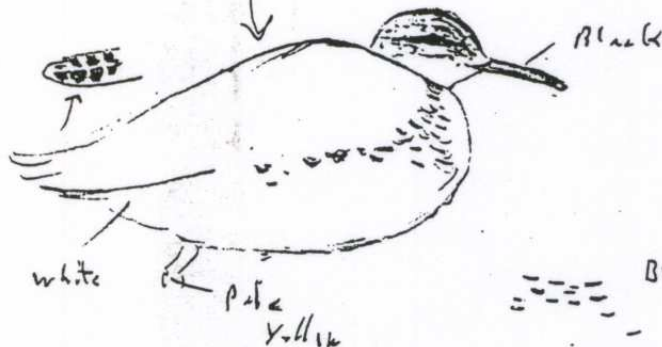
References and persons consulted before writing description: discussed with above at time; NGS Bird; Thompson had "Shorebirds"

How long before field notes made? in field this form completed? 2 hrs

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

96-17

all of
Black Brown Back,
scapular
Black



white underwing, moderate upper wing stripe
"U" of white bent tail

bigger than pectorals (clearly)
slightly bigger than lesser yellowlegs



Neck raised