

Red Knot

12 May 1994

Blue L., Monona Co., IA

\*Peter Ernzen

IBL 64:75; 65:81, Ernzen 1994

Record Number: 94-13

Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Peter Ernzen, 401 Taylor, Ida Grove 51445 [19 Aug 1994\*]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 64:75

Records Committee: IBL 65:81

Ernzen, P. 1994. Red Knot in Monona County. IBL 64:85.

VOTE: 5 A-D, 2 NA

A-D, Date seems early, and observer tentative about id, but good details and drawing.

A-D, Meticulous description strengthened by detailed drawing.

NA, Thin down curved bill doesn't fit Red Knot, size determination vague. I don't think stilt was eliminated.

A-D, What we have here is a documentation written by a relatively inexperienced birder who happened upon a good bird. Because of that inexperience, some characteristics which some of us may rely on after years of studying shorebirds are missing. The observer has, however, captured many important details, particularly in his sketch (which alone says Red Knot). Size described as 25-50% larger than a Baird's is helpful. Eliminating Dunlin was most problematic for me. Dunlin, however, would show more than a slight downward curve at the end of the bill and a distinct eyeline. The clinching written detail was the finely barred tail.

A-D, Interesting account of a good birder's first encounter with a new species in basic plumage. The size, shape, bill, overall color, wing stripe, and tail fit Red Knot and not any other species. Month incorrect on front sheet -- should be May.

NA, Scaly pattern of back (with dark center, light edging) and slight decurve at end of bill without a noticeable chunky look suggest basic plumage Dunlin, not Red Knot. Bill should be straight.

A-D, Careful study; diagram useful. Plumage stage a little puzzling. Dark centers of scapulars but lack of simultaneous reddish color on breast is a little puzzling, but shape, size, etc convincing.

REVOTE (at meeting, 14 Aug 1994): 7 A-D

photo. The legs were dark at the joints instead of red. And most bothersome of all, there was a strange pale area where the upper and lower facial borders came together that looked like it could be white feathers behind the eye. I had no references to the transition from non-breeding to breeding plumage in the Glossy Ibis, and, although I believed that the bird was a Glossy Ibis, I thought that it possibly could be a White-faced Ibis in less-than-full breeding plumage.

In early fall 1992, I obtained Bobbi Webber's slides taken on 4 May. One slide clearly showed the bird in question, but from too great a distance to view the face in detail. The face was well lit however, and when I examined it with a 100 power microscope, I found the key feature of the Glossy Ibis listed by Kaufman (1990) evident. There was no pale area behind the dark eye. The pale-bluish facial border was narrow where it crossed the forehead above the upper mandible, widened between the bill and the eye, and then narrowed as it approached the top of the eye. It resumed at the bottom of the eye and continued narrowly to the base of the lower mandible. This set of characteristics strongly suggested that the bird was a Glossy Ibis, the first for Iowa.

Unfortunately, I made the mistake of not submitting a documentation with the photos and slides, so although the committee received prints of the Webber slides, they mainly looked at the much clearer view in the Bunkofske photo.

In May 1993, the Records Committee decided to have some outside experts review the slides. Robert Janssen, Editor of *The Loon* examined the prints and also showed them to Bruce Fall who had reviewed a report of a Glossy Ibis at Heron Lake, Minnesota (less than 100 miles from Union Slough) in May 1991 (Janssen 1992). This in-depth review of the Bunkofske photo (including measuring the position of the "pale spot" in relation to head width as compared to other ibis photos) concluded that the pale area was a sunlit highlight of the eye, and not white feathering behind the eye.

J. V. Remsen, Curator of Birds at the Museum of Natural Science, Louisiana State University said that the bird in the prints was "absolutely, unquestionably Glossy Ibis." He went on to say, "The Glossy, wings upheld, shows all critical features of the face pattern, particularly the narrow whitish skin border below and the bluish-white "visor" line above" (pers. comm. to T. H. Kent, I.O.U. Records Committee, 21 Oct 1993).

Finally, a year and a half after the sighting, an off-hand remark heard in a grocery store led to Iowa's first conclusive record of Glossy Ibis. It is also interesting to note that Glossy Ibis were reported on 3-4 May 1992 in Kansas (Grzybowski 1992) and on 5-10 May 1992 in Wyoming (Kingery 1992), the first records for both states.

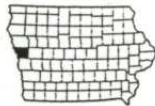
#### LITERATURE CITED

- Dinsmore, S., and J. J. Dinsmore 1986. White-faced Ibis nesting in Dickinson County. *Iowa Bird Life* 57:120-121.
- Grzybowski, J. A. 1992. Southern Great Plains Region. *American Birds* 46:443-444.
- Janssen, R. B. 1992. A Glossy Ibis in Minnesota. *The Loon* 64:5-10.
- Kaufman, K. 1990. A Field Guide to Advanced Birding. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. 299 pp.
- Kingery, H. E. 1992. Mountain West Region. *American Birds* 46:453-456.

709 North Phillips, Algona, IA 50511

## RED KNOT IN MONONA COUNTY

PETER ERNZEN



On the evening of 12 May 1994, I was returning from an engagement at Decatur Bend. I decided to check out southeast Blue Lake for shorebirds. Earlier in the day I had observed large numbers of shorebirds on the north side of the lake.

Upon arriving at the southwest corner, I scanned the shoreline. I immediately noticed large flocks of shorebirds flying about on the east side of the lake. I drove to the south side and walked toward the birds. Due to the sun's glare, I decided to walk to the north to a point that offered much better lighting conditions. There the birds were much clearer and easier to identify.

Among the birds that were there, one, due to its odd coloring, immediately attracted my attention. While sitting, the bird displayed the following characteristics; general colors light gray and white, light gray eyeline, gray back and head, white belly, chin, and face. The bill was black, thin, and slightly down turned at the end. Other features included a scaly looking feather pattern on the scapulars. I was able to observe the bird for a considerable amount of time and approached to within 15 feet.

When the bird flew, I noticed a white wing stripe and a finely barred tail and rump. Upon returning to my vehicle I jotted down my notes and returned to the Monona County Conservation Center. I suspected that I had just seen a Red Knot. When I compared my notes with several handbooks available in the office, I was able to eliminate three other possibilities. This bird was not as gray as a Dunlin, and the bill did not have such a pronounced downward curvature. Its neck was not long enough and its head was too large to be a Stilt Sandpiper. The smaller peeps were eliminated due to the bird being 25-50 percent larger than a nearby Baird's Sandpiper.

Knowing that this would be the third spring sighting for Iowa, I tentatively identified it as a Red Knot. I then contacted Jim Fuller and related my sighting to him and placed it on the Iowa Birdline. However, to the best of my knowledge, no one else saw the bird at Blue Lake.

The next day, I wrote my narrative and made a line drawing of the bird. Two details about this bird made it initially difficult to identify. These were the slight down turn at the end of its bill and the molting sequence from basic to breeding plumage. Most illustrations and books indicate that this species has a straight bill. Several publications however, do mention a slight down turn in the bill, a feature that can be seen only at close range. The molting sequence is still a puzzle, as there should have been reddish feathers on the breast simultaneous with the appearance of the dark centers of the feathers on the scapulars. I still don't know why the reddish colored breast was not present, but perhaps this bird had just begun its molt when I found it.

401 Taylor, Ida Grove, IA 51445

DOCUMENTATION FORM -  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

What species? Red Knot

How many? 1

Location? South Blue Lake in Monona County

Type of Habitat? marshy shoreline

When? date(s) 4 12/94

time: 7:50 *pm* to

Who? your name and address: Peter Ernzen 401 Taylor Ida Grove  
IA 51445

Others with you: none

Others before or after you: none

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.

See attached documents and drawing

Similar species; how eliminated: Closest similar species would be Dunlin?, eliminated by Dunlins pronounced downcurved bill, blue gray color was dissimilar to the pronounced gray and white of the observed bird. See attached documents.

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

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

Previous experience with species and similar ones: none with

*over*

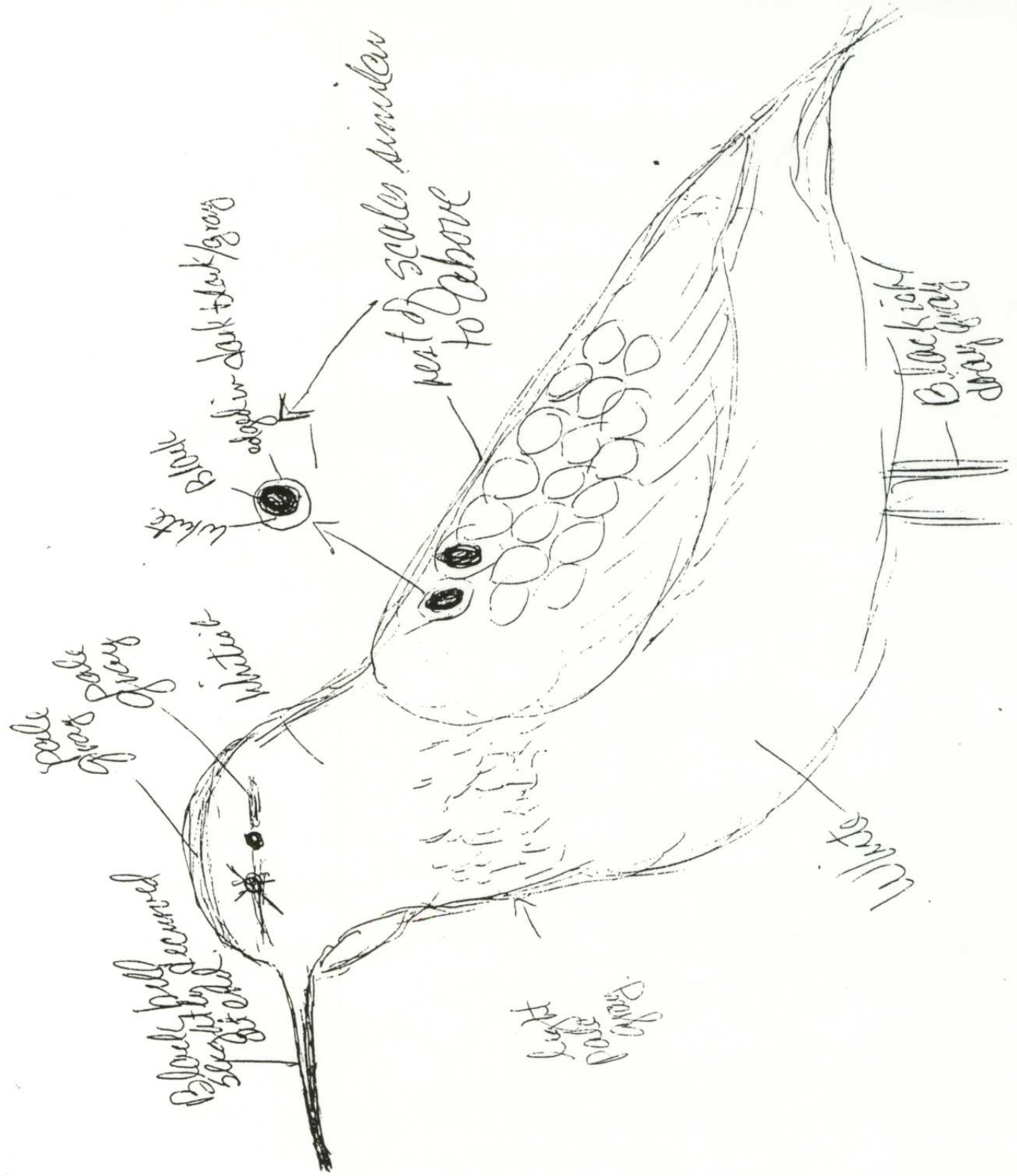
red knot have observed all other similar species.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

See document

How long before notes completed? See document





Wafu  
Anan

On May 12 I approached S Blue Lake from the W. I normally don't bird this side of the lake but I was returning from an outing and noticed few birds on this side of the lake. At the S border there runs E to W a utility road. I noticed a Sandpiper, and I proceeded to scope the East Shore with my binoculars. I saw constant movement of many peeps. Earlier in the day I saw nearly 150 Godwits and many smaller shore birds. I had never birded the S tip (SE) of S Blue Lake and decided to check it out.

Once there I noticed the relatively strong lighting. I was looking into the sun as I walked north. I decided to walk to the North fence line and then back track; this provided me with much better lighting.

I scanned the shoreline - there were thousands of small peeps, killdeers etc, at 7:50 among the many Bairds Sandpipers I noticed a much larger bird. I estimated the bird to be about 10' out in the shallow water, resting. I was standing about 40 ft from shore. I walked on to within 25 ft of the bird. The following is from my initial notes.

I tried to be as conservative as I could and wrote down only my impressions.

The bird was estimated at 25 to 50% larger than the Frank's Sandpiper, nearby. The bird had blackish bill, legs and a thin black bill that was slightly decurved at the end.

Bill was as long as the head was wide. Whitish below (~~white~~ belly), slight markings on neck - indistinct eye line, grayish on top (head) white on the rest of the head.

I eventually flushed the bird, as it flew away I noticed a thin white wing stripe.

Back and wing had pale blue appearance similar to Still only grayer, white ~~to~~ edging border by darker color. Black gray, lightly colored tail very light, gray and white finely barred.

While in the field I didn't have my field guide nor paper pen. I left the area with all these markings memorized. I left then went to the Menomonee County Arboretum and jotted down my notes. After I did this I checked through my Field Guide to the Birds of N.A. National Geographic Society second edition. Within 5 minutes I had identified the bird as a winter plumaged Red Knot.

After the identification I called Bob Lemermond of Sioux City, Ia and inquired what he and Jerry Probst had seen the previous week.



Bob listed several sp. none of which was a Red Knot. I then told him that I thought I had a Red Knot in winter plumage. I asked Bob how familiar he was with this sp. He said that Terry had seen quite a few while in Texas earlier this Spring. I read him my description emphasizing the overall grayness of the bird. He said it sounded like a good possibility. I then asked for Ross Silcock's phone # number.

I called Ross and he said it sounded like a good possibility. He asked about size and shape. He asked if it was more like a Pectoral and I said yes. In retrospect I would say it was more like a Merlin.

Ross then gave me Tom Kent's number and Jim Fuller's number. I called Tom and he asked about Spotted Sandpiper.

I responded that the bird in question was much grayer and that the tail was ~~more~~

I reviewed and grayer and finer lined than Spotted Sandpiper. After I said good bye to Tom I saw if there were ~~any~~ but birds in question.

no more. I remembered that there was a gray band thing on the end of the tail though not quite as light as that pictured.

I then rechecked my book to see if this was true. While looking I noticed that Red Knots have a gray band at the end of the tail, this triggered a memory of a similar

Demanded  
the morning  
went up  
the ramp  
and back

looking band - though I didn't remember  
it being as thick. ~~Then~~

I then called Jim Fuller and  
discussed my original observation. He  
was supportive and asked about plumpness -  
I responded that there were only Baird Sand-  
pipers in the immediate vicinity, there was  
Vernal Sandpipers\* behind it and it made  
judging rather difficult. My impression was  
that the bird was "plump" but with ~~no~~ nothing  
to compare it with I left it out of my description.  
\* After talking with Jim he asked if I was  
comfortable enough to put it on the Red line.  
I was/am nervous about identifying this  
bird, but decided it would be good to have  
someone confirm what I saw.