

Whimbrel
27 Aug 1989
IPL Ponds, Pottawattamie Co., IA
Silcock
IBL 60:11, 14, 61:86

Record Number: 89-30
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Ross Silcock

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:11, 14

Records Committee: IBL 61:86

VOTE: 4 A-D, 2 N-A, 1 abstain.

NA: At first reading, this records seems reasonable. However, several areas of possible (and reasonable) doubt must be considered. First, the only feature besides voice used to put this bird in the class of Whimbrel (or other larger shorebirds) was the size as compared to Ring-billed Gulls that flew over earlier. This seems to say that the size was not directly compared and, unfortunately, the size of a lone bird in flight can be difficult to judge. An observation of a bird the size of a Whimbrel at 100 feet overheard should have at least revealed the bill shape and size. Thus, if the bird was possibly one of the smaller shorebirds, why couldn't it have been a yellowlegs? It is interesting to note that the bird was not even mentioned in seasonal reports submitted by any of the other birders listed as present. This identification is quite possibly correct but evidence submitted in documentation seems to leave open other possibilities.

A-D: A rather thin description one would expect from a flyover. However, general impression of size and description of evidently diagnostic call seems to confirm this one.

NA: Whimbrel is not brown, but grayish to grayish-brown color. The voice needs to be at least reverified in a case where the observers are unfamiliar with the call.

A-D: Description does not help much except to establish size of the bird. Call of this species is distinctive, accurately described and corroborated by a tape with other observers. Separate description by other observers would also help.

A-D: What a nice fly-over bird! While I had initial reservations about this bird, the observer heard a distinctive flight call and had access to a tape recording of a Whimbrel right away while the call was still fresh in his mind and had only a few other possibilities to consider.

REVOTE: 1 A-D, 6 NA

NA: After seeing and hearing many nesting Whimbrel I can not accept document on basis of call. It seems that each Whimbrel had a different call and alarm note. The more of them I heard the less I was sure of their identity.

NA: In addition to the two N-A votes on the first round (one from this evaluator), two of the accepting votes were accompanied by comments that seemed to express some possibility of doubt. While I think this record may have been, in fact, probably was correct, the evidence in the form of the documentation doesn't by

itself eliminate a reasonable doubt. Probably best to let this one go as a good one that got away.

NA: Must agree with 1st NA. Judgement of size could have been in error, call could have been confused with Greater Yellowlegs.

NA: Whimbrel is not brown, but grayish to grayish-brown in color. The voice needs to be at least reverified in a case where the observers are unfamiliar with the call.

NA: Maybe I was a bit hasty on this one. I agree with first NA, no direct comparison for this individual. I admit I was hesitant at first on the first round of voting. Description of call is hard to interpret and I was swayed by a soon after sighting recording verification. To have this record accepted it would seem we would need additional evidence from other observers present. Their silence certainly does not help this record.

NA: After reading the comments of the other members I feel there is reasonable doubt to change my vote from A-D to N-A. Although I think it is still very possible that this bird was a Whimbrel, the possibilities exist that it was a Yellowlegs that looked brownish on an overcast day as they have looked to me on occasion or another shorebird. Observing bill length and especially shape would have been very helpful. I feel Marbled Godwit and Long-billed Curlew were sufficiently eliminated by the calls that were heard.

A-D: I abstained without comment initially. After reading comments, size questions and possibility of yellowlegs is out of question. This bird was large, powerful in flight (not like a yellowlegs) and gave a distinctive call, immediately compared to a tape (see second N-A). Other observers did not report bird as most missed it while looking at the Red Phalarope present at the same place.

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

89-30

What species? WHIMBREL How many? 1

Location? IPL PONDS, POTT CO., IA

Type of Habitat? _____

When? date(s): 8-27-89 time: 1:15 PM to APPROX

Who? your name and address: ROSS SILCOCK

Others with you: LORIN, PABE PADOLFORD, TANYA BRAY, B.J. ROSE, ROBERT ROSE

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.

WHILE OBSERVING OTHER WATERBIRDS AT IPL SOUTH POND, A LARGE BROWN SHOREBIRD (ALONE) FLEW OVER IN A SOUTHERLY DIRECTION. NO DISTINGUISHABLE FEATURES OTHER THAN LARGE SIZE (ABOUT SAME AS RINGBILLED GULLS WHICH FLEW OVERHEAD EARLIER) AND BROWN COLORATION. NOTABLE HOWEVER WAS CALL - A RATHER MELLOW SERIES OF PIPING NOTES. (SOMEWHAT LIKE A MUSICAL LESSER YELLOWLEG). THE ONLY OTHER POSSIBILITIES, MARBLED GODWIT & LONGBILLED CURLEW, HAVE VERY DIFFERENT CALLS. B.J. ROSE HAD A TAPE OF WHIMBREL WHICH HE PLAYED JUST AFTER THE BIRD FLEW OVER, AND IT SOUNDED THE SAME TO ME AS THE CALLS I HEARD.

Similar species; how eliminated:

SEE DISCUSSION ABOVE

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? DONT THINK SO.
If yes, explain:

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

OVERCAST, LIGHT DRIZZLE, BUT LIGHT GOOD. NO WIND.
BIRD APPROX 100 FT OVERHEAD.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

HAVE SEEN & HEARD MARBLED GODWIT & LONGBILLED CURLEW SEVERAL TIMES. HAVE NOT HEARD WHIMBREL CALL BEFORE.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

B.J. ROSE TAPE.

How long before field notes made? NONE this form completed? NEXT EVENING

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