

Long-billed Curlew
11 Apr 1989
Riverton Area, Fremont Co., IA
*Carl Priebe
IBL 61:85, Priebe 1990

Record Number: 89-21
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Carl Priebe

REFERENCES

Field Reports: none

Records Committee: IBL 61:85

Priebe, C. 1990. Long-billed Curlew in Southwestern Iowa. IBL 60:20.

VOTE 7 A-D

A-D. Color like a pheasant hen is perfect for Long-billed Curlew and not too good for Whimbrel. Whimbrel is also eliminated by a bill longer than that of a Marbled Godwit standing nearby. Faint eyeline with lighter area above eye is inconsistent with Eurasian or Far Eastern Curlew and perfect for Long-billed Curlew.

A-D. I don't know what else this could have been. Brown shorebird larger than a Marbled Godwit with a 10" decurved bill doesn't leave many other choices.

A-D. The slightly (?) downturned bill with size comparison to a Marbled Godwit are diagnostic. Time frame, area, length of view, and estimated distance all add credibility to this sighting.

A-D. The size, head pattern, and distinctive bill of this species were all seen on this bird. I don't think the lateness of this documentation would have any bearing on remembering the details of such an unmistakable bird.

A-D. The size, coloration, and head details fit this species. The date also fits; whereas, Whimbrel would be expected in May or late April. The size of the bill and of the bird may be slightly exaggerated. It would have been nice to have the size more directly compared with the godwit. The long delay in completing the documentation is bothersome unless the field notes were quoted directly.

A-D. Size description, suggested coloration, long legs and length of bill good description for Long-billed Curlew. Color of underwing linings not noted. I don't know what else it could be but a Long-billed Curlew.

A-D. I heard Carl's first-hand description of his sighting and am thoroughly convinced he saw a L-B Curlew. His description to me of Marbled Godwit was also excellent. I did not ask any leading questions during our discussion. It was Carl's ID all the way. His written description is a little problematical in the size comparison with pheasant hen. I believe he refers to body size only, not total length. Only real possibility for confusion would be Whimbrel, but lack of head striping (not mentioned in written doc, but given to me orally) convincing. Not an unexpected record, and timing, location (for Iowa), and company kept (Marbled Godwit and LB Curlew winter together on Texas coast) are

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union
Long-billed Curlew

Printed: 08/05/93
11 Apr 1989 RC No. 89-21 (cont)

all convincing.

SENT TO: Carl Priebe, RR 1, Box 31, Sidney, IA 51652 [9/28/89]

LONG-BILLED CURLEW IN SOUTHWESTERN IOWA

CARL PRIEBE



During the afternoon of 11 April 1989 I observed a Long-billed Curlew and a Marbled Godwit feeding in shallow water on the Riverton Wildlife Area in Fremont County. Both birds were a plain brown color similar to that of a hen pheasant. I watched the birds from approximately 3:45 to 4:15 p.m. and then called Ross Silcock to get a second observer. By the time Ross arrived, the birds could not be relocated.

The two birds were feeding about 70-80 yards away from the dike I was on. The smaller of the two, the Marbled Godwit, had a long upturned bill that was orange at the base changing to black at the tip. The larger bird, the Long-billed Curlew, had a longer bill, perhaps 10 inches, that was curved slightly downward. It also had a faint eye line with a lighter area above the eye. The body size of the Long-billed Curlew appeared to be almost as large as a hen pheasant.

The Long-billed Curlew was noticeably larger than the Marbled Godwit. Another curlew, the Whimbrel, also has a down-turned bill but it is about the same size as a Marbled Godwit or slightly smaller. The White-faced Ibis likewise has a long down-turned bill but in spring its plumage is a dull purple. The combination of the large body size, coloration, and the extremely long down-curved bill identify the bird I saw as a Long-billed Curlew.

Previously, there have been only four accepted sightings of Long-billed Curlews in Iowa in this century, the most recent being in 1932 (Dinsmore et al., "Iowa Birds", Iowa State Univ. Press, 1984). During the last 30 years there have been several spring sightings in neighboring states. These include three in Illinois, all in April, and at least four at Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge in northwestern Missouri only 45 miles southeast of Riverton. Three of the four were seen in April and one was in late May. The species nests in western Nebraska and South Dakota. There have also been a few sightings in recent years that have not been documented. A specimen taken in Emmet County on 12 November 1968 is in the bird collection at Iowa State University (#2496). Conservation Officer Don Priebe has also seen single Long-billed Curlews at the Riverton Wildlife Area twice during his 21 years of service in Fremont County (personal comm.).

Box 490, Sidney, IA 51652.

REVIEWS

The Birds of Illinois by H. David Bohlen, illustrated by William Zimmerman. Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington. 1989. 221 pp., hardbound, \$57.50. This new work for our neighboring state is a hybrid between a coffee-table book with full-page color paintings and a careful catalog of distribution, abundance, status, and period of occurrence for the 439 species (including 35 hypothetical species) found through 1987. The 49 color plates by Zimmerman depicting 87 species are nicely done and well reproduced but probably doubled the book's price.

The six-page introduction briefly describes the state's physical features. Two maps are provided: one shows counties, major cities, and rivers, and the other locates 50 major birding areas. Several prime birding areas including the LaSalle County Nuclear Plant, the top waterfowl hot spot in north-central Illinois, are omitted. Definitions of terms of abundance and a brief discussion of conservation in Illinois conclude this section.

The species accounts emphasize distribution and abundance in this century, current status of each species, timing of migration, habitat preference, and nesting information. To check the species accounts, I carefully read the account of the Double-crested Cormorant, a species that nests in good numbers in the portion of Illinois I regularly bird. The one-page account was accurate except for a typo in the nesting section (Doubled-crested Cormorant) and a few omissions. Two winter records in "Iowa Birds" were overlooked; a 15 January 1975 record and two that wintered on the Mississippi in 1980-81. Likewise, an American White Pelican that wintered in 1975-76 at Cordova, Illinois was not mentioned. Very likely other Illinois records from along the Mississippi River but published in "Iowa Birds" or *Iowa Bird Life* were overlooked.

The book concludes with a nine-page literature cited section, two-pages of initials and corresponding names of observers, and an index to bird species. It is well bound, and the double-column format makes for easy reading of the fact-filled species accounts.

It is difficult to rate this book against other recent offerings from Midwestern states since most contain more information than this one (i.e., "Iowa Birds" and "Birds in Minnesota"). Those of similar format are "The Birds of Indiana" (1984) and "The Birds of Ohio" (1989). This book is much like Peterjohn's Ohio book with a bit more emphasis on dates, the plates being identical. The Indiana book put a strong emphasis on breeding species; all were illustrated and larger type was used for their accounts. In total "The Birds of Illinois" is well done and reasonably accurate, but may seem a bit expensive to those who are more interested in the text information than the color plates.--Peter C. Petersen, 235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport, IA 52803

Birds in Kansas, vol. 1 by Max C. Thompson and Charles Ely. Univ. Press of Kansas, Lawrence. 1989, 404 pp., hardbound \$25, softbound \$14.95. It has been 25 years since Richard Johnston wrote "A directory to the birds of Kansas" (Univ. Kansas Mus. Nat. Hist. Misc. Publ. 41, 1965), and so publication of an update has been eagerly awaited. As one who has spent many hours wading through back issues of *American Birds* and the Kansas Ornithological Society's newsletter, I speak from experience of the frustration of trying to compile records of occurrence of Kansas birds. Thus I was happy to see this new book, written by two long-time Kansas ornithologists.

89-2-1

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

89-21

What species? LONG-BILLED CURLEW How many? ONE

Location? RIVERBON AREA FREMONT COUNTY, IA

Type of Habitat? Shallow water area 3-4" of about 1-2 acres surrounded by mudflats.

When? date(s): APRIL 11, 1989 time: 3:45 to 4:15

Who? your name and address: CARL PREEBE RR 1 Box 31 Sidney, IA

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.

Two birds were standing in the shallow water. ~~The~~ Both were a plain brown color similar to that of a pheasant hen. The smaller of the two birds, a Marbled Godwit had a long upturned bill. Its long bill was orange at the base changing to black at the tip. The larger bird (Curlew) had a longer bill, perhaps 10 inches that was curved slightly downward. The bird had a faint eye line with a lighter area above the eye. The Long-billed Curlew, with its body size and long legs appeared to be almost as large as a hen pheasant.

Similar species; how eliminated:

Whimbrel - The curlew was larger than the Marbled Godwit, whimbrels would be about the same size or slightly smaller.

Marbled Godwit - This bird has an upturned bill

Hudsonian Godwit - This bird has an upturned bill

No other bird has a bill comparable to the length and downward curve of the Long-billed Curlew

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? No others saw the bird
If yes, explain:

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

Good light conditions - mid afternoon.

The birds were estimated to be about 70 yards to 80 yards away.

The birds were viewed from slightly above (levee) with a pair of 10X50 binoculars.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have observed many whimbrel and Hudsonian Godwits on the tundra at Churchill Man. I have seen a few Long billed Curlew and Marbled Godwits in the west. My father was in possession of a mounted Long billed Curlew from 1948 until his death. I took the bird specimen to ISU in 1988. I am totally familiar with the Long billed Curlew.

References and persons consulted before writing description: Ross Silcock Tabor IA was called immediately after sighting the birds but it was gone ~~by~~ 'by the time he arrived approximately 1 hour later.

How long before field notes made? 2 1/2 hours this form completed? 101 days

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