

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Printed: 11/22/00

Buff-breasted Sandpiper
29 Mar 1996
Cone M., Louisa Co., IA
*Jim Fuller
IBL 66:103; 67:81

Record Number: 96-16
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 66:103

Records Committee: IBL 67:81

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Details of shape, size, bill length, coloration, leg color are convincing.

A-D, Convincing description of very early bird. Observer aware of rarity of sighting.

DOCUMENTATION OF UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTING

96-16

SPECIES: Buff-breasted Sandpiper

LOCATION: Cone Marsh (Louisa County)

DATE & TIME: 29 March, 1996 (1:30-50 PM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, NE, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240.

OTHERS: None

DESCRIPTION: Cone Marsh was being drained by the DNR to allow dike repairs, leaving extensive mudflats. I was looking at the shorebirds about 125-150 feet away, when a very tawny colored shorebird caught my eye. Despite the early date, the field marks added up to a Buff-breasted Sandpiper. This bird was walking around and rapidly picking at the mud on the drier portion on the mudflat. During the twenty minutes I watched it, comparisons could be made with three other shorebird species, Killdeer, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Baird's Sandpiper.

In general size, this bird was about the same size as the Pectorals (of which there were about 20 birds), but seemed more streamlined and also stood more erect as it walked. It was noticeably smaller than the Killdeer, and it was noticeably larger than either of the two Baird's Sandpipers. This bird was virtually the same rich tan, or buffy color over the entire head, neck, and underparts, although it was a little lighter on the distal part of the belly and vent areas. The back and wing were brownish-gray with buffy feather edgings. The bill was black, straight, and very short (the length was roughly half the width of the head). The bill was noticeably shorter in comparison to head width than either the Pectorals or Baird's. The legs were yellow, but more golden than those of the Pectorals, and the Baird's had black legs. The nape and top of the head were darker. The tan color was a wash which was continuous from breast to belly, as compared to streaking which ended abruptly, leaving a white belly on the Pectorals and Baird's. This bird had a more erect posture than either Pectoral or Baird's, and seemed to more rapidly peck at the surface of the mud, while the other two birds seemed to more slowly probe the mud. Unfortunately, the bird never flew nor did I see it raise its wings, so as to view the underwing.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Comparisons to Pectoral and Baird's Sandpipers have been made during description.

OPTICS & CONDITIONS: It was early afternoon on a partly cloudy day. I was looking to the northeast at 125-150 feet with a KOWA TSN-4 (20 X 60 zoom-lens) telescope.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen numerous birds of this species in the fall migration.

FIELD GUIDES and REFERENCES: No guides were viewed until after field notes were recorded back at the car. This form was typed on 10 April.

EARLY RECORD: This is an extremely early sighting, and this South American winterer would normally not be expected to be here on this date. There was, however, a record of Buff-breasted Sandpiper from High Island, Texas, on 4 April.