

Ruff  
17 Jul 1999  
Harrier Marsh, Boone Co., IA  
\*Eugene Armstrong  
IBL 69:127, 70:145

Record Number: 99-18  
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Eugene Armstrong, 1180 Badger Creek Rd., Van Meter 50261

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 69:127

Records Committee: IBL 70:145

VOTE: 5 A-D, 2 NA

A-D, The description eliminates Pectoral and Buff-breasted sandpipers and yellowlegs. The bird was seen at close range by experienced observers.

A-D, The date seems odd, and I would expect such an early arrival to be an adult, but the description, although brief, is convincing. Side by side comparison with Pecs helpful. Buff-breasted is another possible look-alike, but the discussion of similar species addressed that question well.

A-D, Reluctantly. The description fits a Buff-breasted too, but observer states that head and bill were larger. The yellow legs are more likely on a Buff-breasted, although leg color is variable, but should be yellow-brown or greenish in juvenile. No mention is made of rump & tail pattern, nor of primary vs. tertial length, both good field marks. Adult migrants are seen in July, but juveniles should be later.

A-D, A close view, including comparisons with adjacent Pectorals, of a rather distinctive bird by observers with previous experience with the species.

NA, I am not convinced that this is a juvenile based on date (females & juveniles said to begin leaving breeding grounds after mid-July), no mention of fringed or scaled feather edging on upper parts that is the most prominent feature of juveniles, and leg color (said to be dull yellow-green). The size and plain breast would only fit a female Ruff in basic plumage--not the most likely plumage at this date. One look at the upper tail in flight would have separated Pectoral, Ruff, and Lesser Yellowlegs. I can't identify the bird from the facts given.

NA, Bird described appears to be in juvenile plumage, but date is highly unlikely for a juvenile. Not enough detail to overcome this problem.

A-D, Considering the closeness of the bird and the experience of the observers I don't doubt they saw a Ruff. However the characterization of this bird as a juvenile is puzzling. The Ruff has long been suspected as having a small North American breeding population which is assumed to be in the high arctic. If indeed this bird was a juvenile the time frame precludes a high arctic nesting. In eastern Europe the Ruff nests as far south as 55 degrees latitude. Could there be a boreal breeding population in

North America? I would be interested to know if there are other early reports of juvenile Ruff in North America.

RE-VOTE (by mail): 5 A-D, 2 NA

A-D, I don't understand what is going on here. Of the two dissenting votes, one declared the date as highly unusual for a juvenile, but provided no supporting information for this conclusion, or, for that matter, any other basis for rejecting this record. The other NA voter based the vote on "females and juveniles said to begin leaving the breeding grounds after mid-July." Who says? Again, no supporting evidence is provided, not to mention the rather obvious fact that this record comes after "mid-July." This reviewer goes on to add that if the upper tail was described, we could rule out Pectoral or Lesser Yellowlegs. Pectoral isn't even an issue--Pectorals were beside the bird in question and conclusively eliminated. I don't think any reviewer could read this documentation and conclude the bird was a Lesser Yellowlegs. Also, the Armstrongs are experienced observers. Everybody on this committee has birded with them enough to know that they are not going to misidentify a Lesser Yellowlegs or a Pectoral Sandpiper, or, for that matter, a Buff-breasted Sandpiper. It's probably safe to argue that they have more experience with Ruff than anyone else on this committee--and keep in mind here that while plumages of a species may change somewhat, it is still the same bird--the same size, the same shape, and the same behavior. Moving along, the reviewer concludes that the bird can't be identified from the facts given. Well, I can. It's a Ruff. Regarding the entire likelihood issue, while I agree that this record appears to be early, I don't think we know enough about breeding range, migration interval, and behavior of this species to enter into unsubstantiated statements about likelihood. This record needs outside review. While I accept the fact that it may be rejected, I would hope that it will be based upon something definitive, rather than what the NA voters provided.

A-D, Despite the unusual date for a juvenile, I think the description rules out Pectoral, Buff-breasted, and yellowlegs.

A-D, no change.

A-D, The mid-July departure date given in the shorebirds guide, while pertaining to the European population and not the assumed North American breeders, should be regarded as an average, or usual, date. If a N.A. juvenile left the breeding grounds the first week of July, it would have at least 10 days to reach Iowa by July 17, an unusual occurrence, but not impossible. Here are some additional comments regarding record 99-18, Ruff, 17 July 1999: Another possibility that needs to be mentioned is that perhaps the bird was a one year old, non-breeding individual. I've no idea if there is any precedent for such a bird on this continent, but many Ruffs spend their first summer on or near the wintering grounds, similar to Black-bellied Plovers. The wear on such a bird would erase any border on dorsal feathers, eliminating the scaly pattern, and any new feathers coming in would be basic and inconspicuous. This plumage is

99-18

occasionally seen on wandering late June and July American Golden-Plovers in Iowa. These birds have been reported "basic" (by myself included), but are really juveniles (possibly starting to molt into basic). And more by e-mail: Immature female Ruff (Reeve) seen 31 July 1991 in Anoka Co. Minnesota by Peder Svingen, The Loon Vol. 63 Num.4, pg. 280. He decided it was a female by size, between Lesser Yellowlegs and Killdeer. He reported orange legs on bird. He quotes Chandler's book as saying imms. begin to show orange tones of the adults in the first winter, but that the sun shining from behind him may have intensified the color. He also refers to the photos in Chandler. The bird was not observed in flight. The record was accepted by the MOU records committee.

NA, see previous comments.

NA, Problem of apparent juvenile plumage at very early date has not been explained.

## DOCUMENTATION FORM

SPECIES:

Juvenile Ruff

HOW MANY:

1

LOCATION:

East Harrier Marsh - South of Ogden

DATE:

July 17, 1999

TIME &amp; VIEWING CONDITIONS:

Excellent 25 feet from car  
4:30 PM - Sunny - clear

FIRST OBSERVATION MADE BY:

Eugene Armstrong

DOCUMENTERS' NAMES &amp; ADDRESS:

Eugene Armstrong  
Eloise Armstrong  
1180 Badger Creek Rd.  
Van Meter, Ia 50261

OTHERS WHO SAW BIRD:

No one. Bird left as we  
went up the road to turn  
around.

DESCRIPTION OF BIRD:

Slightly larger than a pectoral.  
Stronger yellow legs and large knees. Much heavier  
than a pectoral. Buffy yellow almost overall with  
dark wing coverlets. Longer, slightly decurved bill.  
Smallish head. 9 to 10 inches in length.SIMILAR SPECIES AND  
HOW ELIMINATED:Feeding beside pectorals  
Body posture much the same. Pectorals had bills  
no breast markings on the ruff. Bill much longer  
and head larger than a buff breasted.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE:

This is the 5<sup>th</sup> ruff we have viewed, but none in this  
plumage.

EQUIPMENT:

Binoculars. Bush + Lomb Elite 8x42  
so close no scope was needed.HOW LONG BEFORE  
FIELD NOTES MADE:Mental notes made on sighting  
Fuller research done when we got home

REFERENCES CONSULTED:

North Atlantic shorebirds. Page 130  
upper right. Excellent picture of the bird we sawHOW LONG BEFORE THIS  
FORM COMPLETED:July 26, 1999  
That best reference we found.  
National Geographic also