

Ruff
22 Apr 1995
w. of Mt. Ayr, Ringgold Co., IA
*Sinclair
IBL 65:73, 66:96, Sinclair 1996

Record Number: 95-16
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Jim Sinclair, 810 N. B St, Indianola [*8/14/95]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 65:73

Records Committee: IBL 66:96

Sinclair, J. 1996. Ruff in Ringgold County. Iowa Bird Life
66:65-66.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Although the white U on the rump was not described, the size, bill shape, and leg color seem to eliminate everything else.

A-D, Although this bird was not seen in flight, which would have further clinched the ID, I believe description of a chunky, short-tailed shorebird with pink-orange legs is sufficient.

A-D, The size and shape and pink-orange legs are clearly described. The description of the body color, however, sounds like almost every shorebird that I have ever seen. The bird must have been more unusual looking than I can abstract from the description. I can't even tell the sex or plumage of the bird. The distinctive tail pattern is not mentioned and apparently was not seen.

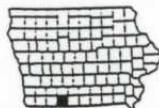
Little Wall Lake is a wonderful place to view migrating ducks, geese, grebes, and loons, especially in the spring. This is the first Red-throated Loon record for Little Wall Lake and Hamilton County. This is approximately the 15th state record for Red-throated Loon in Iowa and the 12th sighting since 1984. Of the 12 Red-throated Loon sightings since 1984, three were seen in April, one in May, seven in November, and one in December.

Box 65, Liscomb, IA 50145

RUFF IN RINGGOLD COUNTY

JIM SINCLAIR

On 22 April 1995 at 9 a.m. Rick Trieff and I were in Ringgold County heading west on Hwy 2. Just west of Mt. Ayr, as we approached the Walnut Creek bottoms, Rick and I both noticed numerous shorebirds in flight over the bottomlands. This area appeared to have been recently flooded, and the fields were still quite damp. As our car came to a stop, I commented on the large number of Pectoral Sandpipers foraging in the soybean stubble on the north side of the road. As I surveyed the scene, a bird appeared at the near edge of the soybean field no more than 40 feet from the car. Raising my binoculars and focusing on the bird, I exclaimed to Rick that I was sure that I had never seen this shorebird before.



My first impression was of a short-tailed, chunky, almost dowdy looking shorebird which was approximately one third larger than the Pectoral Sandpipers with which it was associating. The mantle was a medium sandy-brown color with prominent pale feather edgings. The face and head were pale while the bill was dark and slightly longer than the head with a noticeable droop along the distal third. The throat was off white, and the belly and flanks were light brown with some irregular darker mottling on the flanks. As the bird moved into the bean stubble, the most prominent physical feature became evident. The legs and feet, which appeared proportionately long and sturdy, were an incandescent orange! The bird was clearly a Ruff in basic plumage.

Rick and I observed the bird under ideal viewing conditions as it foraged towards the north through the bean stubble. At approximately 150-200 feet, the bird became increasingly difficult to see, except for the legs and feet which acted as a beacon for attention. At one point I could not make out the body of the bird but could easily see the apparently disembodied legs and feet as they moved purposefully through the soybean stubble. As the bird moved farther into the field, this effect became evident through the binoculars and eventually through the scope. After ten minutes, the bird was lost from view as it and the Pectoral Sandpipers moved further from the road.

Identifying a new species is always problematical, and shorebirds can be notorious in this regard. Add to this the fact that the Ruff is unusual in several ways including more than one key identification point, and you have the potential of an identification nightmare. Most birders are aware of the spectacular and highly variable nature of the male Ruff's alternate plumage. However, the basic plumage can be almost as variable as the alternate plumage, ranging from predominantly white with dark wings through every shade of brown or gray possible. Not only is the plumage variable but the bill and legs may be dark, light, yellow, greenish, orange, or pink! Size is usually a dependable feature for identification purposes. However, the Ruff shows sexual dimorphism with the male being one fourth larger than the female. Besides the above features, the Ruff's range is a matter of question. Although formerly considered a

95-16

North American vagrant, the Ruff has been found with such consistency over the last 30 years that it is now considered regular in some East Coast states and California. There is now strong suspicion that a population breeds in the North American arctic.

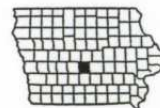
The number of Ruffs reported in Iowa has increased little over the last 20 years. The first record was a female collected in Louisa County in May 1940 (Dill, *Auk* 58:257, 1941). The 1980s saw two more records: 8-12 September 1982 in Fremont County (Silcock, *Iowa Bird Life* 53:87-90, 1983) and 1 September 1984 in Story County (Martsching, *Iowa Bird Life* 56:64, 1986). Previous to 1995, only one Ruff had been identified in Iowa in the 1990s: a female in Greene County on 26 May 1991 (*IBL* 61:92). This spring, in addition to the above bird, a female was identified in Fremont County on 31 March and 1 April (*IBL* 65:73). The Ruff, because of its many singular features and habits, is truly an exciting species and one Iowans should be prepared to find and identify.

810 North B Street, Indianola, IA 50125

ICELAND GULL AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

On 17 November 1995, I parked at the west end of the Saylorville dam in Polk County to scan some gulls feeding along the dam face. At 11:30 a.m., I noticed a very pale gull feeding with a small flock of Ring-billed Gulls off the east end of the dam. The great distance precluded careful scrutiny, but I initially assumed this was the first-basis Glaucous Gull I had seen here the day before. A few minutes later, I was watching the bird from a distance of about 200 m and noted the all-dark bill and smaller size, both of which were wrong for Glaucous Gull. I studied and photographed the bird from distances as close as 30 m until 1:10 p.m.



The bird was with about 25 Ring-billed, ten Herring, and one Franklin's gull. The bird was about 10% smaller than a Herring Gull. The bill was black, short, and straight. The bill was shorter than the bills of all Herring Gulls present, and lacked the pale area of variable extent. The eye was dark. The head and neck were white with extensive but faint gray/brown wash, especially on the crown and back and sides of the neck. The forehead was slightly paler than the crown. The mantle was white with very fine gray/brown speckling, although the overall appearance was still very pale. The underparts were white with extensive gray/brown wash, especially on the belly and flanks. The legs were pink, although the brightness as compared to Herring Gulls was difficult to determine. While on the water, the visible portion of the primaries and the mantle were the palest. The pattern of a pale mantle, darker, mottled tertials, and pale primaries was striking when the bird rested on the water. The wingtips extended well beyond the tip of the tail when the bird was resting. The upperwing coverts were pale and mottled light brown. The upper surfaces of flight feathers were slightly paler than the upperwing coverts. In flight, the spread primaries showed a narrow pale brown fringe on the outer portion of the outer web of each feather. This was visible only at close range; otherwise, the feathers appeared entirely pale. The wingtip, i.e., the proximal 1-2 inches of the outer primaries, was completely white. The underwing coverts were pale gray/brown, contrasting with the translucent undersides of all the flight feathers. The uppertail was white with very fine brown barring, especially on the coverts and outer rectrices. There was a diffuse, pale brown

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

What species? RUFF How many? 1 95-16

Location? Two miles west of Mt. Air on Rt 2, Ringgold Co.

Type of Habitat? Bean stubble

When? date(s): 4/22/95 time: 9 a.m. to _____

Who? your name and address: Jim Sinclair, 810 N. B St, Indianapolis

Others with you: Richard Trief

Others before or after you: _____

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.

Bird was $\frac{1}{2}$ larger than the Pectoral Sandpipers with which it was associating. The general impression was of a chunky, short-tailed shorebird. The bill was black, slightly longer than the head with a noticeable droop along the distal third. The eye was dark and the face and head pale. The throat was off white while the breast, belly and flanks were a light brown with no pattern excepting some darker mottling on the flanks. The mantle was a medium to dark brown with prominent pale feather edgings. The legs were an incandescent pink-orange - strikingly colored. The legs appeared both long and sturdy compared to the size of the body. Bird was feeding with Pectoral Sandpipers in flooded bean stubble.

Similar species: how eliminated:

hooked like no other shorebird
I have ever seen.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? NO
If yes, explain:

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

Viewing and lighting conditions excellent. Bird viewed as close as 30 yds with 10x50 binocs and 75 to 100 yds with 40x scope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

NO

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Trief look at RGFG and Robbins field guides

How long before field notes made? 5 min. this form completed? 24 hours

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