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COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

RUDDY TURNSTONE

Arenaria interpres

Location: A small lake west of Hannah Ranch S.W.A.; near Fountain; El Paso County, Colorado

Date: September 9, 1995

This bird was discovered by Alan Versaw that morning.

Several of us (myself, Brandon Percival, Mark Hullinger) saw this bird late on the afternoon of the 9th. It was a dark, gray afternoon with a persistent light drizzle. It was about 5:00 p.m. when we re-found the bird. We observed it in adequate but poor light for about 15 minutes, perched and in flight. I had brought my Kowa scope and we set it up and observed this bird at 20-60X. I was less than 25 feet away when I first flushed the bird from shore. The rest of the time the bird was about 50-75 yards away. It walked the edge of this small reservoir set in open grassland. It walked on debris-strewn shoreline as well as a small sandy point.

Description:

This was a juvenile or non-breeding adult. It looked like a shadow of a breeding bird -- dull, grayish and brownish where the adult is black, rufous and white. It was a medium-sized shorebird, slightly smaller, shorter-legged and more compact and plumper than nearby Killdeer. It had stout, dull orange legs and a dark wedge-shaped, slightly upturned bill. In flight it was a striking bird -- with white upper tail, back, scapulars and wing stripe contrasting with the otherwise dark uppersides. This gave the bird a conspicuous, harlequin appearance in flight. Perched it was dark brownish above and white below. It had a faint eyeline and a dark arc across the side of the breast.

Similar Species:

The conspicuous white, black and brown pattern in flight and the medium size and wedge-shaped bill eliminate most other shorebirds. Avocets are much larger with recurved bills. Snowy, Piping and Black-bellied plovers lack the white face, bib, rufous and black back and wedge-shaped bill. The Killdeer is plainer above in flight and has two breast bands. Phalaropes have thinner and longer bills, different habits and lack orange legs. Sandpipers are plainer, especially in flight, and lack the chisel-shaped bill. The Black Turnstone has no brown in any plumage and lacks the flight pattern.

Experience with Species:

I have seen many Ruddy Turnstones on ocean beaches. I have seen five previous Ruddy Turnstones in Colorado: 1-2 juveniles on September 16, 1989 at Cheraw Lake; 1 breeding adult at Blue Lake on May 23, 1993; and 2-3 on August 28 September 3, 1994 at Lake Henry.

This report is prepared from notes made after observation.

Mark Janos

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add # & file
19-95-29

(Additional documentation)

RARE BIRD REPORT--SIGHT RECORD

REPORT FILED BY: Alan E. Versaw
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SPECIES: Ruddy Turnstone

DATE(S): 9/9/95

OF BIRDS SEEN: 1

SEX: unk

PLUMAGE: Post-breeding adult, but not yet fully winter plumage

LAT/LONG: 19

ELEVATION: 5200

TIME OF DAY: 7 am

LOCALITY: Colorado Springs SWA

NEAREST TOWN: Fountain

COUNTY: El Paso (first record, I believe)

DURATION OF OBSERVATION: 5 minutes

OTHER OBSERVERS: CFO field trip people went to see it same evening. I know Mark Janos and Brandon Percival were successful. John and Virginia Maynard were successful in looking for the bird the next day (Sunday).

LIGHT CONDITIONS: Moderately dense overcast conditions

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT: Bushnell 8 X 42 Natureviews

DISTANCE: 10-25 feet

PHOTO DATA: none

BIRD BEHAVIOR: The bird was feeding along the edge of the reservoir on the west side of Colorado Springs SWA (Hanna Ranch). It was more or less in the company of a Killdeer and a couple of Lesser Yellowlegs (which were not on the shore, but out a couple feet into the water). Eventually the bird startled and flew to another part of the reservoir.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF BIRD: The bird's bill was short, but was somewhat triangular and turned up at the end--sort of if someone had taken a Killdeer bill and shoved it back into the bird's face--a sort of pug-nosed appearance to its face. The wings and back were brownish and underparts white. Where the lines would be across the chest of a Killdeer, this bird had a sort of loop (roughly the color of Killdeer bands--at least it appeared so in this poor light) and a narrow collar. Both of these features were well-defined: the "loop" on the side of the chest was obvious and unmistakable. The facial pattern was indistinct. When the bird flew away from me I was struck by the obvious white mark up its back, the banded tail, and a prominent white streak in each wing. The bird was a tiny bit smaller than the Killdeer in its company. There was not a strong reddish appearance to the wing and back feathers, but neither was the head as dark nor the collar as indistinct as winter birds are pictured in the bird books. Honestly, I failed to note the bird's leg color. I didn't get my bird book out until after the bird had flown away and I missed noting the leg color.

SONG AND/OR CALL: No call heard, even when the bird flew away.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: Dead weeds and mud along reservoir shoreline--a narrow region of perhaps a couple feet between taller weeds and the water of the reservoir itself.

ELIMINATION OF SIMILAR SPECIES: At first glance, I thought this bird to be a Killdeer. The size, posture, and general color were sufficiently close to produce the suggestion. However, the pug-nosed appearance and "loop" on the side of the chest were wholly incompatible with a Killdeer or, for that matter, any other plover. The back, wing, and tail pattern of the bird when it flew away sealed the bird's identity as a turnstone. A quick check of my birdbook when the bird had left showed that the Black Turnstone's markings were considerably different from the Ruddy's, leaving no other candidates. Getting a good baseline approximation of the bird's size (from the Killdeer next to it) helped to rule out all of the smaller shorebirds right from the top.

PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND SIMILAR BIRDS: Lots of experience with Killdeer (is there anyone out there who can't claim this?), but this is my first-ever turnstone. Moderate experience with shorebirds in general.

REFERENCES CONSULTED: Peterson, Natl. Geo., Andrews & Rinker

DATE OF REPORT: 9/9/95

SIGNATURE:

Alan Peterson