

COLORADO RARE BIRD REPORT

19-94-27
accepted

BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER

Tryngites subruficollis

Location: Blue Lake (Adobe Creek Reservoir); 10 miles north of Las Animas; Bent County, Colorado

Date: August 28, 1994

Setting:

Several of us (myself, Bob Dickson, Brandon Percival, Toni Brevilier) observed this bird. We found it in the southeast corner of the lake at 2:30 p.m. It walked "chicken-like" over the wet mud at some distance from the water's edge. It used the same kind of habitat as 26 nearby Mountain Plovers. We watched it for 1 hour and 10 minutes, until 3:40 p.m., with binoculars and scopes (Kowa TSN4 20-60X; Questar). The light was excellent. We got as close as 40 yards but usually observed it from 75 yards or less. The bird was delicate and upright with a distinctive, bobbing walk. It walked along deep cattle tracks in the mud and picked at the ground with its bill. Rather than gliding along like a plover, it moved forward in short spurts by bobbing its head forward and back.

Description:

The bird was a juvenile. It was a medium-sized shorebird about the size of the nearby Mountain Plovers (about 9" long). Its shape was small and compact with a short neck and proportionately large, blocky head. It was overall a very plain, buffy-yellow shorebird. It had a medium long neck and a smallish head. It had rather large, staring dark eyes. The legs and feet were clear yellow and medium-long. The face was buffy yellow, the brightest part of its plumage. The neck and undersides were buff and lighter than the back. The vent area and undertail coverts were white. There were faint, fine brown spots on the sides of the breast. The tail was brown and unmarked. The uppersides were yellowish-brown and darker than the underparts. The mantle feathers were brown with whitish borders. The scapulars were brownish-gold with fine, clear white borders. The lesser, median and greater coverts were brown, edged with buff. The crown and hind-neck were finely streaked with brown. There was a weak brownish crescent in front of the eye on an otherwise plain face. The bill was pointed, rather short, thin and all dark in color.

Similar Species:

I thought that the bird was a juvenile because of the very distinctive white borders to the scapulars and mantle, which gave the bird a very distinctive scaled look. On the other hand we were not able to see a darker submarginal line in each scapular--this might then indicate an adult. However I thought that this feature might have been harder to distinguish than the white feather margins, which were very clear, and thus I judged the bird to be a juvenile.

The only other pale sandy colored shorebirds are: Mountain Plover has whiter undersides; a patterned face with pale superciliary; white forehead and crescent under the eye; a darker cap; lacks spotting on sides of breast; is much less scaly above. Pluvialis plovers have dark legs; weak eyelines; lack even pale margins on back; are more patterned underneath; have stubbier bills; and have a gliding, not bobbing, walk. Ruff is larger, longer-necked and smaller headed; has a longer, slightly down-curved bill; is more extensively white underneath; and has a weak facial pattern. Upland Sandpiper is more heavily spotted underneath; lacks the scaly back pattern; has a weak eyeline and darker crown; and has a longer bill with a yellow lower mandible.

Experience with Species:

I have seen many Pluvialis and Mountain plovers and Upland Sandpipers. I have only seen 2 other Buff-breasted Sandpipers: In Texas in the spring 1984 and in Denver in the fall of 1989. The 1989 bird was a juvenile. I have never seen a Ruff.

This report is prepared from notes made after observation.

Mark Janos

Mark Janos
10 Sedum Ct.
Pueblo, CO 81001