

## NOTES

### FIRST RECORD OF A SURFBIRD IN THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

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On 9 April 2012, while I was monitoring Red-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon rubricauda*) nests on the cliffs near Halona Point along the southeastern coast of Oahu, Hawaii, a shorebird landed on a rocky ledge on the shoreline below me. The bird had a very distinctive tail pattern; the rectrices were bright white with broad black tips, which combined with other characters made it immediately obvious that it was a Surfbird (*Aphriza virgata*), a species not previously recorded in the Hawaiian Islands (Pyle and Pyle 2009). The bird was stocky, with short yellow legs and a short, thick (for a shorebird) bill that was orangish on the tomlia and at the base of the mandible (Figure 1). The head, back, wings, and upper breast were mottled grayish brown, and the belly and lower breast were white with dark spots. It had a very prominent white wing stripe (Figure 2).

I observed the bird for about an hour, during which time it moved slowly along the shoreline to the east, foraging intermittently for small invertebrates, primarily mollusks, on the rocks and in small tide pools. It was not wary and allowed me to photograph it within about 8 m. The photographs show feathers on the back, breast, and wing coverts of mixed ages. Most feathers were of the formative or basic plumages, being plainer gray and having a narrow white fringe, but some of the scapulars were newer feathers of the alternate plumage, having a black center and a broader white fringe (Figure 1A). In addition, some of the wing coverts were much more worn and more brownish than others and probably were juvenal feathers (Figure 1B), indicating the bird was in its first spring (O'Brien et al. 2006, Pyle 2008). The distribution of alternate and juvenal feathers was asymmetrical; the right side of the bird contained more alternate scapulars (Figure 1A), and the left side had more juvenal wing coverts (Figure 1B). First-year shorebirds often undergo only a partial pre-alternate molt and do not make the northward migration, remaining on the wintering grounds during the breeding season (Johnson 1977, Johnson and Johnson 1983).

The Surfbird was seen again by others and me on 10 different days between 7 April and 10 July, always within the same 300-m length of shoreline. It apparently moved over a much larger area, however, as it was not detected in this area on several occasions, and on three occasions I saw it flying to or from the west, once beyond Koko Head, a distance of 1.5 km. The bird sometimes was seen in the company of several Ruddy Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*), one or two Pacific Golden-Plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*), and a Wandering Tattler (*Tringa incana*).

An obvious question regarding this record is where the bird came from. The Surfbird nests in Alaska and the Yukon and winters on mostly rocky shorelines from southern Alaska to southern Chile (Senner and McCaffery 1997, O'Brien et al. 2006). During the nonbreeding season it is very rare away from the Pacific coast of the Americas but recorded far outside its usual range, as evidenced by spring records from interior California, coastal Texas, Alberta, and Pennsylvania (Hayman et al. 1986, Senner and McCaffery 1997, Davis 2012).

I had been visiting the area about once a week starting in late January to monitor tropicbird nests (VanderWerf and Young 2007), but I did not see the Surfbird before 9 April. Although the timing of the initial observation is consistent with the timing of the species' northbound migration (Senner and McCaffery 1997), it seems unlikely that a bird of any age would leave a nonbreeding site on the mainland and fly a minimum of 3600 km to an island far from any known migration corridor. I think a more

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Figure 1. First-year Surfbird near Halona Point, Oahu, Hawaii. The feathers are of mixed ages, including many formative feathers (plain gray with narrow white fringe), some first-alternate scapulars (black center with broader white fringe), and a few very worn, more brownish juvenal wing coverts. The alternate scapulars were more prevalent on the bird's right side (A, white arrows, 9 April 2012), but the left side contained more juvenal wing coverts (B, white arrows, 13 May 2012).

*Photos by Eric VanderWerf*

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Figure 2. Surfbird just prior to taking flight, Lanai Lookout, Oahu, 13 May 2012.

*Photo by Eric VanderWerf*

parsimonious explanation for the bird's occurrence in Hawaii is that it came from the breeding grounds the previous summer or autumn and was simply overlooked until I saw it in April. A regular migratory pathway from Alaska to the Hawaiian Islands and beyond is facilitated in the autumn by favorable atmospheric patterns, and these tail winds are used by several shorebirds breeding in the Arctic, such as the Wandering Tattler, Bristle-thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*), and Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*; Gill et al. 2008), which occasionally are accompanied by vagrant species (Pyle and Pyle 2009). Furthermore, the bird was not observed for a 60-day period from 13 May to 10 July either, and, given the steep cliffs and high waves that make shoreline access difficult along much of the southeastern coast of Oahu (Figure 3), it easily could have been overlooked during the winter.

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Figure 3. Surfbird (in center foreground) near Halona Point, Oahu, Hawaii, on 10 April 2012. Though far outside the Surfbird's usual winter range, the rocky volcanic shoreline of southeastern Oahu provides foraging habitat not unlike that found along parts of the Pacific coast of North and South America.

*Photo by Eric VanderWerf*

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