FEATURED PHOTO

FIRST DOCUMENTATION OF A JUVENILE RED-NECKED STINT FOR THE LOWER 48 STATES

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On the clear morning of 30 August 2009, I (Easterla) discovered a juvenile Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*), which had never been fully documented in the lower 48 states. At approximately 09:00, while scanning for shorebirds on a large mudflat at the Yolo Wildlife Area in Yolo County, California (managed by the California Department of Fish and Game), I noticed a peep, smaller than nearby Western Sandpipers (*C. mauri*), with a long primary projection, a full set of tertials, black legs, and a very short bill. The bird's fresh plumage and overall scaled appearance showed it to be a juvenile. On the basis of my prior observations of juveniles of another Old World species of black-legged stint in California, the Little Stint (*C. minuta*), on 22 September 1994 (Howell and Pyle 1997) and 14 September 2008 (Pike and Compton 2010), as well as my experience observing stints in Europe, Russia, and southeast Asia, I felt confident this bird was a juvenile black-legged stint from Eurasia (Veit and Jonsson 1987) and probably a juvenile Red-necked Stint. Upon realizing the possibility of such a discovery, I phoned John Sterling and other birders who joined me to verify my observation.

The many shorebirds on the mudflat that morning included 1400 Western Sandpipers, 1800 Least Sandpipers (*C. minutilla*), at least two Semipalmated Sandpipers (*C. pusilla*), and one alternate-plumaged adult Dunlin (*C. alpina*) foraging with the juvenile Red-necked Stint.

Fortunately, the sun was at our backs that morning, allowing optimal light for identification. In addition, the bird was foraging with Western, Least, and Semipalmated sandpipers and moved closer to where we were standing (approximately 18 m). With these three factors combined (good light, closeness of the bird, and similar species nearby), we were able to observe and photograph subtle differences in field marks (see photo on this issue's inside back cover for comparison with a juvenile Western Sandpiper).

There are two field marks critical to distinguishing juveniles of the dark-legged Eurasian stints (Red-necked and Little) from bright juvenile North American peeps (the Western and Semipalmated sandpipers). The Semipalmated and Western sandpipers are the only species of *Calidris* with vestigial webbing between the toes; the Old World stints lack it (e.g., Hayman et al. 1986). Generally, ascertaining the presence of such webbing is less difficult than ascertaining its absence. In all cases, ascertaining the lack of webbing or palmation requires close views. During the initial observation of the Red-necked Stint at the Yolo Wildlife Area, I was not able to confirm the lack of palmation, but during the second day of observing it (1 September 2009), I was able to identify the lack of palmation clearly (see lower photo on this issue's back cover).

The second critical field mark is the length of the primary projection. The Red-necked Stint had a long primary projection, longer than that of a Western or Semipalmated Sandpiper, but not as long as on the larger Baird's (*C. bairdii*) or White-rumped (*C. fuscicollis*) sandpipers (Paulson 2005). Typically, on a Red-necked or Little stint, there is a long primary projection past the longest tertial feather, and these long primary projections can be confirmed only when all of the tertials are present (Veit and Jonsson 1987). Because this field mark may be difficult to assess if feathers are

missing or out of place, I made careful note of this bird's tertials and primaries (see photos on this issue's back cover for confirmation of the long primary projection). There were at least three primary tips visible, and, depending on the position of the bird (for example, when the bird was leaning forward), there often appeared to be four primaries visible. The Western and Semipalmated sandpipers, on the other hand, normally have two (sometimes three) primaries showing beyond the tertial tips, with smaller gaps between the primary tips. Therefore, this second field mark allowed us to narrow the identification to one of the dark-legged stints.

In juvenile plumage, the field marks distinguishing the Red-necked and Little stints overlap, so all need to be scrutinized. The most overt difference is the overall contrast in color. The colors of the Little Stint are normally more vibrant and contrasting than those of the juvenile Red-necked Stint (Hayman et al. 1986). The tertials on the bird at the Yolo Wildlife Area were thinly edged in buffy white, with the middle tertial having slightly more reddish tones. This is in contrast to the broad reddish or rufous edges on the juvenile Little Stint's tertials (Jonsson 1992). Though it was apparent that this bird was not a Little Stint, it is important to note that the color of a juvenile Red-necked Stint's tertials can be misleading (Veit and Jonsson 1987). For example, the apparent color of the tertials may vary with the bird's position with respect to the sun and angle of the light. At times, the tertials appeared to be a flat blackish color, rather than the grayish more typical of a juvenile Red-necked Stint. In addition, the gray wing coverts on the juvenile Red-necked Stint are normally thinly edged with buff color and have a dark central shaft streak. This pattern was clearly seen on the bird at the Yolo Wildlife Area, as was the contrast between the darker back and scapulars and the gray wing coverts (Svensson et al. 2009) (see photos on this issue's back covers). The juvenile Little Stint typically shows very black-centered coverts with a quite broad and distinctive rufous fringe (Paulson 2005).

Other field marks identifying the Yolo bird as a juvenile Red-necked Stint included a light gray wash and diffuse streaking on the sides of upper breast (see upper photo on this issue's back cover). A juvenile Little Stint normally shows a more orange-buff wash with sharper, darker, more prominent streaks.

The crown did not contrast sharply with the supercilium. Rather, these areas appeared blended because of some streaking in the supercilium just above and behind the eye (see upper photo on back cover). A juvenile Little Stint normally shows a very dark-centered crown with a prominent, bright white supercilium and a lateral crown stripe, giving it the look of a split or forked supercilium (Hayman et al. 1986).

The feathers of the mantle and scapulars were noticeably rufous with darker centers, the mantle showing some bright but thin lines that ran the length of the bird's back. These mantle lines appear variably in all of the small dark-legged species of *Calidris*. However, the juvenile Little Stint generally has vibrant, bright, broad, and contrasting mantle lines that help to distinguish it from the other species (Chandler 1989, Rosair and Cottridge 1995).

Finally, the overall build of the juvenile Red-necked Stint differs from that of the juvenile Little Stint. The Red-necked Stint has the longest wings (Hayman et al. 1986) of all the small *Calidris* species. Its tarsi are normally shorter, giving it a more squat and elongated look (Veit and Jonsson 1987). Because of its posture, the Yolo bird was more flat, lowered, and horizontal in profile than the more upright, rounder, and longer-legged Little Stint (and noticeably different from nearby Semipalmated and Western sandpipers as well). As we observed this bird numerous times, its structure made it easier to relocate within the multitude of small sandpipers on the mudflat.

The bill length of the Red-necked and Little Stints overlaps broadly so is not a very conclusive field mark. However, the Yolo bird did seem to show the bill shape typical of a Red-necked Stint, being fairly thick at the base, slightly down-curved, very short, and entirely black. Though the structure of the juvenile Little Stint's bill is similar, on average it is slightly more attenuated and longer with a rather fine, less laterally expanded tip

(Hayman et al. 1986). The sandpipers at the Yolo Wildlife Area flushed periodically, but unfortunately during my two days of observation no one heard the bird vocalize.

The Red-necked Stint's primary breeding range is in arctic and far eastern Siberia; its winter range encompasses southeast Asia and Australasia. In North America, it breeds in northern and western Alaska (Point Barrow and Seward Peninsula) (AOU 1998, O'Brien et al. 2006). Juveniles are rare but regular in fall migration in the western Alaskan islands (primarily St. Lawrence Island, Pribilofs, and western Aleutians) with most records from mid-August to early September (P. Lehman pers. comm.). Elsewhere in North America, the Red-necked Stint is a vagrant, though adults are now reported annually, mostly during late summer and early fall. The first record for the lower 48 states was of an adult in alternate plumage at Walnut Beach, Ashtabula, Ohio, on 21 July 1962 (Ahlquist 1964).

We are aware of only one other well-documented juvenile Red-necked Stint outside of its normal range, of one found dead at Fair Isle, Shetland Islands, 31 August 1994, now in the National Museum of Scotland (Riddington 1994). Note the coincidence of the date with that of our California bird.

Over the years, there have been many erroneous reports of juvenile Red-necked Stints in California and other lower 48 states. The bird we discuss in this note has been accepted by the California Bird Records Committee as the first record of a juvenile Red-necked Stint in California (Pyle et al. 2011). However, that committee has also accepted six records of juvenile Little Stints and a fairly even split of records of adult black-legged stints (14 of the Red-necked and 18 of the Little Stint). So, the question arises, "why are there no previous records of the juvenile Red-necked Stint in light of numerous records of adults and both age classes of the Little Stint?" The answer may be that adult Red-necked Stints and adult and juvenile Little Stints have a more conspicuous plumage during their southbound migration and are therefore easier to find than the juvenile Red-necked Stint, which is very similar to the Western and Semipalmated sandpipers and may have simply been overlooked or missed over the years (Mlodinow and O'Brien 1996).

With increased coverage from birders, including more detailed field guides, advanced optics and photographic equipment, and cell phone and Internet communications, documentation of rare juvenile stints may become more frequent.

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"Featured Photos" of a juvenile Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*), Vic Fazio Wildlife Area, Yolo County, California, 30 August 2009, by © John Sterling of Woodland, California (top), and by © Todd Easterla of Rancho Cordova, California (bottom).