

## IMPORTANT RECENT BIRD RECORDS FROM ATTU ISLAND, ALASKA

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During recent field work for the University of Alaska Museum on Attu Island, Aleutian Islands, Alaska, we obtained important specimens of three species: North America's first of the Chinese Pond-Heron (*Ardeola bacchus*), first of the Solitary Snipe (*Gallinago solitaria*), and third of the Pin-tailed Snipe (*G. stenura*). These records expand our knowledge of the diverse Asian avifauna that passes through the western Aleutians in spring.

On 20 May 2009 we flushed a Chinese Pond-Heron, the second recorded in North America, from the mouth of the Henderson River on Massacre Bay, Attu Island (52° 50' N 173° 12' E), then collected it (UAM 26000, adult male) on the northeast end of Massacre Beach after it landed amid the wreckage of a World War II-era barge. North America's first recorded Chinese Pond-Heron, also an adult in alternate plumage, was on St. Paul Island in the Pribilof Islands 4–9 August 1996 (Hoyer and Smith 1997). This species breeds from eastern India and Bangladesh to northeastern China, Ussuriiland, and possibly Korea (Vaurie 1965, Kushlan and Hancock 2005), and there are several breeding records from Japan (OSJ 2000). Northern populations are migratory, wintering primarily in southeast Asia (Vaurie 1965, Kushlan and Hancock 2005). The Hoyo has also occurred in Norway, Hungary, Taiwan, and the Ryukyu Islands (del Hoyo et al. 1992, Ecsedi et al. 2000, Kushlan and Hancock 2005).

On 24 May 2010 we collected a Solitary Snipe (UAM 27000, adult male) at the base of Alexai Point, Attu Island (52° 49' N, 173° 17' E), from a small stream running through the ruts of an old road along Gilbert Ridge. Earlier in the day members of Zugunruhe Birding Tours (J. Puschock, R. A. MacIntosh, M. J. Toochin, et al.) had observed and photographed the same bird. This species had been added to the list of birds unsubstantiated in Alaska on the basis of a sighting with marginal photographs from St. Paul Island in the Pribilof Islands 10 September 2008 (Bieber and Schuette 2009); the Attu specimen represents the first unequivocal occurrence of this species in North America.

The Solitary Snipe has a patchy distribution in east Asia, where it is known from the mountain ranges around the Sea of Okhotsk, including those of Sakhalin and Kamchatka, the Anadyr region of Chukotka, northeast China, and the larger mountain ranges of central Asia (del Hoyo et al. 1996). Many populations are only partially migratory or migrate altitudinally (Hayman et al. 1986, del Hoyo et al. 1996).

Two subspecies have been described: *G. s. solitaria*, which occupies the majority of the species' range from central China west (Vaurie 1965), and *G. s. japonica*, in the more eastern portions of the species' range. Birds of the subspecies *japonica* often winter in Korea, Japan, and eastern China, and the Solitary Snipe has been recorded as a vagrant to the Ryukyu and Ogasawara islands, the main islands of Japan, and the Commander Islands (Johansen 1961, Vaurie 1965, OSJ 2000). The two subspecies reportedly differ slightly in upperpart color: *G. s. japonica* may have more or richer red and less white producing a more subdued pattern, but, lacking specimens for comparison, we could not evaluate these characters in our specimen. Measurements of the subspecies of the Solitary Snipe overlap considerably (Prater et al. 1977), but those of the Attu bird (wing chord 150 mm, exposed culmen 74.5 mm, tarsus 34.4 mm) are consistent with *G. s. japonica*, the subspecies reported from the Commander Islands (Johansen 1961) and more likely to reach Alaska on the basis of range.

NOTES



Figure 1. Chinese Pond-Heron (UAM 26000) collected at Attu Island on 20 May 2009.

*Photo by Jack J. Withrow*



Figure 2. From top to bottom: specimens of the Common Snipe (UAM 27002), Pin-tailed Snipe (UAM 27001), and Solitary Snipe (UAM 27000) from Attu Island, May 2010. The Common Snipe is included for comparison.

*Photo by Jack J. Withrow*

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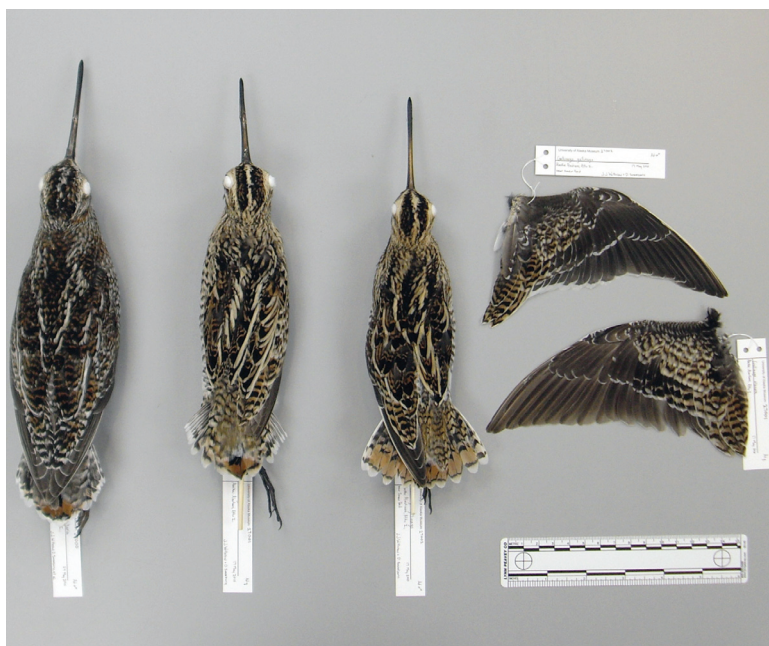


Figure 3. From left to right: specimens of the Solitary Snipe (UAM 27000), Pin-tailed Snipe (UAM 27001), and Common Snipe (UAM 27002) from Attu Island, May 2010. The upper spread wing is from the Common Snipe, the lower is from the Pin-tailed Snipe.

Photo by Jack J. Withrow

On 17 May 2010 we flushed and collected a Pin-tailed Snipe (UAM 27001, adult female) from the side of an overgrown road near Casco Cove, Attu Island (52° 49' N, 173° 10' E). This specimen represents the third occurrence of this species in North America, the previous records being on 25 May 1991 and 19 May 1998, both also from Attu Island (Gibson and Byrd 2007). The Pin-tailed Snipe breeds widely across Russia from the Ural Mountains to the Sea of Okhotsk and Anadyrland and winters on the Indian subcontinent and in southeast Asia (Vaurie 1965, del Hoyo et al. 1996). It is a scarce migrant through Japan and the southern Kurile Islands (OSJ 2000).

To date, the Alaska Checklist Committee has accepted as certain only those identifications of the Pin-tailed Snipe founded on specimens. Two additional reports of snipe identified as this species (25–26 May 1984 and 30 May 1998, both Attu) lack substantiation by specimen or photo (see Tobish and Isleib 1991, Tobish 1998, Osgood and ABA 2003). Other migrant Asian snipe that could possibly show up in the western Aleutians include Swinhoe's Snipe (*G. megala*) and Latham's Snipe (*G. hardwickii*), both doubtfully distinguishable in the field from the Pin-tailed without exceptional documentation (see Prater et al. 1977, Hayman et al. 1986, Carey and Olsson 1995, Leader and Carey 2003). The Common Snipe (*G. gallinago*) is the expected snipe in the western Aleutians, but Wilson's Snipe (*G. delicata*), unrecorded in the western Aleutians but recorded from Chukotka (Arkhipov 2009), is a very real possibility as well. Especially in situations outside these species' normal ranges—where

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lone snipe, offering no comparisons, are the rule—Common and Wilson's are not readily distinguishable with certainty (Dunn and Alderfer 2007, Reid 2008), and, given the potential for six species of *Gallinago* to turn up in the western Aleutians, identifications founded on specimens are critical to accuracy.

The only previous Alaska record of the Chinese Pond-Heron and the only previous Alaska report of the Solitary Snipe are both from the Pribilof Islands in late summer or fall, respectively. All three records of the Pin-tailed Snipe fall within a fairly narrow interval of a week and a half in May. This pattern is similar to that seen in the Common Snipe, a regular migrant in the western Aleutians, in which peak numbers pass through roughly 15–25 May (Gibson and Byrd 2007). Both the Pin-tailed Snipe and Solitary Snipe appear to have recently expanded their breeding ranges into the upper Anadyr River region (Tomkovich 2008).

Along with their obvious value to our knowledge of distributional patterns, these specimens provide considerable opportunities for future research regarding these taxa, which are so rarely incorporated into scientific collections. For example, the Solitary Snipe specimen provided the first tissue sample of this species yet archived, and the pond-heron provided only the fourth (Stoeckle and Winker 2009).

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