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SHORT NOTE

TEREK SANDPIPER FEEDING LIKE AN AVOCET

At Karaka shellbanks, Manukau Harbour. on 22 April 1978, J. A. Brown and I sat quietly on the outer bank watching waders. Before us was an area of firm wet mud with many little pools and patches of shells where birds were feeding on a falling tide. Among them was a Terek Sandpiper (*Tringa cinerea*) working busily towards us. We were able to watch it for about 30 minutes at distances as short as 20-30 m. These are wary birds in New Zealand, and so we were fortunate to have such an opportunity. The weather was fine and calm with clear visibility and I was able to note the following feeding methods:

1. Stood still, then ran to pick flies from surface of water with sometimes an extra run as prey escaped.
2. Picked randomly from surface of mud.
3. Jumped to take flying insects.
4. Probed in water about 3 cm deep for ? crabs, which were shaken and turned before being eaten. Bird was distant at this time.

5. Used bill in continuous side-to-side sweeps in a small shelly pool. No indication as to what prey was taken. Water half-way up bird's legs.

Since 1978 I have looked in vain for a repetition of the last method until at Access Bay, Firth of Thames, on 17 November 1981 a Terek Sandpiper, which had been picking at random over thick wet mud and runnels, carried out side-to-side sweeping in muddy water for 20 to 30 seconds. It then resumed picking as before. At the time I was watching through a x30 telescope with the bird about 50 m distant. The side-to-side passes of the bill presented a continuous almost stirring motion, the right and left movements being rhythmic and deliberate. The bird then dropped into a deep runnel and was gone from my view.

Bill sweeping seems to be used infrequently. Whenever possible I have watched this species, which visits New Zealand in very small numbers annually, since 1964. The bill seems to be admirably adapted for such use. This feeding method is similar to that of the Australian Avocet (*Recurvirostra novaehollandiae*), which I have watched at sewage treatment ponds in Australia at Alice Springs in April 1979 and at Werribee, Victoria, in October 1980.

I have found no record in the literature of *T. cinerea* feeding by side-to-side bill sweeping. Ali & Ripley (1969, *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan*, vol. 2) say "When feeding probes with its bill deep into the squelchy ooze almost to the eyes so that the base of the lower mandible and chin usually become bare of feathers due to the constant attrition. Often a morsel is shaken in water and carefully washed before being swallowed Whether the peculiar upturned shape of the bill has any special adaptive significance remains to be studied." On the Avocet (*A. avocetta*), they describe feeding thus: "The birds run about and feed on squelchy mudflats or by wading in shallow water. The curious upturned bill is directed obliquely against the ground — like a hockey stick held in play — the curved part skimming the surface. It is then moved back and forth in a rotatory skimming motion churning up the bottom mud along with minute organisms which are collected in the mandibles."

The bill of a Terek Sandpiper seems less abruptly upcurved than that of an Avocet and may not be as effective in food gathering in the side sweeping method. This may explain the Terek Sandpiper's infrequent use of a method of feeding for which it appears well suited.

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