

a continual bobbing of the tail (D.V.M.); and the flicking of the tail and back upwards continued whether the bird was standing or moving (R.W.M.). It would feed, often running, amongst the stones at the edge of the lagoon or along the sandy border of the dune pond. Once it explored the timber of a big log heap in the lower stream bed. No calls were audible above the wind. The arrival of some children and a dog put an end to our observations.

From both its appearance and behaviour, and after consulting many books, we are convinced that our unknown wader must have been a Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*).

— W. J. PENGELLY

— R. W. MACDONALD

— D. V. MERTON

[This composite description is based on three separate accounts. Each of the three authors submitted his own story of the Paritutu sandpiper.—Ed.]



#### PROBABLE SIGHTING OF A RUFF

At Karaka on the the Manukau Harbour on 11/4/64 a bird which we are satisfied was a Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) was closely studied with binoculars at thirty-nine yards. It was standing with its body facing half-right away from us and its head at about right angles in a small clear patch in a flock of hundreds of Knots and Turnstones, with the nearest Knot only a foot away. Both of us were attracted to it at the same time, realising that it was a bird we had not seen before. There was ample time to study it and write notes with the bird in a standing position. Unfortunately, a Harrier (*C. approximans*) put up the whole flock and it was covered up by the other birds so that no flight pattern could be seen. No call was heard. The locality agreed rather well with that of its choice as described by Witherby, i.e., near the mouth of a large tidal drain where it debouched on to a sandy-muddy tide-flat.

The size was carefully discussed. N.B.Mack. described it as like a Knot (*Calidris canutus*) but larger and longer in the neck and legs. H.R.McK. took the body size to be about that of a Greenshank (*T. nebularia*) but having a much shorter bill. It was finally decided to compare it with the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*C. acuminata*), this being a smaller bird than the two above, but more like a Ruff in general appearance and proportions and a bird well known to both of us.

The note of the bill as taken down on the spot was: "Compared with Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, longer and somewhat heavier but in smaller proportion to the greater size of the bird. Similar in shape and colour." Witherby gives length of bill as, Ruff 34-38, Reeve 29.5-33. That of the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is 23-27. The bill alone is sufficient to separate it from all other waders of like size and shape.

The side and back of neck were noted as having "thin striations moving diagonally to the rear." Illustrations vary in this respect, apparently because of the different ways the head may be held. A drawing in "Emu" 63, 38 shows rather over emphasised striations moving forward. Witherby, IV, 280 shows them more or less horizontally crescentic, if such a term may be used. In any case they were definite fine markings.

The upper surface was described as: "Wings brownish. Faint light margins on wing coverts. Back more uniform dark grey, not much pattern. Transverse brownish or grey-brown bars on upper rump, but rump not seen in flight." Illustrations show much white at sides of rump and tail with broad patterned centre stripe. The white would not be spread out except in flight and this we did not have the opportunity of seeing. Only the patterned centre was visible with the bird on the ground.

Of the under surface it was noted: "Mid. to lower breast rufous tinge on grey-brown. No pectoral line. Drab white under. Speckled on side of body below rear- and fore-wing gap between, bird standing on ground." After study of many books it has been decided that the speckling on the side is best shown in the illustration of the Reeve, plate 40 in "Collins Pocket Guide to British Birds," by Fitter and Richardson. In the bird we saw, the moult was not so far advanced, for it had speckling below the rear- and fore-wing, instead of the continuous markings along the side. It also did not have the barring right down on the breast.

It was agreed that the legs were: "Longer by say one inch than those of a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper." They were much heavier, in fact appearing to be disproportionately thick. Witherby gives the male tarsus as 45.5-52 but omits the female. That of the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is 23-27.

The difference in the average of the two species is 24 m.m. which is only 1 m.m. less than one inch. The long stoutish legs were the first thing to attract our attention. This would indicate that it was a male, or Ruff. A mounted specimen of a female, or Reeve, in the War Memorial Museum, Auckland, is much smaller, paler and more lightly built than the bird we saw at Karaka. H.R.McK. made the leg colour something like bluish-grey or lead-grey but N.B.Mack, after prolonged study, decided that they were of no definite colour. The books allow for almost any colour.

The more upright stance of the figures in Witherby portrays the position in which we saw our bird but the best picture so far found is a reproduction of a photograph in the English magazine "Country Life," Oct. 22, 1959. This really portrays the bird as we saw it.

The prospects of occurrence of this species in New Zealand are not entirely remote. At least two Reeves have recently been collected in Australia and any species of migratory arctic wader going there, even if in small numbers, can be expected to straggle to New Zealand sooner or later.

— N. B. MACKENZIE

— H. R. MCKENZIE

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#### A RECORD OF THE WESTERN SANDPIPER ON FAREWELL SPIT

During a visit to Farewell Spit in early October, 1964, the attention of one of us was drawn to a bird resting in a tight flock of 31 Red-necked Stints (*Calidris ruficollis*), on account of its distinctive bill. A long period of observation at 18 to 20 feet with 10 x 50 and 7 x 50 binoculars, and subsequent reference to the literature, has enabled us to identify the bird as a Western Sandpiper (*C. mauri*). During the period of observation the bird was put to flight more than once, so that the wing and tail pattern could be noted; and it was at all times