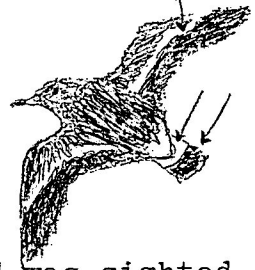


298-01-1979



DESCRIPTION OF A SURFBIRD SIGHTED AT  
PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK

By Observer: JERRY MCWILLIAMS



About 7:30am on Saturday, August 18, 1979, a bird was sighted through a Bushnell Spotting Scope with a 25 Power eyepiece at about 35 to 40 yards. It was feeding with a small flock of Black-Bellied Plovers and was Golden Plover sized, or maybe slightly smaller. The bird picked casually unlike the Plovers which were at rest, and the posture of the bird as it fed, was Dove like; short necked, and plump with short legs, compared to the upright long legged posture of the Black-Bellied Plovers. At this distance, the plain slate colored head and back was quite distinct, almost like a knot. The bird moved a short distance from the Plovers and then flew about 20 yards showing its' white underside and white wing linings. It was then approached to within 20 yards and seemed quite tame sitting for a moment and then continued feeding. At this distance, detail could be observed quite easily. Light conditions were good, considering cloud cover and our backs were to the East giving us adequate and ideal light.

As mentioned earlier, the back and head of the bird was slate colored, but towards the back of the wings, the feathers had a white edging giving it a scaly appearance.

There was no eye ring and the top of the head was covered with fine dark spots.

The breast was slate colored and stopped abruptly on the breast similar to the Pectoral Sandpiper. The breast was then spotted quite heavy with darker spots and continued and gradually disappeared down the breast onto the white underparts and down the sides.

The belly and undertail coverts were white and the legs were short and pale yellow or green.

The bill was Golden Plover sized and was light at the base and darkened towards the tip. Also noteworthy, was the lump or bulb on the upper mandible that curved down over the lower mandible slightly.

At rest, the primaries appeared slightly darker than the birds back and a white wing stripe was prominent much the same as a Willet when at rest.

It had been observed at this point for about 10 minutes and then it flew again with its back facing us. A single white wing stripe running the length of each wing near the base of the primaries and secondaries was evident and the rump was white and the tail was short and solid black contrasting sharply with the plain gray back. It continued flying Northwest along the lakeshore about 5 to 10 feet above the water and was not sighted again. No call was given while on the ground or in flight.

298-01-1979

# SURFBIRD AT PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK, ERIE, PA.

ON THE morning of August 18, 1979, pressure systems out of the north-west combined with south-westerly winds created ideal conditions for what turned out to be one of the most spectacular shorebird migrations recorded in recent Presque Isle history. In a period of about five hours, 20 species of shorebirds, including a Surfbird, were identified, with about 400 individual birds. Sightings included the following:

- Semipalmated Plover - 40
- Killdeer - 2
- Black-bellied Plover - 35
- Surfbird - 1
- Ruddy Turnstone - 4
- Spotted Sandpiper - 3
- Willet - 16
- Greater Yellowlegs - 1
- Lesser Yellowlegs - 80
- Pectoral Sandpiper - 5
- Least Sandpiper - 9
- Short-billed Dowitcher - 10
- Long-billed Dowitcher - 1
- Stilt Sandpiper - 37
- Semipalmated Sandpiper - about 200
- Western Sandpiper - 1
- Hudsonian Godwit - 12
- Sanderling - 4
- White-rumped Sandpiper - 1
- Baird's Sandpiper - 1

The flight seemed to peak between 9 and 11 a.m. By 4 p.m. the storm system had passed and the birds, which seemed to precede it or arrive with it, were all but gone. The temperature ranged between 60° and 65°. Winds were south-west at about 15 mph, with heavy rains at times, accompanying the front.

At about 7:15 that morning, a bird was sighted with a flock of black-bellied Plovers on a small sandspit along the Lake Erie shore at Presque Isle. The six plovers were in various spring to fall plumages, and a Semipalmated Plover was also present. The bird was about an inch shorter in length than the black-bellieds and stood about two-thirds as high. (It was about the size of a Ruddy Turnstone.) It was chunky, short-legged, and short-necked. In comparison to the longer-legged, upright posture of the plovers, its short stance and plump body gave it a squatty appearance.

The slate-colored upper body and breast were distinct. The bird moved a short distance from the plovers and then flew about 20 yards toward us. The underparts--belly, wing linings, and axillars were all dull white. It was approached to within 60 feet and seemed quite tame (or possibly tired). It sat for a moment and then continued feeding. At this distance detail could be observed quite easily. It was not yet raining. Considering cloud cover, light conditions were good. Our backs were to the east giving us further light advantage. A 25x spotting scope and 7x50 binoculars were used for these observations.

As mentioned, the head, face, neck, upper back, and breast were an even-toned dark slate gray. No eye-ring or face pattern were seen and the head was covered with fine dark spots, as was the breast. Although the gray of the breast stopped abruptly at the belly, the spotting extended below onto the white belly

and along the flanks. The wide gray feathers of the wings as they were folded over the lower back were delicately edged with white, giving it a clean slightly scaled appearance. At rest, the primaries appeared a little darker than the back, and a narrow white stripe was visible at the lower edge of the folded wing. The wing tips extended out to the end of the tail.

The legs were short and pale yellow or green. The short plover-like dark bill was light colored (flesh or yellow) at the base. Also noteworthy was the upper mandible which curved slightly down over the lower, and showed a distinctive lump or knob at the tip.

The bird had been observed at this point for about 10 minutes when it flew again with its back toward us. In flight it showed a clean striking gray-white-black coloration, with single wide white wing stripes and a distinctive tail pattern.

The rump and upper tail coverts were white and the tail was short, square, and solid black, contrasting sharply with the rump and back. The white area was a little wider than the black. (See illustration.) The wings were long and wide and the flight was steady and strong. The bird continued flying northwest along the lake shore five to ten feet above the water and was not seen again. No call was given.

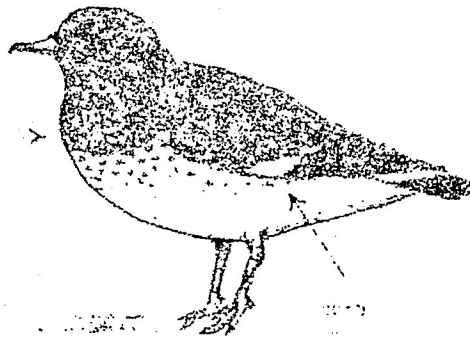
4.

Although a photographer was called, the bird had gone when the arrived.

Field notes were made independently by each of us later that morning and final identification came only after careful study of all available references.

Jerry McWilliams

Sam Stull



SKETCH  
BY

Jerry  
McWilliams

Record No.: 298-01-1979

## Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # / of

Species: *Sorfbird*

Date of Sighting: 08/18/79

Observer(s): *Jerry McWilliams, Sam Stoll*

Date of Submission: 1989

Submitted by: *Jerry McWilliams*

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V		
					A	B	C
E. Kwater			X				
B. Haas		X					
F. Haas		X					
R. Leberman			X				
G. McWilliams			X				
S. Santner		X					
P. Schwalbe			X				
TOTALS		3	4				

DECISION

*Accepted Class II*

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

*[Signature]*

Date:

*3-1-90*