

Notes on Little Stint – Record No. 305-01-2000 – by Paul Hess

An extreme rarity that is also a species difficult to identify always requires – to use the cliché – almost a feather-by-feather description. Two aspects of the description may point to the possibility of Little Stint, such as the thin bill and appearance of long legs, but the ID must rely on much more than those impressions.

Following are some details that I would need, which are not given in the description, before accepting a sight record of a juv. Little Stint to separate it from the bright extreme of a juv. Semipalmated Sandpiper (e.g. Veit & Jonsson 1984, page 857, Fig. 6; Paulson 1993, page 250).

- * There is no mention of one of the most important field marks for Little Stint ID: conspicuous white mantle and scapular stripes forming distinct white “V” lines on the upperparts.

- * There are no details on any contrast between the “rufous” crown and dull gray-brown hindneck, another important character that should be noted. Actually a juv. Little Stint’s crown is streaked with brown, with only rufous feather edges.

- * There is no detail about the scapulars’ color or pattern; they are described only as “bright.”

- * There is no mention of the tertial pattern.

- * There is no mention of a buff wash on the upper breast, which Little Stint should show (e.g. Chandler 1989, Prater et al. 1977). In fact the breast was described as “almost pure white.”

- * There is not a sufficient distinction made from a Semipalmated’s bill. A Semipalmated bill might also in some cases appear “thin, straight...with no hint of a droop and no thickening to the base.” (See the thin extremes depicted in Plate 75 of Hayman et al. 1986.)

Paulson is perhaps extreme when he says of distinguishing Little Stint from Semipalmated Sandpiper, “Only one characteristic is definitive, the absence of toe webbing in Little, and that attribute must be carefully observed.”

But Veit & Jonsson are clear about the many characters that should be included for positive identification of a juv. Little Stint:

1. Two distinct ‘V’ marks on the upperparts, one of these formed by white tips on the outer mantle feathers, and the second by white tips on the lower row of upper scapulars.

2. The greater and middle coverts, particularly the anteriormost ones, and the lower scapulars have broad, dusky brown centers that conceal the shaft streak, buff or rufous edges, and sometimes, whitening tips. The tertials are also patterned like the lower scapulars – dark brownish black with bright but narrow rufous edges...

3. Little Stints have a gray nape that contrasts strongly with the dark crown and bright mantle.

4. The very dark crown forms a dark ridge, which is emphasized by a bright whitish lateral crown stripe.”

References:

Chandler, R. J. 1989. *North Atlantic Shorebirds*. Facts on File. New York.

Hayman, P., J. Marchant, and T. Prater. 1986. *Shorebirds: an Identification Guide*. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston.

Paulson, D. 1993. *Shorebirds of the Pacific Northwest*. UBC Press, Vancouver, B.C.

Prater, A. J., J. H. Marchant, and J. Vuorinen. 1977. *Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holarctic Waders*. British Trust for Ornithology, Tring UK.

Veit, R. R., and L. Jonsson. 1984. Field identification of the smaller sandpipers within the genus *Calidris*. *American Birds* 38: 853-876.

305-01-2000

LITTLE STINT

Avocet Point, Conejohela Flats, Susquehanna River, Lancaster County, PA

Sunday, 17 September 2000, approx. 2:00 PM

Dear Nick:

After careful studying and consideration of all other similar species, I am fully confident that I observed a juvenile Little Stint on the Conejohela Flats last year on 17 September 2000.

After birding with 5 other birders all morning, I was alone on Avocet Point in the afternoon conducting a shorebird survey for the Safe Harbor Water Power Corporation. We had observed 9 shorebird species during the AM, but there seemed to be no new birds arriving through the day, as often occurs in clear weather. I continued to check the available habitat and re-check the few small flocks that were present.

I came upon 2 peeps: 1 was an adult Least, the other was the surprise. It was the same size as the Least, but the plumage was brilliant by comparison. The crown was bright rufous and the supercillium was distinctly white. The breast was almost pure white, with no wash or streaking. The scapulars were as bright or brighter than the crown, while the center of each wing covert was very dark, with some rufous fringes. So far, this could almost have been a very bright juvenile Least.

However, the bill was thin, straight and black, with no hint of a droop and no thickening to the base. Next problem was the legs: they were slightly longer than the Least's legs and BLACK. So even the brightest of Semipalmated, Western, and Least Sandpipers are now eliminated by the bill and legs, in conjunction with the white breast and bright cap. It was definitely a small, short-winged peep. The other three stints are eliminated by several characters.

The result of this analysis is that the bird was a juvenile Little Stint. I had never seen any stint anywhere, but I have studied them extensively in preparation for seeing/finding one. My very first impression (after HOLY COW!!) was that the bird was a Little Stint, probably a juvenile. Closest drawings that I've found are the juvenile in the 3rd Nat'l Geographic Guide, if you give the bird a slightly brighter cap, or the Shorebirds Guide, page 188, the small 193 illustration, the one without the gray on the breast.

To the best of my knowledge there are no previous PA records.

I viewed the bird for 15-20 minutes in good light from a distance of 35-50 feet. Most of the time I was observing with a Kowa TSN-4 spotting scope at 20-40X. I also observed through my Zeiss 10X40 binoculars. The stint was in direct side-by-side comparison with an adult Least Sandpiper for the entire time, standing, preening, and feeding. Because I was attempting to call people and transport them to the Flats in my boat, I did not obtain any photos. We could not relocate the duo after other birders arrived. Searching on several subsequent days were equally fruitless.

I know that this is a difficult ID, but I feel totally confident in my conclusion.

Sincerely,

BOB

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE
613 Howard Road, West Chester, PA 19380

29 January 2003

Bob Schutsky
115 Peach Bottom Road
Peach Bottom, PA 17563

Dear Bob,

Thank you for submitting documentation of the Little Stint on 17 September 2000 at the Conejohela Flats. After careful review, the Committee has voted not to accept this record.

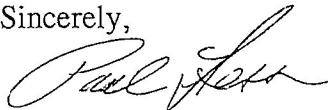
The vote was one member favoring acceptance and six members voting against it. Most of those who voted "no" placed the record in Class IV-A as "a record for which there exists a majority of evidence in support of the observer's identification; the record is probably correct, but not beyond reasonable doubt." In general the Committee felt that more complete details were needed for acceptance of a first state record and extreme rarity for which the ID of a species is not obvious. Following are two members' comments, and I am also attaching a copy of another member's more detailed analysis.

* "Nothing in this description rules out a Semipalmated Sandpiper...I believe this bird was not a Least but do not believe it was adequately distinguished from a Semi or a Red-necked Stint. Nowhere in the description does he mention white braces along the scapulars or a split supercilium, and the bright cap he mentions is not a character for juvenile Little Stint that is especially distinctive or even typical."

* The overall description and in particular the rufous fringe on dark-centered coverts strongly suggest Little Stint; however, there was no mention of white lines on sides of mantle which are said to be quite distinct on Little Stint...Also no mention of a split supercilium. Some juvenile Semipalmated Sandpipers can be quite bright (see *Shorebirds*, Hayman et al. plate 75, 190e). Also Semis can have thin straight bills (Hayman plate 75, 190f, and plate 79, 190a & d.)

The Committee emphasizes that our non-acceptance does not imply a belief that the bird was not a Little Stint, but simply that the members felt more complete evidence was needed. We hope that our non-acceptance in this case will not discourage you from submitting reports on any future rarities you may find.

Sincerely,



For the Committee:
Paul Hess, Chair

Record No. 305-01-2000

P.S. I would like to apologize for the delay in announcing our result. We are striving to process the dozens of documentations we receive each year more quickly.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)

Date of Sighting: 17 September 2000 to 17 September 2000

Location: WASHINGTON BORO

County: LANCASTER

Observer(s): Bob Schutsky

Date of Submission: 2001

Submitted by: Bob Schutsky

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead					X			
D. Heather D. Couchman			X					
P. Hess					X			
J. Stanley				X				
B. Reid				X				
B. Leberman				X				
M. Sharp				X				
TOTALS			1	4	2			
DECISION				X				

Comments: 1/6

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

6/30/02