





Date: April 18, 2012 3:05:29 PM EDT
Subject: **Ruff, Somerset County PA- Spring 2012**
Source: Nemesis Bird
Author: Mike Lanzone

[Ruff, Somerset County PA- Spring 2012](#)

On Monday April 16, like most mornings, I was birding my Somerset Lake IBA route. The day before was an incredible day here, but this am started pretty slowly. Passerines were a bit quieter and waterfowl numbers much lower. It was sunny, with a clear blue sky, about 70-75 degrees, and it was fairly breezy with strong gusts from the south-west. About the only thing going by, and in fairly big numbers, were migrating Red Admirals and Question Marks. This movement started in earnest the day before, and was likely brought on by the strong south-west winds. In fact, many of these could have come from Texas with April 5 and 6th getting reports of 100s per site migrating north (keep this in mind later on).

As I finished my route that morning I got to the last parking lot and started counting the coots and other waterfowl from right to left, as I reached the edge of the mudflats and I stopped dead as the bird came int view... holy *#%\$@#\$ I thought to myself as I quickly grabbed and erected my scope. First impression was a bird roughly a bit smaller than a nearby Greater Yellowlegs, short straight bill, but through bins was back-lit pretty badly, and at the time was thinking reeve (female Ruff, and what most eastern US records are), mostly because it seemed small for a male bird to me. I got my scope onto it and could not believe my eyes, I had what appeared to be a male bird. I quickly digiscoped a few shots with my phone and sent to Drew to post, and sent out an alert to PARBA.

It was smaller than I thought it should be for a male, but sizing is often hard in the field. Its head was rufous and it had darker streaking on its belly, sides and flanks. It appeared to be in alternate, striped plumage. Ruffs have a different moult strategy which they aquire an in-between plumage between winter and breeding. They moult into an alternate plumage prior to underging their supplemental moult which replaces many of their feathers from the alternate moult. In Ruff the elaborate breeding plumage is this supplemental moult. Here are some (mostly i-scoped) photos below followed by more text and the checklist links from Somerset Lake that day at the end.

I knew this would be a pretty good bird for PA, but had no idea that a spring Ruff (male) made this sighting very rare indeed. Almost all birds that I can find records for or get info from talking to people that saw them were reeves (females). In fact the only place in the state to ever get male birds in spring was Tiniicum. In the years prior to 1980 they had been more regular rare vagrants. They were almost annual (spring and fall, both sexes) at Tiniucm during the period 1960 to 1973. For some reason after 1980 they became increasingly rare across PA. From

1980 to present there have been only 10 records of Ruff in PA, of these only 3 have been accepted by PORC, all in south-eastern PA. Two at Tinicum NWR (10/1986, 9/1992) and one in Bucks County (9/2002). The most recent record is still under review, and also from the se part of PA, Lehigh County (5/2011). Only one of these records was in spring. It was hypothesized this Somerset bird could have come from some of the birds that annually show up in the Midwest possibly due to the sustained south-west winds, possible the same winds that brought the large numbers of butterflies! We will never know for sure where this bird came from, but it will be interesting to see if it shows up anywhere else this spring.

Unfortunately the bird only stuck there for about 1/2 hour. Birders soon started showing up from all across PA and unfortunately we could not relocate the bird. It was not for lack of trying, lots of eyes combed the lake for many hours. I also returned several times later that day to look to see if had returned, but unfortunatley could not find it.

[Ruff, Somerset County PA- Spring 2012](#) by [Mike Lanzone](#). Originally posted on [Nemesis Bird - birding and ornithology in Pennsylvania and beyond](#).

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Ruff Philomachus pugnax

Date of Sighting: 16 April 2012 to 16 April 2012

County : SOMERSET

Location : SOMERSET LAKE

Observer(s): Mike Lanzone

Date of Submission: 2012

Submitted by: Mike Lanzone

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

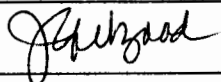
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
D. DeReamus	1							
B. Coulter	1							
C. Rutt	1							
D. Weber	1							
D. Farbotnik	1							
M. Lanzone	1							
M. Fialkovich	1							
TOTALS	7							
DECISION	accepted							

Comments: Drew Weber: Photos are diagnostic.

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

12/12