

PA Rare Bird Report

Submission Date	2019-12-02 13:12:20
Observer's Name	Ted Nichols II
E-mail	tanicholsii@gmail.com
Phone	7178563851
Observer's Address	102 Spruce Ct Annville Pennsylvania 17003 United States
Names of additional observers	None
Species (Common Name)	Ruff
Species (Scientific Name)	Philomachus pugnax
Number of individuals	1
Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)	Adult Female in Breeding Plumage
Observation Date and Time	04-23-2019 5:50 PM
Did you submit this sighting to eBird?	Yes
Link to eBird checklist	https://ebird.org/checklist/S55315543
County	Lebanon
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Heidelberg Township
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	Balmer Farm Ponds
GPS coordinates of sighting	40.322830, -76.332883
Habitat	Flooded Farm Pond and Adjacent Wet Meadow
Distance to bird	700 feet
Viewing conditions	Rain storm had just passed, cloudy
Optical equipment used	Swarovski 10x50 binoculars, Celestron Regal M2 100ED Scope at 67x zoom

Description

Summary of notes sent to other birders and e-mail listservs the day of the sighting. Female type. Prominent orange bill and legs which were what I first took notice to as I was scanning a large flock of Yellowlegs for counting purposes on the edge of the water. Birds legs were obviously orange in comparison to the yellow legs of the surrounding Greater Yellowlegs. In comparison to the Greater Yellowlegs the bird was noticeably smaller and the bird ever so slightly smaller than an adjacent Lesser Yellowlegs, but in each case the bill was noticeably smaller and slightly decurved. In addition, the chest and flanks of the bird stood out as much different than that of the Yellowlegs as they were blotchy with dark gray and black. Despite having a similar erect/upright posture to that of the Yellowlegs, the bird was also feeding differently than the majority of Yellowlegs that were in actually in the water of the pond, while this bird was feeding about 4 feet away from the pond in wet grass/meadow. A large noisy truck that was jake braking passed as I went to get my camera to digiscope a picture and I was unable to relocate the bird prior to having to leave for a meeting. While in flight, I did get my binoculars on the bird though and noticed a prominent white "U" on the upper tail that separated the dark rump from the dark tail tip. Subsequent efforts to refind the bird in the next few days were unsuccessful. The orange color of the legs and bill (which was smaller and shaped differently than the Yellowlegs) are key ID factors for a Ruff. I have seen this species on a few stateside chases as well as overseas and have no reasons to question my ID especially given the easy comparison to nearby Yellowlegs species. Additionally elimination wise, the bird structurally and sizewise differed from that of a Ruddy Turnstone which would also be another species to consider in this area that could occur with orange legs and a blotchy breast/flanks. The splotchy breast/flanks with no sharp demarcation from breast to a white belly, leg and bill color and distinct "U" on the uppertail observed in flight also led to me eliminating further considering Pectoral Sandpiper which were also present for comparison.

Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)

Bird was feeding adjacent to a farm pond containing a large flock of Greater Yellowlegs and Lesser Yellowlegs. The Yellowlegs were in the water and this bird was feeding in adjacent wet grass/meadow.

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

In all cases bird was smaller than that of the different Yellowlegs species and the breast and flank blotching was unique in comparison to the Yellowlegs. In addition the differing bill color and leg color are what first captured my attention in regards to this bird. The bill size and shape (slightly decurved) was also different to that of the Yellowlegs. When considering other species, bird differed clearly in size to that of a Ruddy Turnstone which would be another species to consider with Yellowlegs. The splotchy breast/flanks (with no noticeable demarcation from breast to a white belly), leg and bill color and distinct "U" on the uppertail observed in flight also led to me eliminating further considering Pectoral Sandpiper which were also present.

Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)

Yes, I am positive. I regularly observe many similar shorebird species regular to this area and have also observed this species overseas and on prior chases and feel the key ID features of this species were confidently observed by me and allowed me to eliminate other similar species. The orange leg and bill color was quite distinct.

During

Sibley Birds iPhone App,
<https://nybirds.org/KBsearch/y1973v23n3/y1973v23n3p116-121wentworth.pdf>
were consulted during the observing session before leaving the field

After

Did not consult any further materials after leaving the field where I sent out texts and e-mails regarding the sighting

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