

BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPERS AT CLINTON CONSERVATION PARK

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The Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* occurs annually in small numbers on most parts of Australia's northern coast with largest numbers being observed in north-western Australia, particularly at Port Hedland Saltworks (Lane 1987). The bird is rare in South Australia, where only three records, each of single birds, exist for the period 1976-1985 (Close & Mcrie 1986).

At 1500 hours on 17 November 1986 we entered Clinton Conservation Park from the Ardrossan Road, about 18 km from Port Wakefield, via a short (ca 100m) track from the main road to a picnic site and parking area. We estimated that the mudflats were exposed to a distance of 400m east of the shore (low water in Outer Harbor on this date was 0.26m at about noon, while high water was 1.96m at 1800 hours — both times are local). After walking to a point about 200m east of the mangroves, we observed 30+ Broad-billed Sandpipers in the company of 50+ Red-necked Stints *Calidris ruficollis*, feeding together on the mudflats and forming mixed flocks in flight.

Among the features by which we identified the Broad-billed Sandpipers were their size relative to the stints (slightly larger) and their plumage coloration (much browner than the stints). Of 10 birds examined closely through a 50× telescope at 10-20m, all had a prominent white supercilium extending from forehead to nape, but only two had a visible bifurcation in this posterior to the eye. All birds had bills longer than their heads, and the bills curved downwards at the tip. Two birds seen in good light had deep olive legs. Two birds seen well in flight had all-dark upperparts except for white sides to the rump, and a group of 10+ flying with Red-necked Stints had generally white underparts. Several birds showed prominent streaking on the breast. All birds seen were in constant motion, jabbing at the mud with their beaks. The birds appeared tilted forward while in motion and seemed to creep rather than walk with the more upright

stance of the longer-legged Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*.

The lack of precision in our count is due in part to the constant motion of the birds, both on the ground and in flight, and to our inability to approach all birds closely due to soft mud.

Of the two subspecies of *L. falcinellus*, *L. f. siberica* is the only one so far recorded from Australia (Lane 1987; Condon 1975). There is nothing in our observations to suggest that the birds we saw were not *L. f. siberica*; indeed, the indistinct double supercilia are consistent with *L. f. siberica* (Marchant *et al.* 1986; Cramp & Simmons 1983). The presence in some birds of prominent breast streaking, a plumage feature more prominent in nuptial plumage (see, for example, Cramp & Simmons 1983), suggests to us that the birds had not yet completed moult from nuptial to winter plumage.

This report provides evidence that the mudflats of the Gulf St Vincent may be among the regular wintering grounds of this small wader.

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