

Bird Note

A second record of White-rumped Sandpiper, *Calidris fuscicollis*, for South Australia, with some comments on identification

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INTRODUCTION

The White-rumped Sandpiper, *Calidris fuscicollis*, breeds in the Canadian Arctic and most spend the austral summer in southern South America. There is some vagrancy, however, and prior to the sighting reported in this note there had been seven records of White-rumped Sandpiper for Australia accepted by BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC). One of those, BARC Case no. 124, was from South Australia, on 15 January 1988 at Dry Creek Saltfields, Adelaide by Cox and Lees (1990).

On 16 March 2018, at approximately 2 pm, we were seated and using our telescopes to count shorebirds at an ephemeral swamp on private property on the margins of Lake Alexandrina when we noticed a wader intermediate in size between Red-necked Stint, *Calidris ruficollis*, and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, *Calidris acuminata*, feeding no more than 30 feet away. Based on Colin Rogers' experience with the species in South America, a careful inspection quickly

revealed that it was a White-rumped Sandpiper. We took a series of photographs, some of which are reproduced here.

THE RECORD

Examination of the bird, illustrated in Figure 1, indicates a rather dull individual, probably a first-year bird, showing a hint of rufous on the crown, ear coverts and scapulars. Streaking on breast and flanks on a pale wash is relatively dense and typical for White-rumped Sandpiper. Some chevrons were also present on the lower breast and flanks. Only a very faint hint of red at the base of the lower mandible is detectable in some of the photographs but was not noticed in the field under the low light conditions ahead of approaching rain squalls.

A detailed description of White-rumped Sandpiper in breeding and non-breeding plumage is given by Menkhorst *et al.* (2017, p. 162) although a bird in its first summer plumage, as in Figure 1, is not illustrated. Figure 2 illustrates a more sharply patterned bird consistent with adult breeding plumage.

A useful size comparison with Red-necked Stint is illustrated in Figure 3. White-rumped Sandpiper is larger than Red-necked Stint, but smaller than Sharp-tailed and Curlew Sandpiper, *Calidris ferruginea*, and in Australia has usually been found in mixed flocks of those three species. White-rumped Sandpiper has a longer and finer tipped black bill than Red-necked Stint and usually shows a reddish tinge on the lower mandible (just visible in Figures 1 and 2).

Possible confusion species in Australia might be Sharp-tailed Sandpiper that should, however, be readily excluded by leg and bill colour as well as



Figure 1. White-rumped Sandpiper near Lake Alexandrina, 16 March 2018. Image Colin Rogers



Figure 2. White-rumped Sandpiper in adult fresh breeding plumage, Ushuaia, 23 March 2018. Image Colin Rogers



Figure 3. Size comparison between White-rumped Sandpiper (left) and Red-necked Stints. Image Colin Rogers

plumage, shape and the diagnostic white rump (Figure 4).

Another American vagrant that could be confused with White-rumped Sandpiper is the superficially similar Baird's Sandpiper, *Calidris bairdi*, of which there are at least four records for Australia accepted by BARC: Case Nos: 74, 99, 182 and 185. There are two records for South Australia. The first South Australian record was a bird at Buckland Park Lake, SA on 17 December 1986 seen by Bob Snell (1988) and accepted as BARC Case No. 182. The second record was a bird seen by David and Sue Harper on 5 December 1992 in Dry Creek Saltfields, and subsequently seen over the next few days but no report was submitted to BARC. For comparison, an illustration of Baird's Sandpiper taken in South America is presented in Figure 5.

Baird's and White-rumped Sandpiper have similar shape and structure, in particular, long wings giving an elongated rear end to the bird, but Baird's generally has browner non-breeding plumage and lacks the distinct streaking and chevrons on the flanks usual on White-rumped Sandpiper. Nevertheless, the two species are superficially similar, and some care is required to separate them in the field.

If seen, the obvious diagnostic feature is the white rump on White-rumped Sandpiper, revealed in Plate 4. By comparison, Baird's Sandpiper has a dark central rump stripe similar to that on Red-necked Stint and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Curlew



Figure 4. White-rumped Sandpiper revealing the white rump after which it is named.

Image Peter Koch

Sandpipers also have a white rump but in non-breeding plumage are easily distinguished by their much longer legs and long black downcurved bill.

Finally, those interested in calls should listen for the mouse-like squeak of the White-rumped Sandpiper, made as it flew away when the flock of stints took off. That call is unlike any made by other *Calidris* sandpipers that regularly visit Australia.

The record was submitted to BARC as case 991 and accepted 18 June 2018.



Figure 5. Baird's Sandpiper, Tierra del Fuego, Chile, January 2009.

Image Colin Rogers

REFERENCES

- Cox, J. B. and Lees, A. F. 1990. A sighting of the White-rumped Sandpiper in South Australia. *South Australian Ornithologist* 31: 18-19.
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- Snell, R.G.T. 1988. First record of Baird's Sandpiper in South Australia. *South Australian Ornithologist* 30:118-119.

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