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LITTLE STINT (*Calidris minuta*) NEW (HYPOTHETICAL) SPECIES FOR KANSAS

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ABSTRACT

Herewith, I report on the first record of the Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*) for Kansas, observed on 30 April 2017, at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, Stafford County. The Little Stint was added to the official Kansas State List, designated as hypothetical (KBRC# 2017-10). It is at least the fourth documented spring record for the interior United States.

INTRODUCTION

The Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*) is a Palearctic breeding species (Europe and Asia), and a long-distant migrant that winters primarily in India and Africa (Hayman et al. 1986, del Hoyo et al. 1996, A.O.U. 1998, Iliff and Sullivan 2004, O'Brien et al. 2006). It is an occasional vagrant to Australia and North America (Iliff and Sullivan 2004). In North America, most records are from Alaska, followed by records along the east and west coast (Iliff and Sullivan 2004, O'Brien et al. 2006). It is considered accidental elsewhere. Inland records are few, but include southern Ontario (Canada), Yukon Territory (Canada), and North Dakota (Iliff and Sullivan 2004, O'Brien et al. 2006). Vagrancy records in North America range from 25 April to 21 November (Iliff and Sullivan 2004).

OBSERVATION and DESCRIPTION

On 30 April 2017, while at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (QNWR), Stafford County, I spent from 1400 –1815 hrs observing birds along the northern edge of the refuge at the “Big Salt Marsh, wildlife loop” area (38°11'36.47”N, -98°31'45.67”W), including the flats north of 170th Road. Weather conditions were miserable, with overcast skies, light to moderate rain, winds were from the N to NNW 32.2 – 64.4 km/h, and the temperature dropped from 3.9°C to 2.1°C.

The marsh was full of water, and shorebirds were plentiful. The northerly winds concentrated the shorebirds along the north edge of 170th Road, which runs south of the main flat just northeast of the wildlife loop. Birds were actively feeding along the south shoreline edges, especially where wave action caused foam to accumulate. After a couple of trips through the wildlife loop, at about 1515 hrs, I stopped to observe ca. 100 shorebirds feeding within and adjacent to the foam along the north edge of 170th Road (38°12'06.55"N, -98°31'33.00"W). There was one Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*); 16 Snowy Plover (*Charadrius nivosus*); two Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*); 14 American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*); 50 Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*); one Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*); four White-rumped Sandpiper (*Calidris fuscicollis*); two Baird's Sandpiper (*Calidris bairdii*); four Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*); and several Least Sandpipers (*Calidris minutilla*).

At 1527 hrs, I noticed a sandpiper that was different in appearance. I was observing the subject bird with 10x40 binoculars, at close range. The bird was foraging along the edge of the road, often amongst foam. It was in front of the vehicle, too close to view with a spotting scope. Light rain was falling at the time. The subject bird was in between the size of the Least and Semipalmated sandpipers it was associated with, and had black legs and black feet like the Semipalmated. All of the Least present had yellow to orange legs. Thus, leg color appeared to be "real", and not dark because of mud or staining. The bill was thin, straight and black, giving a more needle-like appearance than the adjacent Semipalmated and Least sandpipers (Figure 1).

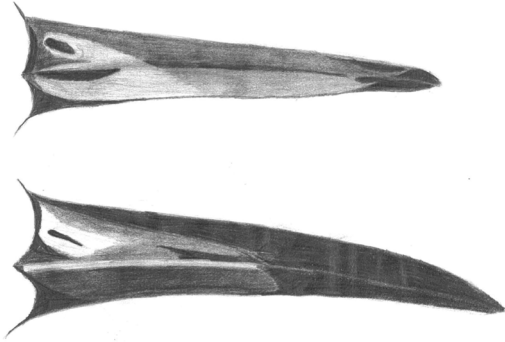


Figure 1. Artist rendition of bill shape of Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*) above, thin, straight, needle-like; and Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) below, droopy; based on authors field notes. Drawings courtesy of Dawson Henrichs.

The following characteristics were observed with both binoculars and a spotting scope (Nikon Fieldscope III, 20-60x zoom eyepiece). The mantle was dark brown/reddish/rufous overall, with a distinct white line along the scapulars, on both sides of the body, which extended the entire length of the scapulars. From an anterior view when the head was down, I could see both white lines that continued posteriorly toward to rump area, forming a V-shape (widest at the shoulders, narrowing at the rump). This also was observed from the rear of the bird looking toward the head. A secondary smaller V-shape was observed on the lower back, starting near the rump and extending anteriorly about mid-way through the mantle, but inside the outer V-shape (Figure 2). Feathers on the mantle were dark, mostly black centered with

rufous edges (Figure 3). From the side-views, the wing projection was very long, considerably longer than the tail, similar to what you would expect with a Baird's or White-rumped sandpiper (Figure 3).

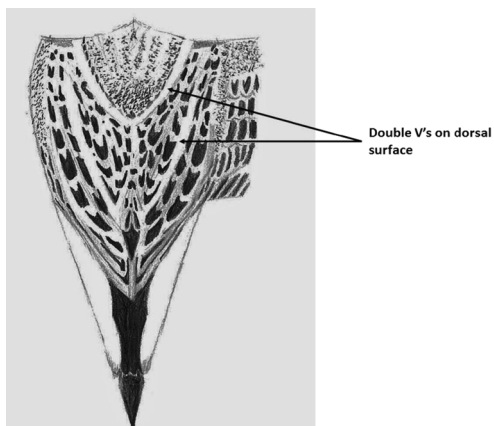


Figure 2. Artist rendition of the dorsum of Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*) showing the double V-shapes, based on authors field notes. Drawings courtesy of Dawson Henrichs.

The overall body shape was reminiscent of a Western Sandpiper (*Calidris mauri*) in that it appeared front heavy (barrel chested), but with extended wings. Throat was white, sides of breast contained small streaking and spotting, with no markings seen on center of breast, no real ground color was observed. The breast overall, contrasted with white throat. Lateral stripes, streaking, or spotting were not observed beyond the breast, the ventral surface was white. Crown appeared to be streaked and dark, similar to the back in color. A black lore existed in front of each eye with a white supercilium above the eye. In flight, rump was white, bisected by dark feathers that extended into the central tail feathers, which were darker than outer rectrices. Outer tail rectrices were a sandy or dirty off-white, darker than the lateral side of the white rump. The dorsal wing surface contained a white stripe above or on the primaries and secondaries that extended to the tip. The wing lacked dark tips, and the overall color of wings appeared the same throughout (brownish), with the exception of the white stripe.

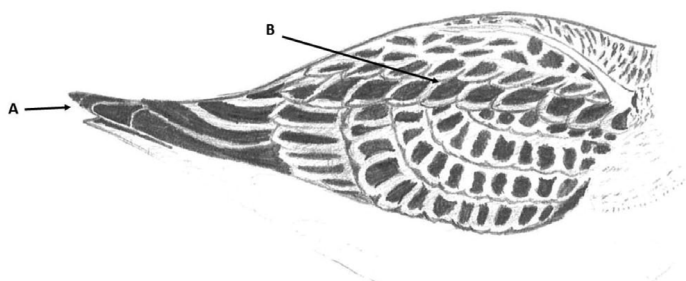


Figure 3. Artist rendition of the lateral side of Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*) showing the long wing projection (A), and scapulars with dark center, edges were rufous (B), based on authors field notes. Drawings courtesy of Dawson Henrichs.

Comparison with Adjacent Shorebirds

Over the entire observation period (ca. 1527 hrs to 1815 hrs) this individual was observed with the following species: Least, Semipalmated, White-rumped, Baird's, and Stilt sandpipers; American Avocet; Black-necked Stilt; Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*); Wilson's Phalarope; Snowy and Piping plovers; and Franklin's Gull (*Leucophaeus pipixican*).

Size. The subject bird was associated with, and often side-by-side to Least and Semipalmated sandpipers. Overall, its size was between that of Least and Semipalmated sandpipers and was always larger than any of the Least and always smaller than Semipalmated. It was much smaller than Baird's or White-rumped sandpiper's. Overall characteristics were similar to what one sees in a Western Sandpiper, with a front heavy, barrel shape chest, but with an elongated body due to long wing projections.

Legs. Color of legs and feet was black, most similar to adjacent Semipalmated, Baird's, and White-rumped sandpiper's. All Least had yellowish to orange legs.

Wings. Wing projection was obviously long, extending well beyond the tail. This was similar to what was observed in White-rumped and Baird's that were present. The overall extent of wing projection was more similar to comparative lengths of White-rumped's, not quite as long as Baird's. The wings were the same brownish color throughout the dorsal surface. Wing tips of Least and Semipalmated from the lateral view showed darker tips near the tail; this bird showed wings that were evenly-colored throughout. In flight, the dorsal surface had a white stripe above or on the primaries and secondaries that ran to the tip of the wing, and the color of the wing appeared uniform brown (including coverts). All Least Sandpiper showed darker wing tips near the distal portion of the wing tips, and no white in the wing was visible in the tips.

Rump/tail. Rump was white, with a dark center that extended into central rectrices, similar to what you see in Least and Semipalmated sandpipers, or even Pectoral (*Calidris melanotos*) and Western sandpipers. The outer tail feathers were a darker off-white, darker than the white in the rump but lighter than the central rectrices. The subject bird's outer tail feathers were distinctly darker than the white outer feathers of the Least and Semipalmated sandpipers present.

Bill. Bill was all black, thin, straighter, more needle-like than adjacent Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers. It had no droopiness as in the Least, or as in female Semipalmated. All Semipalmated and Least had much thicker bills that tapered from base to the tip, giving a triangular appearance.

Head/throat. Throat was white. The black lore got larger toward the eye. Above the eye was a white supercilium. The dark cap appeared streaked. Overall, the head appearance was similar to the Least Sandpipers, although the lores were always thinner on Least. The cap color appeared about the same as the upper back

on the subject bird. No distinct dark ear coverts were observed as in Semipalmated Sandpipers.

Breast/sides. Breast had small streaking or spotting on the sides, none on the center of the breast. No obvious contrasting ground color was distinguished, but overall the breast was darker than the white throat. All of the Least Sandpipers had streaked breasts, often with light brown base color across the entire breast. All breast marks were much more extensive on Least, even on the sides of the breast than seen in the subject bird. The Semipalmated Sandpipers had various amounts of light spotting on the breasts. Some had more spotting on their sides than on the central portion of chests, but these birds all had distinctive white throats and white breasts. None of the Semipalmated Sandpiper's had the same characteristics as the subject bird. There were no lateral markings along the sides of the body as one might see in Western Sandpipers or the adjacent White-rumped Sandpipers. Ventral surface of this individual was white, similar to Semipalmated.

Mantle/scapulars. Overall, the back appeared darker than the adjacent Least Sandpipers due to the feathers on the mantle being dark centered with rufous edges. All of the Semipalmated Sandpiper's present had grayish backs. A couple of the Semipalmated had rufous scapulars, similar to what you expect to see in Western Sandpipers. Some of the Least Sandpipers had a slightly buff to white line along the scapulars. However, this bird had distinct white lines along the rufous scapulars on both sides, extending the length of the wings toward the rump, which produced a distinct V, originating near the rump and spreading anteriorly. Additionally, there was a second smaller V on the inside of the larger V, which was apparent on the back, from just above the rump to about mid back. None of the Least Sandpipers had a V formed on their back. The white on the scapulars/back of the Least was about the same width from mid-back to the anterior and never narrowed much, nor extended posteriorly to the rump.

Based upon the aforementioned characteristics I determined the bird to be a Little Stint. The following summarizes characteristics compared with adjacent birds during the nearly three hours of observation.

vs. Least Sandpiper

Stint was always larger, had an overall darker back with two white V's, its legs and feet were black. Wing projection extended beyond the tail, bill was thinner and straighter, needle-like, not droopy.

vs. Semipalmated Sandpiper

Stint was always smaller; majority of Semipalmated had gray backs. Some Semipalmated had reddish scapulars, but all lacked white on the back or above the scapulars. Stint bill was thinner and straighter, needle-like, even thinner than presumed male Semipalmated, which had a more tapered bill from base to tip. Legs similar for both species.

vs. White-rumped Sandpiper

White-rumped all much larger, have white rump in flight, larger bills, some with light color at base. Wing projection similar. All White-rumps had lateral streaking not observed on the Little Stint.

vs. Baird's Sandpiper

All Baird's much larger, with more elongated looking body, but wing projection similar. Back color lighter, more tan with scaled appearance than the Little Stint. Chest markings similar, but apparent overall buffy tones on Baird's was not observed on the Little Stint, and all Baird's had markings across the entire breast, whereas the Little Stint only had markings along the side of breast.

DISCUSSION

Iliff and Sullivan (2004) provided a synopsis of 91 Little Stint reports in North America, in which all spring records of known-age individuals (adults) occurred from 25 April – 10 June. Of the seven interior North America records reported, two are spring, 18 May 1991 (Imperial County, California) and 19 May 1997 (Yudas Creek, Yukon, Canada). A search of eBird records provided only one additional spring record from Bitter Lake NWR, Chaves County, New Mexico, observed by Jerry Oldenettel and Gordon Warrick on 31 May 2005, the first New Mexico record (with photo). I observed this Little Stint on 30 April, within the known timeframe for spring vagrants. The remaining records are all in fall, with the nearest locale being Minot, North Dakota, on 4-5 July 2003 (Iliff and Sullivan 2004). Overall, two of the records are from specimens, three are accepted by a Bird Records Committee (BRC) with photographs, and two are from identifiable photographs (Iliff and Sullivan 2004). This record (KBRC# 2017-10), is the first BRC record from the interior accepted based upon written description.

The Little Stint can be difficult to distinguish from other “peep” or stint species that are also rarely encountered within North America. One of these, the Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*) has been confirmed in Kansas with photographs (Land 2013, KBRC# 2012-19, QNWR, 1-2 July 2012, Barry Jones). Below I provide comparisons with other possible species, including the Red-necked Stint, based on field guide and literature reviews.

Other Possible Species

Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*) is an Asian species that is also rare in North America (O'Brien et al. 2006). There is one confirmed record from Kansas (Land 2013). While the Red-necked Stint and Little Stint can be virtually identical in juvenile and winter plumage, this individual was in a transitional plumage moving from juvenile to adult. As such, the clear, forming, double-V on the back; the white throat; very straight, thin, fine-tipped bill; very long wing projections; and cap that

was as dark as the back separates it from the Red-necked Stint (Prater et al. 1977, Hayman et al. 1986). Both Red-necked and Little stints are about the same size, have black legs, can have wing extensions past the tail, and can have dark scapulars fringed with rufous or red.

Long-toed Stint (*Calidris subminuta*) is an Asian species that can be common in spring in the Aleutian Islands, and accidental along the West Coast (O'Brien et al. 2006). To date there are no records for Kansas (Thompson et al. 2011). Long-toed Stint most closely resembles the Least Sandpiper due to its leg color being greenish to yellowish and having a more streaked breast pattern (Prater et al. 1977, Hayman et al. 1986, O'Brien et al. 2006). This eliminated it from consideration since this stint had dark black legs and less patterned breast. Bills can be similar to Little Stint, as can the V on the back.

Temminck's Stint (*Calidris temminckii*) is an Eurasian species that is rare in western Alaska and accidental on the Pacific Coast, with no records for Kansas (O'Brien et al. 2006, Thompson et al. 2011). Temminck's Stint most closely resembles the Long-toed Stint and Least Sandpiper due to its greenish, brownish, to yellowish legs; solid breast markings; more gray on the dorsum; and a relatively distinct eye-ring (Prater et al. 1977, Hayman et al. 1986, O'Brien et al. 2006). These characteristics separated it from the Little Stint. Bills can be similar to those of Little and Red-necked stints.

Broad-billed Sandpiper (*Limicola falcinellus*) is an Eurasian species that is casual fall migrant on Aleutian Islands, accidental in New York, and has not reported in Kansas (O'Brien et al. 2006, Dunn and Alderfer 2011, Thompson et al. 2011). Broad-billed Sandpiper is larger than the stints, and Least and Semipalmated sandpipers, and has a proportionally larger bill, dull olive legs, and distinct white-streaking on head; none of these match characteristics of the Little Stint (Hayman et al. 1986, O'Brien et al. 2006, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Molt

Based on the plumage characteristics, this Little Stint appeared to be in transitional plumage from juvenile to adult. Molt can occur on the winter grounds, and it may be delayed (Prater et al. 1977, Iliff and Sullivan 2004). Molt from juvenile plumage usually occurs between September and April, while adults typically molt from February through May (O'Brien et al. 2006). Based on observations, the mantle and scapulars were most similar to Figures 5 and 6 in O'Brien et al. (2006); breast markings and throat similar to Figures 2-5, however without the buff ground color; white supercilium like Figures 2-3; bill similar to Figures 1 and 7; and lores similar to Figure 3-5.

CONCLUSION

This Little Stint observation is only the fourth inland spring record for North America, and a first record for Kansas. Though Little Stints can be most similar in

appearance to Red-necked Stint, the combination of the following characters: thin, black, straight needle-like bill; two distinct white V's on the back; black legs and feet; black lore, lack of defined ear patch; size between Least and Semipalmated sandpipers; characteristic back, tail, and wing patterns; and long primary projection; distinguish it from the Red-necked Stint, and separate it from the remaining North American "peeps" and possible Eurasian vagrants.

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