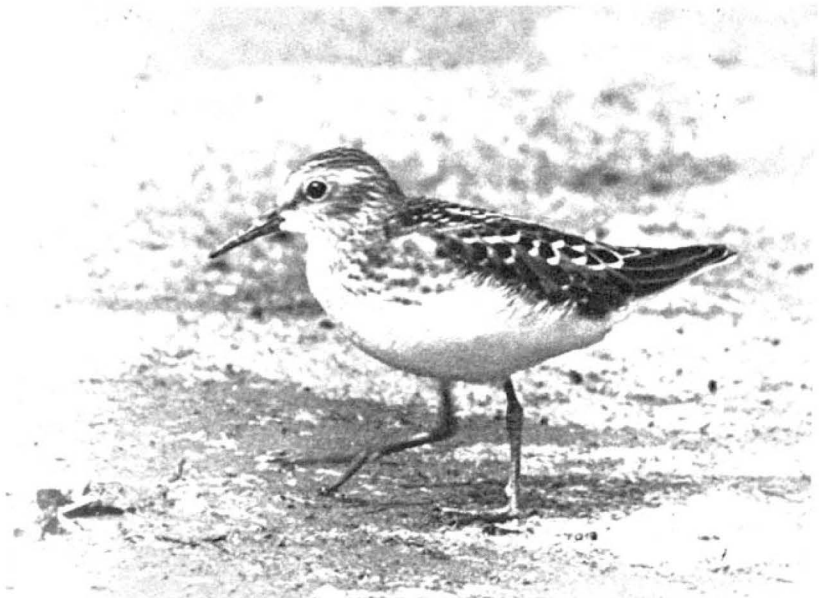


THE WESTERN SANDPIPER IN OKLAHOMA

BY JAMES R. PURDUE

The new world scolopacid known as the Western Sandpiper (*Ereunetes mauri*) breeds "on the coasts of western and northern Alaska" (Gabrielson and Lincoln, 1959, *Birds of Alaska*, p. 398); winters "on both coasts of America from Washington and North Carolina to Peru and Venezuela, including Cuba, Hispaniola, and Trinidad" (Peters, 1934, *Check-list of birds of the world*, 2: 281); and migrates "chiefly along the Pacific coast, rarely in the central interior from North Dakota and southern Ontario southward, more commonly in the southern interior (Texas, Utah), and regularly in small numbers (largely in fall) on the south Atlantic Coast . . ." (1967, *AOU Check-list of North American birds*, p. 203). In Oklahoma the species was considered a "rare transient" forty years ago (Nice, 1931,



WESTERN SANDPIPER

Male in juvenal feather photographed 25 August 1968 at Lake Eufaula, in McIntosh County, Oklahoma, by James R. Purdue.

observers throughout the year. The large numbers reported by Beall for May (see above) I consider exceptional; since such abundance in spring has not been reported from any other part of Oklahoma, I did not include the "8 to 29 May 1960" records in my averaging. The species passes southward through the state from late June (one seen near Moffett, Sequoyah County, by B. W. Beall on 21 June 1960; one seen and shot—female in breeding feather, UOMZ 4993—near Norman by W. M. Davis on 30 June 1961) to mid-October, with a pronounced peak in the last week of August and first week of September. Northward migration takes place from mid-March to the end of May, with a vague peak in the first week of May. During southward migration the average flock numbers 11.6 birds, a larger average than that for spring (6.7 birds).

Holmes (1966, *Condor*, 68: 27) states that in California southward moving adult Western Sandpipers arrive ahead of young birds. This is true in Oklahoma too. Southward moving adults in breeding feather or in postnuptial molt have been taken on the following dates: 30 June 1961 (female, UOMZ 4993); 11 July 1954 (male and female, UOMZ 1260, 1255); 13 July 1951 (female, UOMZ 480); 13 July 1957 (female, UOMZ 3121); 14 July 1954 (female, GMS 12155); 17 July 1963 (female, UOMZ 5252); 18 July 1964 (male and female, UOMZ 5489, 5490); 19 July 1901 (female, UOMZ old no. 3185); 19 July 1960 (two females, UOMZ 4238, 4239); 20 July 1959 (male, UOMZ 3604); and 21 July 1960 (female, UOMZ 4356). The earliest dates for young birds in juvenal feather are: 13 August 1953, male (UOMZ 795, taken at mouth of Big Mineral Creek on south shore of Lake Texoma in Grayson County, Texas); 18 August 1959 (male and female, UOMZ 3626, 3627); and 22 August 1961 (female, UOMZ 5034). Most birds that have thus far been taken in fall are molting into first winter plumage.

A few observers have seen the Western Sandpiper in winter. Along the Arkansas River, in Sequoyah County, B. W. Beall and R. D. Fox saw one bird on 20 December 1959 and two birds two weeks later (3 January 1960). In the vicinity of Oklahoma City, in central Oklahoma, D. Clark *et al.* saw the species (one bird presumably) on 10 January 1953 (1953, *Audubon Field Notes*, 7: 222), and during the last two weeks of December, 1962, J. G. Newell saw one bird repeatedly at Lake Hefner; this individual was seen during the Christmas Count (1963, *Audubon Field Notes*, 17: 236). At the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge in Alfalfa County, north-central Oklahoma, H. F. Miller *et al.* saw two birds on 26 December 1964 (1965, *Audubon Field Notes*, 19: 274). No Oklahoma specimen in the considerable series of Western Sandpipers (38 specimens) at the University of Oklahoma Bird Range is in complete winter feather.

The spatial distribution of *E. mauri* in Oklahoma is dependent largely on that of proper habitat — i.e., mudflats and open shores on which the birds may feed, drink, bathe, and rest. This dependence on habitat has been noted especially at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Comanche County where, according to A. F. Halloran, "shorebirds are scarce . . . except during dry years or when the lakes are drained. Only then do mudflats form and the shorebirds appear" (letter of 3 December 1968). *E. mauri* has been reported from all parts of Oklahoma, but most records are from the vicinity of Oklahoma City where J. G. Newell has been an extremely active observer, and from Cleveland County, where L. W. Oring and W. M. Davis were afield almost daily gathering data for the paper mentioned above. There are valid records for the far western Panhandle (species seen repeatedly, taken once at Boise City by G. M. Sutton);

for north-central Oklahoma (seen at Salt Plains refuge by L. L. Byfield; taken near Cherokee by J. L. Cracraft); for Tulsa (seen by Anne Reynolds *et al.*); for far eastern Oklahoma (seen in Sequoyah County by B. W. Beall); for Lake Eufaula (seen and photographed by J. R. Purdue); for southeastern and south-central Oklahoma (seen and taken in Bryan, Johnston, Murray, and Marshall counties by G. M. Sutton *et al.*); and for southwestern Oklahoma (seen at Wichita Mountains refuge by A. F. Halloran; taken in "Old Greer" County, probably along the Red River in Jackson County or Harmon County, by C. D. Bunker).

E. mauri is common in Oklahoma for about three and a half months in late summer and early fall, yet this fact is not reflected in the reports of most observers. One reason for this is that the Western Sandpiper may easily be confused with the Least and Semipalmated sandpipers (*Erolia minutilla* and *Ereunetes pusillus*); indeed, many Westerns may well be listed and reported as Least or Semipalmated sandpipers (or both) simply because the latter two are so widely believed to be the common small peeps of the Southern Great Plains. The three species often feed together, making direct comparison possible. This being the case, I offer the following suggestions concerning identification.

Legs. If the light is good, Least Sandpipers are distinguishable from the other two species at once by their greenish or yellowish legs. All Western and Semipalmated Sandpipers have dark gray legs, hence no one should expect to tell those two apart on the basis of leg-color.

Bill. Bill size and shape are important. In the Least Sandpiper the bill is thin, rather short, and slightly decurved. In the Western and Semipalmated it is heavier. Generally speaking, it is longer in the Western than in the Semipalmated; in both species it is longer in the female than in the male, so some female Semipalmateds are virtually as long-billed as some male Westerns. In the Semipalmated the bill is decurved very little, if at all; the same is true for the male Western; in most female Westerns, however, the bill is fairly heavy, conspicuously long, and slightly decurved.

Plumage. Peeps seen in late summer before the young birds start to move south, are likely to be in worn breeding feather. The wearing away of pale feather-edgings leaves some Least Sandpipers very dark above and heavily streaked on the chest, but with an overall brownish tone; the Western with some rusty above, especially on the head and shoulders, and with noticeable dark flecking on the foreneck, chest, and sides; and the Semipalmated dark gray above, with some dark streaking on the foreneck and chest. In all three species birds in juvenal feather are richly colored by comparison, but the colors are not very noticeable in the field. The juvenal Least is strongly brown above and buffy on the chest, the juvenal Semipalmated less brown above and only faintly buffy on the chest, the juvenal Western somewhat rusty on the head and scapulars and buffy on the chest. In winter all three species are gray — the Least brownish gray; the Semipalmated ashy gray; the Western ashy gray, often with a hint of rusty on the head and shoulders. The above summarization shows that at some seasons heaviness, length, and curvature of bill are all-important.

Habitat. As stated above, all three species often feed together on mudflats. However, the Western and Semipalmated are likely to be seen along outer shores, sometimes in mixed flocks, while the Least, in separate flocks, feeds quietly at the edges of shallow, grass-lined pools well away from the other two species.

Behavior. Of the three species, the Semipalmated seems to be the most quarrelsome. When feeding close together, Semipalmated Sandpipers often spar — running at one another or even lifting wings and jabbing in threat. The Western also is quarrelsome, though less so than the Semipalmated. The Least is peaceable by comparison (Sutton, personal communication). The Western is said to probe for food in deeper water than its congener, the Semipalmated, sometimes submerging its head (Robbins, Bruun, and Zim, 1966, *Guide to field identification birds of North America*, p. 124). This particular behavior I have not observed myself.

DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, NORMAN, OKLAHOMA 73069, 18 MARCH 1969.

GENERAL NOTES

Winter records for the Sora Rail in Oklahoma.—On 23 January 1969 (air temperature a little above freezing; no ice on ponds), George M. Sutton, Larry A. Pulliam and I observed a Sora Rail (*Porzana carolina*) at the west end of Grassy Lake, 6 mi. directly southeast of the village of Tom in southeastern McCurtain County, Oklahoma. Grassy Lake is one of about two dozen "cutoff" or "oxbow" lakes just north of the Red River in southern McCurtain County. The south shore of the lake is bordered by woodland, while about half of the north shore is without woods but fringed with emergent vegetation. Pulliam and I flushed the Sora from short grass along the water's edge and watched it drop into rank vegetation several yards out from shore but did not get a very good look at it. After considerable effort, the three of us managed to force the bird from its hiding place and to identify it satisfactorily as it swam slowly across a three-foot opening to another mass of rank vegetation. We clearly saw its short yellow bill.

There are, so far as I know, only three other midwinter records for the Sora in Oklahoma. On 28 December 1947, Hugh S. Davis found a freshly killed adult Sora in a steel trap along the shore of Recreation Lake in Mohawk Park, near Tulsa, Tulsa County (1948, *Audubon Field Notes*, 2: 104). On 26 December 1949, Davis saw another Sora in the same area (1950, *Audubon Field Notes*, 5: 151). On 25 December 1967, J. S. Shackford *et al.* flushed one from a dense stand of spikerush (*Eleocharis* sp.) just below the dam of a small impoundment known locally as the airfield pond near Norman, Cleveland County. The only late fall record that I know about is of a specimen shot by R. W. Harris along the Canadian River near Norman on 30 November 1965 (Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 162). Evidently *Porzana carolina* is to be looked for in marshy spots in winter in Oklahoma especially if the weather is mild.

I wish to thank John S. Tomer for details concerning the Tulsa County records.—William A. Carter, *Department of Biology, East Central State College, Ada, Oklahoma 74820, 11 February 1969.*

Late spring record for Ruddy Turnstone in Oklahoma.—At about 1800 in the evening on 6 June 1969, along the west shore of Draper Lake, near Norman, Cleveland County, central Oklahoma, Mary Avolyn Johns, Ruth Scott, and I observed a Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) on a flat spit. It was by itself. While watching it we remained in our car. Its colors, intensified as