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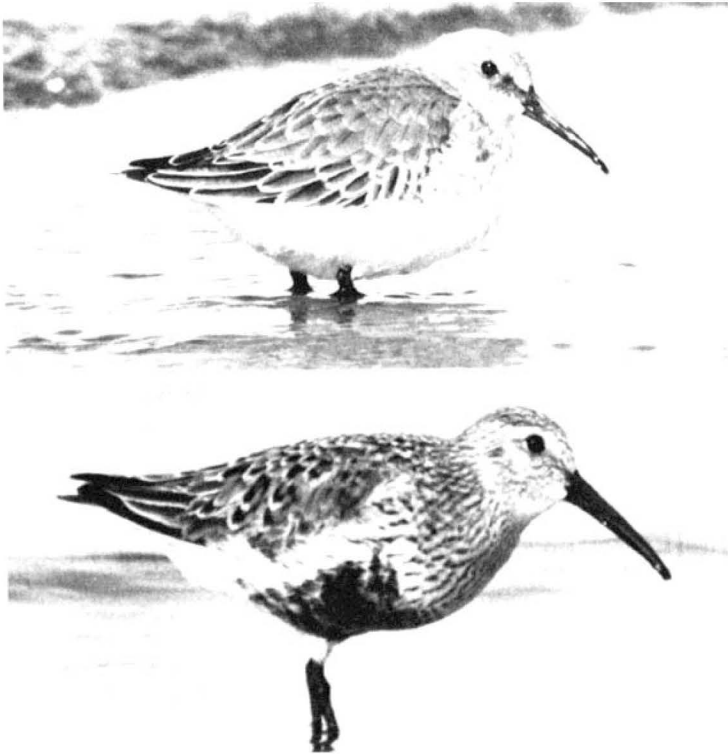
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No. 1

THE DUNLIN IN OKLAHOMA

BY JOHN S. SHACKFORD

In bright breeding plumage the Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) is wholly unlike any other scolopacid known to visit Oklahoma, but in winter plumage it can be puzzling. It is not much smaller than the Pectoral Sandpiper (*C. melanotos*) and



DUNLINS

Photographed by John S. Shackford at Lake Hefner in Oklahoma City, central Oklahoma: lower, in full breeding plumage, on 11 May 1975; upper in winter plumage, between 11 and 16 October 1975.

not much larger than the Baird's Sandpiper (*C. bairdii*) and White-rumped Sandpiper (*C. fuscicollis*). It has about the same body size as the Stilt Sandpiper (*Micropalama himantopus*), but is much shorter-legged. During the period of southward migration, when it is likely to be in winter feather, its long, slender, slightly decurved bill is perhaps its best fieldmark. The species with which it is most likely to be confused at that season is the Western Sandpiper (*C. mauri*), females of which, though actually quite small, sometimes look large on chilly days, and their bills are longish, slender, and slightly decurved toward the tip. The Curlew Sandpiper (*C. ferruginea*), a mainly Old World bird that has been seen on three occasions on the coast of Texas (Oberholser, 1974, *The bird life of Texas*, Univ. Texas Press, Austin, 1: 351), resembles the Dunlin closely in winter. That species has a white rump patch at all seasons, however, and its bill is more strongly decurved throughout its whole length than that of the Dunlin.

The Dunlin was first recorded in Oklahoma on 3 September 1879 in Love County, in the south-central part of the state, by G. H. Ragsdale (Nice, 1931, *Birds of Oklahoma*, p. 94). It was recorded for the second time on 15 May 1924, when L. B. Nice collected one of five birds "in summer plumage" seen near Norman, Cleveland County, central Oklahoma (Nice, *loc. cit.*). This specimen, a male (UOMZ old no. 3180), though somewhat "grease-burnt," is still in fair condition. On 26 and 28 May 1928, George B. Saunders saw Dunlins at Lake Overholser in Oklahoma City — four birds (one collected) on the 26th, two birds on the 28th (Nice, *loc. cit.*). On 16 May 1937, George M. Sutton saw two Dunlins in a mixed flock of shorebirds along the Cimarron River north of Gate, Beaver County, at the eastern end of the Panhandle. So much for early Oklahoma records spanning a 58-year period: the species was not reported between 1937 and 1950.

Since 1950, the Dunlin has been seen almost every year in the main body of the state—i.e., east of the 100th meridian. According to the summary of records on file at the University of Oklahoma Bird Range, northward migration takes place from 27 April to 31 May, whereas southward migration begins 23 July and continues well into fall. Most late summer and fall sightings have been of one, two, or three birds, though on 7 September 1971, Dotty M. Goard saw a flock of about 20 at Young's Lake, near Dewey, Washington County, northeastern Oklahoma; on 21 October 1967, Robert B. Payne, Walter R. Quanstrom, *et al.* saw a flock of about 20, all in gray feather, at Lake Overholser; and on 16 and 17 November 1968, John G. Newell saw a flock of six birds at Lake Overholser. With one exception, records for the period between 24 November and 15 February have been of one bird, the exception being the two birds seen together repeatedly by John G. Newell, J. E. Martin, *et al.* from 15 to 29 December 1962, at Lake Hefner in Oklahoma City; that winter bad weather set in at the end of December and the two birds must have perished or moved on, for no one could find them on 1 January 1963 (1963, *Audubon Field Notes*, 17: 236, 340). The several winter records for the period between 15 December and 15 February indicate that *Calidris alpina* is a hardy bird.

In spring, large aggregations have been seen in the vicinity of Oklahoma City, notably the 39 birds counted by John G. Newell and Tom Shires on 25 May 1968 in a flooded field in Canadian County just west of Lake Overholser, and the 43 birds counted by Newell in the same area the following day (26 May).

Most Dunlin sightings in Oklahoma have been in Oklahoma, Canadian, and Tulsa counties, but there are records also for Sequoyah, Rogers, Washington, Osage, Bryan, Marshall, Love, Murray, Cleveland, Payne, Alfalfa, and Beaver counties. The fact that no sightings have been reported from southwestern Oklahoma and from the western nine-tenths of the Panhandle may be indicative of absence of observers rather than of Dunlins.

Like all "peeps," the Dunlin is gregarious while migrating. Shorebirds with which it has been observed to associate in Oklahoma include most of the species mentioned above, the Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*), and the American Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*). No one has reported seeing any sort of courtship behavior among Dunlins in Oklahoma, nor has anyone observed a Dunlin in juvenal plumage, a plumage to be looked for in the early part of the southward migration, and one characterized by small dark spotting throughout the breast and belly. A bird observed by O. W. Letson and his wife Ethel at Recreation Lake in Mohawk Park, Tulsa, on 5 and 6 September 1954 (1955, Proc. Oklahoma Acad. Sci., 36: 83-84; 1955, Audubon Field Notes, 9: 37), was gray above but black on the belly—an example, it would seem, of abnormally delayed postnuptial molt.

10731 N. WESTERN, OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA 73114, 15 MAY 1975.

FOOD HABITS OF THE COMMON MERGANSER IN WINTER

BY BERTIN W. ANDERSON AND MICHAEL G. REEDER

The Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*), a large duck especially adapted for catching fish, is abundant in late fall and winter on many Oklahoma reservoirs. At the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge in Alfalfa County, north-central Oklahoma, where we studied the species' winter food habits between November 1969 and March 1972, it was among the commonest of waterfowl. During the three winters we saw it chiefly on the main reservoir in the refuge and on a mile-long stretch of the Salt Fork of the Arkansas River below the reservoir dam (Anderson and Timken, 1972, J. Wildl. Mgmt., 36: 1127-33). We observed feeding behavior on 83 occasions ranging from one to eight hours in duration and collected 142 specimens. All food from the stomachs and esophagi of these we removed, weighed, and identified.

The gizzard shad (*Dorosoma cepedianum*) was by far the commonest food item, though some sunfish (*Lepomis* sp.) were caught (Table I). Common Mergansers are opportunistic feeders, hence they prey on whatever is most readily