

A NEW BIRD FOR OKLAHOMA: WILSON'S PLOVER

BY JERI McMAHON

On 15 August 1982 (weather warm, but not excessively so; sky clear; little wind), while participating in a Tulsa Audubon Society field trip to a cluster of four sewage ponds in the eastern part of Tulsa County, northeastern Oklahoma, Elwyn Aud (of Tulsa), Inez Strohink (of Muskogee) and I happened upon a shorebird that puzzled me greatly. It was smaller than the several Killdeers (*Charadrius vociferus*) that were feeding about the ponds, was pale tan or buff on its upperparts, had a noticeable white stripe above the eye, and was white below save for the tan, rather wide, single neck-band. A noticeable feature was its big, all-black bill, which was almost as long as its head. I came to the conclusion that the bird could be nothing but an adult female or immature Wilson's Plover (*C. wilsonia*), but was hesitant to say so since I had never before seen the species anywhere. I recorded it in my notes that evening as a



WILSON'S PLOVER

A somewhat faded adult female, or possibly an immature bird, that frequented sewage ponds in Tulsa County for several weeks in the late summer and early fall of 1982. Photographed by John S. Shackford on 25 August 1982.

Wilson's Plover. It was obviously too small and too long-billed for a Semipalmated Plover (*C. semipalmatus*).

Within the ponds were extensive mudflats on which many shorebirds were feeding. We identified Pectoral, Least, and Western sandpipers (*Calidris melanotos*, *C. minutilla*, and *C. mauri*, respectively), Solitary Sandpipers (*Tringa solitaria*), Lesser Yellowlegs (*T. flavipes*), and Spotted Sandpipers (*Actitis macularia*), in addition to the above-mentioned Killdeers. When we first saw the Wilson's Plover it was close to a Killdeer, so direct comparison was possible, but most of the time it kept apart from the other birds. We watched it through our spotting scopes for about five minutes. During most of that period it simply stood there; but presently it walked a short way, "sat down" for a while as if for a rest, and flew off. Had it been "sitting down" when we first went past the spot at which it was feeding we might never have seen it, for its coloration was very protective.

When I returned to my home in Fort Gibson that evening I telephoned James L. Norman of Muskogee, telling him of my belief that the puzzling bird I had seen was a Wilson's Plover. He agreed that my description fitted that species well and he expressed a hope that the bird would linger long enough at the ponds for everyone to have a further look.

Several of the persons who were on the 15 August field trip saw the moot plover, but not all of them did. Six days later (21 August), James W. Arterburn of Tulsa, quite without having been told to be on the lookout for something unusual, came upon the bird at the ponds. He was so puzzled by it that he called James C. Hoffman and Elizabeth Hayes, suggesting that they all make a point of seeing the bird again if possible. As a result of his calls, the following Tulsans went to the ponds early the following morning (22 August): Arterburn, Hoffman, Elizabeth Hayes, K. Hayes, R. G. Jennings, and J. S. Tomer. Hoffman, who had become familiar with *Charadrius wilsonia* on the Atlantic coast, immediately confirmed my tentative identification: the big-billed plover was indeed a Wilson's. And Tomer photographed it.

Word spread fast that the sewage ponds had a bird everyone would want to see. On 23 August the following were there to see it: J. L. Norman and Marion Norman of Muskogee, J. S. Tomer and his wife Patricia, Arterburn, and Hoffman. Tomer and Arterburn took photos on that date.

On 24 August the following Tulsans saw the plover: Terri Bruner, Eileen Docekal, Elizabeth Hayes, Deloris Isted, Alice Hensey, Anne Long, Aline Romero, Roberta Whaling, Rosemary Locke, Louise Rogers, Juanita Martin, Jennie Siebert, G. Riggs, and J. S. Tomer. Tomer took more photos.

On 25 August John S. Shackford of Oklahoma City, Dotty M. Goard of Bartlesville, and Ella Delap of Dewey drove to Tulsa to see the bird and Shackford took several photos, one of which is reproduced here as a halftone. Another shows how protective a bird's coloration can be. In this shot the bird figure is not out of focus, but so similar are the tones of its upperparts to those

of the habitat that the upper edge of its body melts into the background. There stands the bird, its head and underparts clear enough, but so like the habitat is the back that there is no contour line.

Nearly every birder of the Tulsa area had a look at the rare visitor during its stay. On 26 August Wesley Isaacs and his son Kevin drove from Oklahoma City to see it; R. J. Farris of Tulsa photographed it; and J. S. Tomer took more photos.

On 28 August the following Tulsans saw it: Tomer, J. Sisler, R. G. Jennings, Terri Bruner, Elwyn Aud, Louise Rogers, Dorothy Norris, K. Ashley, Juanita Martin, M. Overby, Joan Sullens, J. Dickerson, J. Tindle, Aline Romero, W. F. Whaling, and Roberta Whaling. Whaling took photographs. H. W. Goard and Dotty M. Goard of Bartlesville drove over to see it.

From 28 August on, the plover was observed repeatedly: on 29 August by K. Hayes, Elizabeth Hayes, R. J. Sherry, W. F. Whaling, and Roberta Whaling; on 31 August by Dotty M. Goard, Ella Delap, Phyllis Chapman, R. Hunter, Marjorie Dearmont, Alice Hensey, N. J. Thayer, Margaret Thayer, and J. Sisler; on 3 September by Eleanor Sieg and Elizabeth Hayes; on 4 September by R. G. Jennings and Terri Bruner; on 12 September by Lois Rodgers and Ruth Kern; on 29 September by J. C. Hoffman; on 31 August by Dotty M. Goard and Ella Delap. I am not sure of the last date on which it was seen, but J. S. Tomer photographed it on 4 October and J. C. Hoffman saw it on 9 October.

Charadrius wilsonia is a New World species that lives along ocean coasts. On the Atlantic side it breeds from New Jersey southward through the West Indies to northern South America and on the Pacific side from central Baja California to Colombia and Peru; it winters from South Carolina, Louisiana, southeastern Texas, central Baja California and central Sonora southward to central eastern Brazil and Peru (AOU Check-list, 1957, p. 169). According to the AOU Check-list (1957, p. 170) the species is "accidental in Ohio (Lucas County)."

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SMITH'S LONGSPUR IN BREEDING PLUMAGE IN OKLAHOMA IN DECEMBER

BY JOHN S. TOMER

While participating in the Tulsa Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count on 20 December 1981 (weather bright and mild), Jerry Sisler and I found a flock of eight Smith's Longspurs (*Calcarius pictus*) in northern Tulsa County, northeastern Oklahoma. We had made a point of visiting the open prairie of that part of the county, knowing that longspurs were likely to be there. As we were driving alongside a big pasture 5 miles east of Sperry, Sisler noticed the little flock as it flew, longspur fashion, not far above the ground and alighted in the grass. They were a long way from the road. Stopping the car, we got out and started walking toward the place at which they had landed.

As we approached them, the longspurs flew up and toward us, landing