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First Record of the Ruff for Oklahoma

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On the morning of 8 May 1999 while looking through a large flock of shorebirds in a flooded wheat field along state highway 132 in northwest Kingfisher County, Oklahoma, I came upon a Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) (Fig. 1). Although I had never seen a Ruff before, I immediately recognized this bird as a Ruff due to its overall appearance (e.g., medium sized shorebird, with a small head and a medium sized, slightly decurved bill), an appreciation gained from studying various published photographs.

Most other shorebirds in the flock were Long-billed Dowitchers (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*), Wilson's Phalaropes (*Phalaropus tricolor*), and Stilt Sandpipers (*Calidris himantopus*). The Ruff was approximately the size of the dowitchers with which it associated. It appeared hunch-backed and pot-bellied. The hunch-backed appearance was enhanced when



Fig. 1. Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) in Kingfisher County, Oklahoma, 8 May 1999. This bird represented the first record for Oklahoma. Photograph by James W. Arterburn.

the long, loose scapulars were raised from time to time by the wind. The bill was black with some slight paleness at the base. The eye was dark, and the legs were a bright orange. The top of the head, nape, and the sides of the neck were spotted brown while the chin, sides of the face, and the forehead at the base of the bill were buffy. The throat and breast were brownish with heavier blackish blotching, while the flanks had large brownish-black spots. The belly, vent, and undertail coverts were white. The coverts and scapulars were brownish with black centers and buffy edges. The tertials were blackish with rufous barring.

In flight the Ruff showed a thin white wing stripe. The tail had black and rufous barring and the uppertail coverts had a brown center stripe with white outer feathers that produced bold white ovals, one on each side of the uppertail coverts. Based upon the bird's size and description, the bird was an adult female Ruff or Reeve, as a female is sometimes called, molting into breeding plumage.

I viewed the Ruff for over an hour and during this period it spent most of its time in belly deep water. It fed by submerging its head and probing for food. The Ruff tended to run from place to place even though it was up to its belly in water. The bird was also very aggressive with the dowitchers and phalaropes and would chase them away if they got close to it. This sighting and my photographs of the Ruff were accepted by the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee on 2 October 1999 as the first record for Oklahoma.

After I reported this sighting via telephone, Jim Thayer arrived at the site around 15:00 CDT but did not relocate the bird. At around 17:00 Jo Loyd, Pat Seibert, and George and Marty Kamp arrived and joined Thayer in looking for the bird. They searched until around 20:00 but were never able to find the bird.

On 2 August 1999 Jo Loyd and I found an immature Ruff in a flock of about 90 Buff-breasted Sandpipers (*Tryngites subruficollis*), not far from Dover Marsh in Kingfisher County. The bird was seen briefly on the ground and for several minutes in flight. It was half again as large as a Buff-breasted Sandpiper and had greenish-yellow legs, a buffy breast, and a darker upper surface than a Buff-breasted Sandpiper. In flight the bird was noticeably larger than the Buff-breasted Sandpipers in the flock and showed a thin wing stripe and a white oval patch on each side of the upper surface of the tail. This sighting was accepted by the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee on 5 August 2000 as the second record for Oklahoma.

The Ruff is an Old World species, breeding from northern Europe to Siberia in arctic and subarctic tundra and meadows. It winters primarily in southern Europe and Africa, with Africa having most of the Ruff population. Smaller numbers are spread through southern Asia to Australia (Hayman et al. 1986). The Ruff is a rare but regular migrant to Alaska (where it nested in 1976), Canada, both U.S. coasts, and the Great Lakes region, and is a casual migrant elsewhere in North America (Hayman et al. 1986; Paulson 1993).

Among neighboring states, Texas had 22 accepted records through 1999 (G. Lasley, pers. comm.). The first record was of a bird on South Padre Island in Cameron County on 10 December 1902, with the second record not coming until 1968. The most recent records for Texas were in the spring of 1998, with one bird seen in Calhoun County on 30 April and another in Tarrant County from 29 August through 4 September (Texas Bird Records Committee 2000). Kansas had five accepted records through 1999, with the last record being 5 May 1991 at Quiveria National Wildlife Refuge in Stafford County (Kansas Bird Records Committee 1992). The other records for Kansas include observations in Pottawatomie County on 23 May 1964 and three records from the 1980's (Thompson and Ely 1989). Arkansas has seven accepted records. The first was from Lonoke County in 1974 (James and Neal 1986) and the last two of single birds seen on 27 March and 21 April 1999 in Prairie County (K. Nichols and M. Parker, pers. comm.). Through 1999 Missouri had 10 accepted records with the first being of two birds at the Busch Wildlife Area, St. Charles County, on 7–10 October 1962. Their most recent record was of one bird seen on 13 May 1990 at the Schell–Osage Wildlife Area in Vernon County (Robbins and Easterla 1992).

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