

**SECOND RECORD OF PURPLE SANDPIPER  
(*Calidris maritima*) FOR OKLAHOMA**

JOHN POLO AND BRANDY POLO

611 W 7th Ave, Stillwater, 74074. E-mail: [jpolo@mail.usf.edu](mailto:jpolo@mail.usf.edu)

*Abstract*--We document the second record of the Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*) for Oklahoma from Lake Carl Blackwell, Payne County.

**INTRODUCTION**

On 6 January 2013, at 1430 h, we located a Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*; PUSA) at Lake Carl Blackwell, Payne County, Oklahoma. This represents the first record of a PUSA for Payne County and only the second record for Oklahoma. The PUSA was observed on the south shore of the lake along the new shoreline, which was present due to the lake being more than five feet below normal levels as a result of the extended drought in the region. We were looking over the water for waterfowl when J. Polo noticed a chunky shorebird in the water, between the shore and a pile of mud a few feet from the shore. Being the only shorebird in sight, we quickly focused on the bird after noting few waterfowl present. First impressions were of a dark bird, larger than the *Calidris* sandpipers sometimes referred to as "peeps." We moved closer to the bird to observe more details as it foraged in the water up to its breast feathers.

**OBSERVATIONS**

The plumage of the bird's head and neck was dark grey, while the back and wings were mottled grey with some lighter highlighting on the edges. There were no distinct marks or patterns to the head or face. The underside was white with some streaks on the flanks. We noted a distinctive orange base to the longish bill. We watched the bird for several minutes, hoping that it would move out of the water, for a better view of the legs. Having only been

birders a few years, most of that experience in Oklahoma, this was a species with which we were not familiar, and we attempted to note every characteristic. When the bird finally climbed up on the mud pile we were able to fit in our last piece of the puzzle; short, orange legs (Figures 1 and 2). The bird did not make any kind of vocalization during the time we observed it.



**Figure 1.** Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*) observed on 6 January 2013 at Lake Carl Blackwell, Payne County, Oklahoma. Note the orange legs, orange at base of bill, gray scapulars and white-fringed coverts and tertials. Photographed by John Polo.

Upon observing all characteristics of the bird, and obtaining photographs (Figure 1 and 2), we turned to the guide we had with us and quickly made a tentative decision on PUSA. The range map for the bird indicated that we were looking at a significant vagrant, but wanted to consult more sources to better ascertain the distribution of the PUSA. We spent close to 20 minutes observing the bird as it methodically probed the substrate under the water. We were able to approach relatively close with the PUSA barely taking notice. However, thinking this might be a rare



**Figure 2. Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*) observed on 6 January 2013 at Lake Carl Blackwell, Payne County, Oklahoma. Note orange at base of bill and on legs, overall smooth gray head, and streaking along breast and flanks. Photographed by John Polo.**

find that other birders would want to see, we were cautious so as not to flush the bird. That evening we reported it to the Okbirds listserv.

After consulting additional resources, (Sibley 2009, Floyd 2008, O'Brien *et al.* 2006) we noted that the Rock Sandpiper (*C. ptilocnemis*), a similar species found on the West Coast, could be eliminated, partly because of their yellow or olive legs and yellow base of the bill. Subsequently, digital photographs by Jim Arterburn also showed the strong areas of orange at the base of the bill (Figures 3). Additionally, the Rock Sandpiper is endemic to the

region surrounding the Bering Sea, with a comparatively small wintering range (Pruett and Winker 2005). The distribution maps for Rock Sandpiper contained in Sibley (2009) and Floyd (2008) show a limited North American distribution for Rock Sandpiper, ending in northern California, and O'Brien (2006) notes "... fairly common, but highly localized along seacoast; less common in southern part of winter range..."

By mid-morning of 7 January 2013, the bird was relocated where it was originally found and observed by a small group of birders including

**Figure 3. Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*) observed on 7 January 2013 at Lake Carl Blackwell, Payne County, Oklahoma. Note orange base to bill and solid gray head and upper breast. Photographed by Jim Arterburn.**



Patricia Seibert, Jo Loyd, Jim Arterburn, Joe Grzybowski, John Sterling and Ken Williams. They noted the bird at first alone, quiet and somewhat subdued, but joining two Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) that flew past the point to land further down shore. However, it later returned to the point where it was originally found. For the rest of that day, many other birders observed the bird. It was present until late the following morning (8 January), when Melinda Droege and Steve Metz were the last to see it, noting it fly off and raise in altitude.

## DISCUSSION

Documentation and photographs were made available to the Oklahoma Bird Records Committee, who accepted this record (OBRC 2013-1). This observation is the second state record for the species in Oklahoma. The first documented observation was by John Shackford at Lake Overholser, Oklahoma County, over 36 years ago, 9 December 1977 (Shackford 1978). When Shackford found the bird, it was feeding in the presence of Killdeer and Least Sandpipers (*Calidris minutilla*), while the bird we saw was the lone shorebird. As noted above, a few observers noted it briefly joined two Killdeer the next day.

The characteristics of the bird were quite distinct and the physical identification was not too difficult, but the variance from the normal range gave us pause in making a definitive identification. In summer, PUSA inhabits the Arctic region, its North American range in winter is from northern Florida to Newfoundland (O'Brien *et al.* 2006). Inland observations of the bird away from the eastern Great Lakes are few. In states adjacent to Oklahoma, there are no documented appearances for Kansas (Thompson *et al.* 2011, E. Young pers. comm.), Missouri (Missouri Bird Records Committee 2012), or New Mexico (Williams 2012). There are two documented inland records of the PUSA of which the authors are aware: Arkansas in 1976 (James and Neal 1986) and Utah in 2010 (Utah Bird Records Committee 2011). Texas, with its long coastal zone, has 24 recorded sightings of PUSA (Texas Bird Records Committee 2012).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Eugene A. Young, *Agriculture and Life Sciences, Northern Oklahoma College, 1220 E. Grand, P.O. Box 310, Tonkawa, OK 74653-0310. E-mail: eugene.young@noc.edu*

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