

AN ACCOUNT OF NEW YORK STATE'S FIRST RUFIOUS-NECKED STINT

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On the afternoon of 27 July 1985 I was birding the "Raunt" (the pilings near the south end) at the East Pond, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens, N.Y. with Paul A. Buckley. I noticed three birders slogging through the mud on the western shore. When they reached the East Garden one of the birders, Georges Dremeaux, shouted to us through the breeze, "STINT at the NORTH END!" We quickly made our way to the parking lot. There Georges, his wife Myra and Rick Cech gave us a somewhat confusing description of a bird which they thought was either a Rufous-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficolis*) or a Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*). Paul and I drove to the north end. As we walked toward the island about 1,500 peep were flushed by a jet and we watched in dismay as some four or five hundred birds departed the East Pond. An hour's careful search of the remaining shorebirds left us disappointed.

The next morning I arrived at the pond at 5:45 A.M. I started at the south end and quickly checked the handful of birds at the Raunt. I rapidly worked my way up the eastern shore. Just west of the aforementioned island at the north end of the pond several hundred Semipalmated Sandpipers were roosting on a large floating mat of algae. Among them was a peep with the lower half of its face a rufous/reddish pink, and the dark-brown centered feathers of the upperparts and scapulars having chestnut/rufous edgings.

I began to wade into the pond for a closer view, testing the soft mucky bottom with my tripod. While standing in thigh-deep water I was treated to excellent views of the bird from within sixty yards at 60 power. Viewing conditions were perfect with no heat distortion in the cool of the early morning and a bright morning sun at my back. I was able to note the following features which left no doubt as to the bird's identity – New York State's first Rufous-necked Stint!

A peep about the same size as, but standing slightly shorter (due to its shorter legs) than the surrounding Semipalmated Sandpipers. Lower half of the face, neck, throat and upper breast rufous/reddish pink. **The color about the face, neck, throat and upper breast was clear and unstreaked.** Lower breast with grayish/brown streaks, spots and smudges. Upperparts and scapulars dark-brown centered feathers with bright chestnut/rufous edgings. **These feathers contrasted markedly with the coverts and tertials which were gray with**

faint whitish edgings. Crown brown with tiny streaks of white, dark brown and black. Supercillium whitish. Bill very short and heavy, similar to an extremely short-billed male Semipalmated Sandpiper. Legs black. A squat bird with hunched posture.

The *American Birds'* article "Field identification of smaller sandpipers within the genus *Calidris*" made identification of the bird as a bright but fading adult Rufous-necked Stint a straightforward matter. I had studied this article so often than my copy is now tattered and worn.

Little Stint was ruled out for the following reasons: Little Stint is more delicately built than Semipalmated Sandpiper and exhibits a more erect posture; this bird was squat and stockily built. Little Stint has a slender finely pointed bill; this bird had a short blunt bill with a deep base. Little Stint has longer tarsi than Rufous-necked Stint; in direct comparison with Semipalmated Sandpiper this bird stood well shorter. The rufescent tones of Little Stint have an orangish cast; the rufescent tones of this bird were reddish on the upperparts and salmon about the face, neck, throat and upper breast. Little Stint has the crown and auriculars cinnamon/rufous; this bird had a brown crown and showed color only on the lower half of the face, not on the auriculars. Little Stint has a white throat; this bird had a rufous/reddish pink throat. In Little Stint the rufous about the face and neck is always spotted or streaked with dusky brown; on this bird the color about the face, neck, throat and upper breast was clear and unstreaked. Little Stint has dusky brown inner coverts and dusky brown tertials both broadly edged with rufous and sometimes with buff; on the bird in question these feathers were gray with faint white edgings. In breeding plumage Little Stint always shows a double row of white "vees" on the mantle; this bird had no white vees.

The bill shape of this bird ruled out Spoonbill Sandpiper (*Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*).

I returned to refuge headquarters and entered a detailed description of the bird in the log. I drove home and attempted to contact other birders, but most phones were unanswered on this beautiful summer Sunday.

I returned to the pond at about three P.M. and found the bird at the north end asleep in typical shorebird fashion with its bill tucked among the feathers of its upperparts. This would prove to be its favorite activity as it spent most of its time sleeping. I was soon joined by about thirty birders. Two observers familiar with the species, Paul Buckley and Paul Lehman, concurred with my identification. Through Buckley's Questar at 120 power two additional field marks diagnostic of Rufous-necked

Stint were also noted; a dark loreal line and a fuzzy white ring around the base of the bill.

Five days later the Stint was still in its now familiar haunts at the north end of the pond. It was not as bright as it had appeared a week earlier, but still had "good color." I saw the bird several more times, the last on 11 August. By this time feather wear and the bleaching effect of the sun left the bird but a pale reminder of its former self. There was no color on the face and just a blush of orange on the sides of the upper breast. The brilliant feather edgings had faded to a chestnut/beige. My final view of the bird was from less than forty feet and is one I shall long remember. I believe that the bird departed the pond for good on either 12 or 13 August, as a north wind blew on both these nights and Semipalmated Sandpiper numbers dropped by more than 1,500 between 11 and 13 August.

Hundreds of birders from many states flocked to the pond during the Stint's astoundingly lengthy stay of 17+ days. None, however, traveled as far as the Stint. Rufous-necked Stint breeds along the northern coast of Siberia and winters mainly in southeast Asia. Vagrants have been seen in North and South America, in western Europe and in South Africa (Veit and Jonsson, 1984). This species has previously occurred in Maine, Ohio, Massachusetts (at least two records) and Bermuda (Tom Davis – pers comm). In 1981 five top New York State birders were asked to predict the next ten additions to the New York State List (Able, 1981). Rufous-necked Stint was the only bird to appear on all five lists!

LITERATURE CITED:

Able, Kenneth P. 1981 Trends in the state list of New York birds: *Kingbird* 33: 6-11.

Jonsson, Lars and Veit, Richard R. 1984 Field identification of smaller sandpipers within the genus *Calidris*. *American Birds* 38: 853-876.

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