



Wood Sandpiper, Marshlands Conservancy, Rye, New York, 31 Oct-5 Nov 1990.
Photograph by Andrew Farnsworth.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF NEW YORK STATE RARITIES 52: WOOD SANDPIPER AT MARSHLANDS CONSERVANCY

THOMAS W. BURKE

"Rather puzzling" were my thoughts regarding a shorebird that I'd seen briefly at the Marshlands Conservancy in Rye, New York, before the bird disappeared into the marsh grasses during my last hurried stop on the morning of Wednesday, 31 Oct 1990. The bird was reminiscent of, but did not conform to, a strongly patterned Solitary Sandpiper. But, it was Halloween, so perhaps a Solitary in disguise was to be expected. Upon returning to the marsh early Thursday morning, 1 Nov, I met Lysle Brinker, down from Maine for the week, who was just on his way out. After exchanging greetings, I inquired if he'd seen an odd Solitary Sandpiper, and he mentioned that when all the shorebirds were flushed by a Northern Harrier, such a shorebird flew by him, giving a very un-Solitary-like call. With suspicions mounting, it didn't take much to get Lysle to return with me to the marsh, where we searched patiently for the better part of an hour without success. We had actually picked up our telescopes and were leaving when, with excellent timing, the bird flew in, announcing its arrival with a trebled call I did not recognize. It took only as much time as needed to raise our binoculars for us to realize we were looking at something very unusual for Marshlands Conservancy.

Several features at once distinguished this bird from our regular shorebirds. A quick but difficult (for fear it might fly away) decision to flush the bird before it moved too far provided us with sufficient additional field marks to determine that we had discovered a Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), a species that breeds across northern Europe and Russia and winters from southern Africa through southern Asia to Australia. Consultation with field guides in Lysle's car quickly confirmed this identification.

At this point I raced to a telephone to contact other observers, while Lysle returned to the marsh to photograph the sandpiper and tape record its call. The latter was accomplished nicely with the additional authenticity of hearing Lysle's footsteps as he sloshed through the water around the mud flat. Needless to say, both Lysle and I were rather late to work that day. By Thursday afternoon many local birders had arrived at Marshlands to see the sandpiper. For most, the brownish bird, with its

broad white superciliary, heavily spotted upper parts, white rump, barred tail and long greenish legs, was a life bird. Good photographs were taken by Andrew Farnsworth and Frank Mantlik (and later by others). Some of these, along with the recording, will accompany the written reports being submitted to the New York State Avian Records Committee as part of the permanent documentation of this occurrence.

With many more people from throughout the Northeast, and a few from even more distant parts, pouring into Marshlands on Friday, it became apparent that additional preparations for the weekend would be needed. Alison Beall from Marshlands and Ken Soltesz from the Read Sanctuary at Playland constructed signs and prepared and marked the trail down to the marsh. The adjacent Rye Golf Club, through superintendent Harry Dunning, very generously allowed birders to park at the club, use a service road down to the marsh, and use the spit known as "poison ivy point" for the best views of the marsh mud flat. It was from there that close to a thousand birders got to enjoy wonderful views of the Wood Sandpiper, which stayed through Monday, 5 Nov. It left with the passage of a cold front that day. Its notoriety was spread by national newspaper coverage and a Monday segment on ABC's Eyewitness News.

Ironically, despite the extremely few records in North America outside of Alaska (where the species sometimes nests in the Aleutian Islands), this is not a first New York record. A shorebird collected in Orleans County, New York, in Oct 1907, and labeled as a Solitary Sandpiper, was reidentified as a Wood Sandpiper after it had been donated to the University of California in 1979 (Dziadosz, *Am. Birds* 34(3):231; 1980). Apparently excepting one at Tokeland, Washington, in October, 1988, all other reports outside of Alaska have been rejected by their respective state bird records committees.

235 Highland Road, Rye, New York 10580