

THE OLDEST SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER ON RECORD

John Thaxton and Patricia Thaxton

212 East 18th Street, New York NY 10003

ABSTRACT -- A banded Semipalmated Sandpiper sighted at Jamaica Bay National Wildlife Refuge was determined to be the oldest Semipalmated Sandpiper on record: 13 years old.

On 25 Jul 1996, while observing shorebirds on the south shore of East Pond at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens County, we noticed a banded Semipalmated Sandpiper preening and scratching on the mud flat. We observed the bird for ten minutes through a 20x Nikon ED spotting scope from a distance of approximately 15 yards. It was 2:00 p.m. on a calm, sunny day. The bird was in a tight group of six Semipalmated Sandpipers that was among approximately two hundred peeps, including some Least and Western, and roughly two hundred dowitchers, mostly Short-billed. The bird displayed four leg bands configured as follows:

Right leg below joint--aqua above, white below;

Left leg above joint--silver above, ochre below.

We reported the sighting to Dr. Cheri L. Gratto-Trevor, Research Scientist, Canadian Wildlife Service, because, as a representative of the Pan American Shorebird Program, she had responded to a previous shorebird sighting of ours. Dr. Gratto-Trevor, author of the Semipalmated Sandpiper chapter of *The Birds of North America*, studied the breeding biology of Semipalmated Sandpipers for eight years at La Perouse Bay, Manitoba (approximately 40 kilometers east of Churchill). She responded with enthusiasm to our report, saying that she had used such a color pattern on birds she banded at La Perouse Bay in 1984. To clarify what we meant by "ochre" and "aqua," she enclosed with her letter samples of the bands she used at La Perouse Bay.

Based on our interpretation of the colors of her bands, Dr. Gratto-Trevor concluded that the bird was most likely a female banded in late spring 1984 as a yearling, making the bird greater than thirteen years of age at the time of our sighting. The previous record for Semipalmated Sandpiper longevity was twelve years (Holroyd and Brown 1970). Dr. Gratto-Trevor allowed that, even if the band colors had faded and what we called "ochre" had been orange rather

than yellow, the individual we sighted would still have been one of two other birds, both of which were also banded as breeding adults in 1984.

Dr. Gratto-Trevor included in her communication with us individual histories of all three of these birds. We submitted copies to Dave Taft, Refuge Manager, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge.

LITERATURE CITED

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