

A COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*) ON LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK, 5-6 MAY 2019

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Abstract—A Common Greenshank at Timber Point Golf Course in Great River, Suffolk County, New York, established the first definitive record for New York State, the third for the eastern United States, and the eleventh for the western North Atlantic.

The Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) is a widespread Palearctic species, breeding mainly below the Arctic Circle, from northern Scotland east across northern Europe and Asia, to the Kamchatka Peninsula. It winters widely in southern Africa, southern Asia (including the Philippines), and Australia, with a few remaining in Europe as far north as the British Isles. It is regular in spring in the Bering Sea region but is an extremely rare vagrant elsewhere in North America.

Mlodinow (1999) reviewed the species' known occurrence in the New World, listing 54 records. The great bulk of these, 47 records involving 93 individuals, came from the Bering Sea region (western Aleutian Islands, Pribilof Islands, and St. Lawrence Island), from 1962 to 1997, mostly during spring. It should be noted that many of these line item records represent spring season totals or maxima for favorable sites (e.g., 15 at Shemya 16-31 May 1976 and a seasonal max of 6 at Attu 22-31 May 1981).

Away from this region, he noted just seven records: four from Barbados (12 Mar 1980, 3 Oct 1980, 9 Oct 1990, and 18-19 Nov 1996) and three from eastern Canada (Riverhead, NL, many dates 3 Dec 1983 through 2 Feb 1985; Cherry Hill, NS, 24 Sep through 1 Oct 1988; and St. Gedeon, QC, 1-3 May 1983). Not covered by Mlodinow but relevant to the present record are historical records from Bermuda (18 Oct to 21 Dec 1965, A. Dobson, pers. comm.); Puerto Rico (near Guanica 22 Jul 1993: *Field Notes* 49: 204); and sight records from Tobago (Buccoo Jul 1977) and Trinidad ("early 1987"), "in each case beside a pool on a flooded savannah" (ffrench 2012).

More recent records include two new records from Alaska away from the Bering Sea islands (Kodiak Island, 13-19 Jun 2008: NAB 62: 602; and Nome, 30 May 2016: Hajdukovitch 2016) and also California's first state record, a juvenile,

at Mad River Estuary, Humboldt County, 27 Aug through 15 Sep 2001 (NAB 56: 101-102). This was followed by an adult the next year (18-25 Oct 2002), believed to represent the same returning individual (Cole and McCaskie 2004). In eastern North America/northwestern Atlantic, there have been additional records from Newfoundland (27-29 May 2001, from the same site as the first!), Bermuda (23-31 May 2009: NAB 63:518-521), and three more from Barbados: 1 Nov 2003, 11 Feb-9 Apr 2007 (both Buckley et al. 2009), and 4 Apr 2013 (Julian Moore, fide P. A. Buckley).

And, at long last, the eastern USA has finally produced confirmed records in the last decade. The first involved a photo of a shorebird initially identified as a Greater Yellowlegs. This was fortuitously reevaluated and identified as a hatching-year Common Greenshank, and the date (8 Dec 2014) and location (Gloucester, Essex County, MA) were confirmed by the photographer, finally establishing a record for the Atlantic coast of the United States (Williams and Trimble 2018). Just two weeks after this re-discovery, New Jersey added another, an adult in basic plumage at Edwin B. Forsythe NWR which remained from 23 Oct to 11 Nov 2017 (Brown et al. 2019).

In addition to these, there is also a sight report from Onondaga Lake, NY 30 Aug 1962 (Propst and Peakall 1962). Although the documentation associated with this report was not adequate to support definitive acceptance of such an extraordinary occurrence (Able et al. 1992), this report was published by Bull (1974), under his *Hypothetical* category, and regarded by Mlodinow (1999) as likely correct. We have reviewed the original documentation for this report and agree with these authors, and also the NYS Avian Records Committee reviewers, regarding its plausibility but also its limitations. We also wish to clarify the correct date of this report: it was 30 August 1962, as originally published, not 30 October, as stated in the NYSARC report.

PJL'S ACCOUNT

On the stormy morning of 5 May 2019, Shai and I were patrolling our usual haunts in coastal southwestern Suffolk County, NY. Noting the prolonged and blustery northeast winds and bouts of intense rain, we were deliberately searching for rare birds. Late in the morning we decided to execute what Shai calls our “pincers maneuver” wherein we divide our efforts to cover both edges of the western Great South Bay: while he scoured the outer beach for Lesser Black-backed Gulls and other mobile, oceanic species affected by the storm, I focused on the rain puddles and marsh edges at Heckscher State Park and Timber Point Golf Course, across the bay. At Timber Point, the storm had resulted in puddling and ponding on the fairways and—importantly—no golfers on the course. It was the perfect scenario for detecting migrating shorebirds put down by the weather. Activity and turnover were even more dynamic than I had hoped, and this kept my anticipation high for the better part of an hour. A few Lesser Yellowlegs and Willets and a Short-billed

Dowitcher were moving around, and the number of Greater Yellowlegs was building slowly.

As I was about to call it quits I made one more circuit—and spied a large, very pale shorebird, resting on its belly with its bill tucked, at the edge of a puddle that had for the past half hour hosted only a few Greater Yellowlegs and Willets. This was the very puddle where, a year earlier, I had found a Wood Sandpiper under similar stormy conditions! After an interminable wait, the bird finally awakened and showed its legs and bill. Suspecting its identity, I called SSM, describing the bird but not yet naming it. Unprompted, he queried me about several points that I understood were intended to distinguish Common Greenshank from Greater Yellowlegs, Willet, and Bar-tailed Godwit. As I scribbled notes and consulted Mullarney et al., I became more confident this was in fact a greenshank, but I felt puzzled by what appeared to be pinkish legs—and paralyzed by the improbability of finding another Palearctic *Tringa* at this very puddle! Shai arrived and the pincers closed. Scoping from our separate cars in the rain, we were in contact by phone. He asked me to look at the book as he studied the bird and independently described several specific details of the plumage, apart from the most familiar ones associated with recognizing a greenshank—for instance, the size, shape, and configuration of the black ventral markings; the shape and irregular spacing of black-centered alternate-plumaged feathers on the back; and the intensity and pattern of streaking on the head and face. As I confirmed that each of his impressions of these secondary features matched the reference materials, he declared it a Common Greenshank! For me, the pinkish legs were unexpected, but Shai was quite sure that the legs looked greenish enough. At this point we reported the bird to the birding community. Almost 100 observers saw the Common Greenshank that afternoon, and, like the Wood Sandpiper a year earlier, this bird remained overnight into the morning of the second day.

DISCUSSION

Whereas Spotted Redshank (*T. erythropus*) has occurred numerous times in the eastern United States, Mlodinow (1999) specifically noted the absence of such records for Common Greenshank, through 1999. The few records then known from the western North Atlantic involved three records at widely varying dates from eastern Canada and four records from late fall through early spring from Barbados. The over-representation of records from this one small island is notable, as Barbados is famed as a locus for vagrants straying from the southbound Palearctic to Africa route. Among the nine western North Atlantic records from north of the West Indies, no fewer than four have been from May, over a very wide latitudinal range (Bermuda, NY, QC, NL), suggesting that these, and possibly also the three records from September and October, pertain to birds that crossed the Atlantic at low latitudes in fall, wintered at low latitude, then resumed migratory movements with (or at least similar to those of) their Nearctic

congeners. The role of Long Island birders in the early recognition of this model of occurrence is worth noting here. Eisenmann (1960) and Bull (1964) articulated the model to explain the preponderance of spring vs. fall records, and of adults vs. juveniles, among what were then regarded as surprisingly large numbers of records of Curlew Sandpiper and Ruff on Long Island. The hatching-year greenshank in MA in Dec is an exception that hints at future discoveries.

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A Common Greenshank at Timber Point Golf Course, *Suffolk*, 5-6 May 2019 (here 5 May) was the first for NYS and one of very few records for the eastern USA. See article pp. 202-205; photos © S. S. Mitra.