

## SHORE BIRDS OF THE NEW JERSEY COAST

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Twelve years have elapsed since the publication of Dr. Witmer Stone's "Bird Studies at Old Cape May". During that time the numbers of shore birds have increased under protection, and the time that they spend in our territory has been extended. The purpose of this paper is to supplement Stone's book and to bring the records of the rarer species up to date.

The area covered includes the beaches and salt marshes from Long Beach Island to Cape May, and the lower Delaware Bay shore from Fortescue southward.

Generally speaking, earliest and latest dates are based on averages but, from year to year, variations of a few days will occur. It is impossible to determine the precise date of conclusion of the northward flight and that of the arrival of the southbound birds, since a few non-breeding individuals remain during the intervening period.

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### OYSTERCATCHER—*Haematopus p. palliatus* Temminck

During Alexander Wilson's time the Oystercatcher nested regularly along the New Jersey coast. Then, for a great many years only occasional records are found in the literature. In recent years the bird has returned as a breeder at Little Beach Island near Tuckerton. Although the exact date is unknown, it seems likely that it was ten or fifteen years ago. Little Beach Island is seldom visited by ornithologists, but nests have been reported by fishermen who land there, and the birds have been seen at intervals on the neighboring beaches. A nest was found on July 26, 1947 (Lukens and Kramer 1947).

### PIPING PLOVER—*Charadrius melodus* Ord

The Piping Plover usually arrives on our beaches about March 20th. It has been reported on Long Island on March 3 and 4 (Cruickshank 1942A), and we have one remarkable date at Beach Haven on February 13, 1949 (Hetzl). The peak of the northward migration occurs during the first and second week of April.

The bird is, of course, a regular breeder, most of the nesting activity taking place in May, with a few individuals laying in June and, very rarely, early July.

Toward the end of July or first week in August birds from farther north begin to arrive on their southward flight. They are most numerous about the first week in September, and then gradually decrease until after the first frost, when only occasional individuals will be seen. We have one exceptional date from our area at Wildwood on December 21, 1941 (Ross and Weyl 1942). Another unusual record (while not strictly within our territory) deserving mention in this paper is that of a bird seen at Barnegat Inlet on December 4, 1938 (Watson 1939).

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER—*Charadrius hiaticula semipalmatus* Bonaparte

These little plovers occasionally arrive as early as the first week in March, but the second week in April is more usual. Migration reaches a peak about May 15 and ends about June 1.

The first week of July brings early returning birds, the numbers increase gradually with the maximum reached the first week in August. After the middle of September the species becomes gradually less common. There are many October and November records, and some individuals have lingered into January.

WILSON'S PLOVER—*Charadrius w. wilsonia* Ord

This species was considered "pretty common" in Alexander Wilson's time, but from then until the publication of Stone's book there were only three records that he considered worthy of mention. Then, on June 8, 1935, two nests were found at Brigantine (Reimann 1940). On July 22, 1950 at Holgate, Lukens, Kramer and I found a bird which we suspected had young in the vicinity. This suspicion was confirmed a week later by A. E. Eynon, who told me that he had seen the young. These and other reports indicate that the bird is increasing in our area. It is, however, still of rare occurrence.

KILLDEER—*Charadrius v. vociferus* Linnaeus

The Killdeer may be found every month of the year along the New Jersey coast. It is rare from the end of November until the latter part of February. From then on we see a rather rapid increase which continues through April and May. The bird breeds regularly in the state.

GOLDEN PLOVER—*Pluvialis d. dominica* (Müller)

In the spring this plover is one of our rarest shore birds. Records on the southward flight are quite regular, but the species is never seen in great numbers. Dates run from August 4 to December 4, with the majority occurring during the month of September.

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER—*Squatarola squatarola* (Linnaeus)

This handsome plover is present every month of the year, a few birds remaining through the winter. During the third week in April the first

spring transients appear, the species increases rapidly reaching its maximum abundance by the middle of May. There is then a decrease in numbers and after the first week in June only a few stragglers are left.

The southward flight starts about the first week in August but does not reach its peak until the first week of October. The bird is quite common during that month and only slightly less so until November 15. After that time only those scattered birds which remain through the winter are left.

**RUDDY TURNSTONE**—*Arenaria interpres morinella* (Linnaeus)

Not before the end of April or early May do we see the Turnstone in our area in any numbers. From then on the species increases rapidly reaching its maximum abundance by the middle of May. My mid-June only a few stragglers are left.

The return flight appears about the middle of July in some years, but usually it is the first week in August before many birds are present. The greatest numbers are normally found about the end of the month or early in September. In recent years more birds have been lingering into November, and occasionally one may be found during the winter.

**AMERICAN WOODCOCK**—*Philohela minor* (Gmelin)

The Woodcock is present every month of the year, at least in the southern part of the state. One of the most interesting aspects of the occurrence of this bird in New Jersey is the concentration which builds up at Cape May during October and November when a strong northwest wind blows transients out to sea. The birds beat their way back to land and seek shelter in the woods, and when the wind changes they resume their southern flight and become scarce.

The bird is a regular breeder. Eggs are laid in the latter half of March or first half of April in the southern part of the State.

Stone mentions two records of the European Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) from New Jersey. He was unable to give us any accurate information as to where the specimens came from since they were purchased in the market.

**WILSON'S SNIPE**—*Capella gallinago delicata* (Ord)

Usually the Snipe appears in our territory early in March, reaches maximum flight about the end of the month, and by the first week in May has become scarce.

In the fall a few arrive in September, but it is not until October and November that they reach their greatest abundance. Snipe have been seen at Cape May virtually throughout the winter.

LONG-BILLED CURLEW—*Numenius a. americanus* Bechstein

An old specimen recently added to the Academy collection through the generosity of Harry Drinker was shot at Cape May by his father about 1890.

Urner and Storer (1949) reported one at Absecon on July 26, 1936.

HUDSONIAN CURLEW—*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus* Latham

One may expect to find these curlews at any time after the middle of April; an earlier date would be exceptional, and it is not at all unusual for their arrival to be postponed until toward the end of the month. Numbers increase rapidly, reaching a peak about the tenth of May. They are common until the first of June and stragglers may be found through most of that month.

Returning birds begin to arrive early in July, and by the end of the month are present in greatest numbers. Most of our birds pass through the state by mid-August; a few, however, linger into September and occasionally into October.

ESKIMO CURLEW—*Numenius borealis* (Forster)

Stone gives us a full account of the former status of this bird in New Jersey. He states that no specimen was ever collected on the coast.

UPLAND PLOVER—*Bartramina longicauda* (Bechstein)

The Upland Plover is primarily a bird of the fields and pastures, where in recent years it appears to have increased as a summer resident at some inland locations. It is rare as a spring transient in our area, and what records we have are in April.

The return flight takes place from early July until late September, and while individuals do occur during this period, it is exceedingly unusual to find them on the marshes of our coast.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER—*Actitis macularia* (Linnaeus)

This sandpiper arrives about the middle of April. It is fairly common as a breeding bird, egg dates ranging from the middle of May to the middle of June.

Southbound birds from farther north begin to arrive about the middle of July. After the middle of August the species becomes less common but we will usually see a few individuals through September, early October and very rarely in early November.

SOLITARY SANDPIPER—*Tringa s. solitaria* Wilson

This is an extremely rare bird along the beaches and salt marshes, as it prefers the fresh water streams and ponds. Spring records at or near Cape May up to 1937 consisted of three: June 9, 1907, and May 20, 1928 at Ocean

View, and May 12, 1929 at Dennisville. There is a specimen in the Academy collection taken at Avalon on May 7, 1899 by William E. Hughes.

An occasional southbound bird may be seen between the middle of July and the end of October.

EASTERN WILLET—*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus semipalmatus* (Gmelin)

WESTERN WILLET—*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus inornatus* (Brewster)

The Western Willet occurs along the New Jersey coast during the fall migration in some numbers, but since separation of the two races in the field is uncertain they are treated together for the purposes of this paper.

As a transient the Willet is uncommon in spring, first arrivals generally appearing about the middle of May. A rather rapidly increasing colony of breeding birds exists along Delaware Bay between Reed's Beach and Fortescue. In 1941 a careful estimate of the breeding population resulted in a count of ten thousand birds (McDonald and Potter 1943). Four years later, covering the same territory, an estimate of from fifteen to twenty thousand birds was made (Coman 1945).

During July and August Willet are common. They become less so in September, but a few linger into October, and we have one exceptional date at Cape May on November 14, 1937 (Livingston 1938).

GREATER YELLOW-LEGS—*Totanus melanoleucus* (Gmelin)

A few of this species occasionally winter in the State. Thus it is difficult to determine when the first spring arrivals occur; after the middle of March Greater Yellow-legs are seen in small numbers. They are most common by the middle of May, but by the first of June the spring migration is about over, although a few non-breeders may be seen even during the last half of the month.

The return flight starts about the middle of July, with the greatest numbers appearing during the latter part of August and early September. The bird is not uncommon in October, and usually a few small flocks will be seen in November.

LESSER YELLOW-LEGS—*Totanus flavipes* (Gmelin)

As in the case of the preceding species, a few birds have been wintering in recent years. The Lesser Yellow-legs has been considered a rare bird in spring, but careful observation may prove it more plentiful than records indicate. Most of our reports for this period occur from late March to early June.

By the first week in July the first southbound transients appear, numbers increase through August and early September. During October and Novem-

ber scattered small flocks are frequently seen. The bird is very common in summer, being more numerous than the Greater Yellow-legs.

AMERICAN KNOT—*Calidris canutus rufa* (Wilson)

This is another species of which a few individuals have wintered in recent years. It is therefore difficult to state when the first spring arrivals occur. It is the first of May before they are present in any numbers, and the bulk of the migration does not arrive until the middle of the month. By the first week in June most of the birds have gone on to the north, although a few stragglers may be seen all through that month.

Southbound transients arrive about the middle of July and the migration ends about two months later with the largest numbers being present the last week in July and the first week in August.

PURPLE SANDPIPER—*Erolia maritima* (Brünnich)

This hardy sandpiper is only a winter visitor on our coastal rock piles and breakwaters. Although never present in large numbers, a few may be found any winter at some point along the shore. Usually they do not arrive before the first week in November.

Twelve years ago, April 7 was the latest date on record. More recently, a few have been reported in May, the latest date being May 23, 1937, at Tuckerton Road (Rogers).

PECTORAL SANDPIPER—*Erolia melanotos* (Vieillot)

The Pectoral Sandpiper is rare in spring, and those birds which do come through are late. Up to 1937 Stone had no spring records at Cape May. He did publish three from the Newark Meadows and Cruickshank gives us one for March 18, 1928 (1942 B) from the same place. While these are not strictly in our territory, they deserve mention in this paper.

The southward flight is quite different. In suitable habitat the birds are regularly found from July 8 to early November with an occasional individual lingering to the end of that month. The greater numbers occur from the middle of August to the middle of September, but at no time, even in the southward migration, are large numbers seen, fifteen in one flock would be considered exceptional.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER—*Erolia fuscicollis* (Vieillot)

It is unusual for more than a few of this species to be seen in a day. They are late spring transients, being more common in northern New Jersey than at Cape May, where Stone considered them rare in spring. First arrivals occur about May 7, and normally by June 10 the northward flight is over.

By the middle of July we may expect to find southbound birds, and from then until early in November they are seen quite regularly.

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER—*Erolia bairdii* (Coues)

Baird's Sandpiper is difficult to identify and of such rare occurrence that sight records (except by the most competent observers) are subject to question. We have only one specimen in the Academy's collection which was taken in our area. This bird was shot by David McCadden on September 5, 1898, at Stone Harbor.

Stone lists seventeen sight records of which only one (May 30, 1929) by Charles Urner in the Barnegat Region, was made in the spring. Of the others, five were in August, nine in September, and two the first week of October.

LEAST SANDPIPER—*Erolia minutilla* (Vieillot)

This little sandpiper is one of our more common transients, usually occurring along the edges of the mud flats in the salt marshes. It does appear occasionally along the beaches and should not be overlooked there.

On the northward flight they may be seen from the second week in April until the third week in June, the majority passing through during the month of May.

Southbound birds begin to appear the first week in July, and are most numerous between the middle of that month and the middle of September. Stragglers are noted through October and November, and we have a few December records.

CURLEW SANDPIPER—*Erolia ferruginea* (Pontoppidan)

This Old World species is accidental on our shores. Stone gives us a full account of its occurrence up to the date of publication of his book. Since that time I have found four published records: Beach Haven, October 3, 1937 (Urner); Holgate, June 23-27, 1939 (Rogers); Tuckerton, May 18, 1940 (Fleisher); and Anglesea, July 9-11, 1947 (Choate). On July 22, 1950 at Holgate I saw one while working the flats there with Mr. and Mrs. Lukens and Mr. and Mrs. Kramer.

RED-RACKED SANDPIPER—*Erolia alpina pacifica* (Coues)

Of all our shore birds this is the only one which winters on our coast in any numbers. It may be seen any month of the year, but June records are rare, and an exceptionally cold winter may send most of our remaining birds to the southward. During a normal winter large flocks are seen at various points on a day's trip along the coast.

EASTERN DOWITCHER—*Limnodromus griseus griseus* (Gmelin)

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER—*Limnodromus griseus scolopaceus* (Say)

For the purposes of this paper no separation between the Eastern and the Long-billed Dowitcher is attempted, as bill lengths overlap and identification in the field is difficult, if not impossible. Stone states that no specimen of the long-billed bird has ever been collected on the New Jersey coast.

Next to the Semipalmated Sandpiper, the Dowitcher is our most abundant shore bird. Usually they begin to arrive about the third week in April. The numbers increase rapidly reaching a peak about the middle of May, and by the first of June most of them have gone on to their breeding grounds.

The return flight begins early in July. From the end of that month they are common to abundant until the middle of September, when they gradually decrease in numbers. A few individuals may linger into October and we have a very few records for the first week of November.

STILT SANDPIPER—*Micropalama himantopus* (Bonaparte)

The Stilt Sandpiper must be classed as one of our rare transients. In the spring it is so rare that Stone considered only one sight record worthy of publication. The principal southbound migration takes place between July 22 and September 12 (Urner and Storer 1949 A).

SEMPIPALMATED SANDPIPER—*Ereunetes pusillus* (Linnaeus)

The Semipalmated Sandpiper is without doubt our most abundant shore bird. In some years a few probably winter in this area. From the middle of April until the end of October one is practically certain of listing the bird on a day's trip to the coast. The bulk of the spring migration passes through between the first and third weeks of May, and on the return flight the greatest concentrations occur between the middle of July and the middle of August.

WESTERN SANDPIPER—*Ereunetes mauri* (Cabanis)

One of the most difficult problems confronts the field observer when he tries to distinguish between this and the preceding species. Many individuals are not separable in the field. Length and size of bill are not sufficient, as bill measurements of the male Western and female Semipalmated overlap. When looking over a flock of sandpipers it is perhaps possible to pick out a few birds with rusty backs and bills exceptionally long, and thick at the base, which should be identified as Westerns. To do more destroys any attempt at accuracy. Familiarity with their mouselike, squeaky notes is an aid in identification, but care should be taken as those of the White-rumped Sandpiper are almost identical.

There is only one specimen in the Academy's collection which was taken in the spring in this area. Fall dates coincide with the Semipalmated Sandpiper.

BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER—*Tryngites subruficollis* (Vieillot)

Published records of this rare sandpiper are confined almost entirely to the month of September or the last few days of August and the first few days of October. Many of the most ardent field observers have never had the good fortune to find one. It is therefore an event of great interest to encounter one in the field. The only record in recent years was given to me by Julian K. Potter. He met a young man by the name of Jerry Brown at Beach Haven Inlet on September 2, 1950. Brown had seen a Buff-breasted Sandpiper that day and tried to show it to Potter without success. From the conversation he had with Brown, Potter believes the record to be valid.

MARbled GODWIT—*Limosa fedoa* (Linnaeus)

Up to the publication of Stone's book there were no spring records for this bird. We now have two: one at Stone Harbor on May 11, 1940 (Starr and Clark), and the other at Little Beach Inlet on June 5, 1949 (Ridgely).

Most of our southbound records run from the end of July to the end of September, although occasionally a bird will linger later. We have one very exceptional date at Barnegat, December 26, 1937 (Urner and Eayre 1938).

BAR-TAILED GODWIT—*Limosa l. lapponica* (Linnaeus)

On July 18 and August 14, 1937 an individual was seen at Absecon (Urner and Storer 1949). On July 26 of the same year at Nauset Beach, Eastham, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, a specimen was collected by James L. Peters. This was the second North American specimen and the only one collected as such, the first having been purchased at the Faneuil Hall Market, Boston, on September 3, 1907, with no data as to the locality whence it was taken (Peters and Hagar 1937).

HUDSONIAN GODWIT—*Limosa haemastica* (Linnaeus)

This godwit is a rare transient, particularly in spring. Stone listed only three records for May, and since that time I have been able to find only one, which was reported at Stone Harbor on May 7, 1938 (Lehrman).

Southbound records run from July 17 to October 12. Since publication of "Bird Studies at Old Cape May" four records appear in the literature: Tuckerton, October 12, 1936 (Urner), and September 26, 1937 (Urner); Ocean City, July 17, 1940 (Rigby); and Stone Harbor, September 29, 1940 (Cadbury).

RUFF—*Philomachus pugnax* (Linnaeus)

This Old World species is of accidental occurrence on the eastern coast of North America. Stone listed a specimen taken at Barnegat with no date and two seen by Charles Urner near Tuckerton on October 2, 1932.

We have four recent records: Holgate, July 2, 1944 (Kramer and Miller); Stone Harbor, June 24, 1945 (Miller); Cape May, August 28, 1948 (Choate); and another which, although not in our area, should be listed here to make the record complete, was seen near Bridgeport, N. J., May 3 to 8, 1947 (Kramer, Lukens and Potter).

SANDERLING—*Crocethia alba* (Pallas)

Usually the Sanderling is present every month of the year at some point along the coast. Numbers begin to increase toward the end of April, but the major portion of the northbound birds pass through between the first week in May and the first of June.

Southbound transients arrive during the third week in July, during the month of August they reach their greatest numbers, and subsequently gradually become less common until, by the end of November, only stragglers are left.

AVOCET—*Recurvirostra americana* Gmelin

This western species has occasionally wandered into our coastal marshes. Stone gives five records, and ten years ago a bird was reported from Tuckerton on August 26, 1939 (Hiatt). Another record which should be included here, although not included in the territory under discussion, is that of a bird seen at Salem on November 26, 1947 (Bishop).

BLACK-NECKED STILT—*Himantopus mexicanus* (Müller)

This handsome wader nested in the Cape May meadows in Alexander Wilson's time. Stone has given us a very full account and, since we have no recent records, is impossible for me to supplement what he has written.

RED PHALAROPE—*Phalaropus fulicarius* (Linnaeus)

The Red Phalarope occurs in large flocks off shore but is rare along the coast and has only been noted after severe easterly winds. Stone lists it ten times; eight of these records were in the first two weeks in May, one in August, and one in September. Since the publication of his book, I have found a published record at Holgate on June 7, 1941 (Kramer), and Julian Potter tells me that he saw one at the same place on May 25, 1940. On May 21, 1950

at Holgate I saw a flock of thirty birds, many of them females in full breeding plumage.

WILSON'S PHALAROPE—*Steganopus tricolor* (Vieillot)

This phalarope occurs rarely along the coast, but has been recorded almost every year along the Delaware River, usually in the falls. Most of the records published by Stone were made during August, September and October. We have one record from the coast at Brigantine, July 25, 1948 (Kramer).

NORTHERN PHALAROPE—*Lobipes lobatus* (Linnaeus)

Of the three phalaropes, this species is most frequently seen. It is, however, a rare bird in our territory. The records published by Stone were confined to May, August, and September. More recent records are for the same months or nearly so. We have two unusual occurrences which should be listed here; one bird was seen at Brigantine on October 26, 1946 (Sproy) and another at Seaside Heights on November 7, 1948 (Kramer). Julian Potter believes that more phalaropes would be seen if determined observers were to go to the coast immediately after northeast storms in late May and early June.

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