Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Ivory Gull Reported

Sandy Kovanda
_Omaha, Nebraska_

Jim Kovanda
_Omaha, Nebraska_

Bill Otto
_Omaha, Nebraska_

Eldon Marsh
_Brunswick, Nebraska_

Barbara Marsh
_Brunswick, Nebraska_

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SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER AND IVORY GULL REPORTED

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER. On 12 October 1986 we saw an unusual sandpiper, in company of three dowitchers, on the east side of Nebraska Highway 15, about half the distance between the Platte River and Octavia, Butler Co. We watched the bird from about 1:30 to about 2:30 PM so the sun was at our backs. We had two telescopes (one used at 20x, the other at 40x), and one 8x and two 10x binoculars, and had the Peterson and National Geographic guides. The road ditch was flooded; the adjacent land was pasture. The bird was 30 to 40 feet from us at all times.

We thought the bird to be a juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (Calidris acutirostris). It had a dark gray eye stripe and a finely barred reddish cap, which set off a white superciliary. The eye stripe and cap met at the base of the upper mandible. The superciliary appeared to be broadest near the back of the head, but did not extend behind the head. The back of the head and the nape were slightly buff colored, with fine dark barring. The solid black, thick bill was equal to the length of the head. The back had a scaly appearance; the body of each feather was black and the edges were golden. The wings extended just beyond the tail tip and the black primary feathers were edged with red. Overall, the back and wings were rufous/golden with black scales which increased in size as they approached the tail. The white throat was highlighted by finely barred white cheeks and a buffy breast. The breast had a fine barring on the edges and a very faint necklace. The necklace was created by a few short dark streaks, and was seen only under high magnification. The remainder of the breast was unbarred buff, which ended sharply at the belly. The belly and undertail coverts were white and unbarred. Its short legs were yellow, with large yellow feet. The bird at times fed near the dowitchers, affording a good size comparison. The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was about two-thirds the size of the dowitchers. The bird picked at the grass and water surface, rather than probing. It also tended to feed near the water's edge. It did not call, raise its wings, nor fly while under our observation.

We ruled out the birds with which we are familiar: the Pectoral Sandpiper because this bird did not have a barred breast; the Western Sandpiper because this bird was larger and had a buffy breast; and the Stilt Sandpiper because this bird had short legs.

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Sandpiper at the Coralville Reservoir, Johnson Co., Iowa 3 October 1974 and (p. 168) reports a sight record of an immature Ivory Gull at Rathburn Reservoir, Appanoose Co., Iowa 20 December 1975. The AOU Checklist (sixth edition) calls the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (p. 198) casual in Colorado and Iowa, and the Ivory Gull (p. 226) casual in Iowa.

--- Eldon and Barbara Marsh, PO Box 365, Brunswick, Neb. 68725-0365