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On 23 December 1994, Gordon Brown and I were walking the North Platte River below Keystone Dam as part of the Lake McConaughy Christmas Bird Count (CBC). At approximately 8:30 a.m. MST, about 0.5 mi below the dam, we observed a group of 8 Killdeer and a smaller shorebird, which we immediately recognized as a "peep." We studied the bird for about 30 minutes at distances as close as 40 feet, then returned in the afternoon to photograph it. The size and black legs immediately eliminated Least Sandpiper, and the dark rump eliminated White-rumped Sandpiper. The remaining possibilities were Semipalmated, Western, and Baird's Sandpipers, or the remote possibility of something like a stint. The bill was straight, thin, and pointed, very unlike the bill of a Semipalmated. Additionally, the bird had a very elongate body shape like a Baird's and unlike either Semipalmated or Western. This and other features led us to conclude that it was a Baird's Sandpiper (*Calidris bairdii*).

The following is a detailed description of the bird. Its size was about half that of a Killdeer, though it was proportionally slimmer and longer-winged. The slender shape was accentuated by the short legs, and by wingtips that extended beyond the tail tip. The bill was black, straight, and thin, pointed at the tip. The throat was white, neatly separated from the buff-colored breast. The crown, face, and upper breast were buff-colored. There were no obvious darker streaks on the breast. The lower belly and undertail were white. A clear line separated the buff upper breast from the white underparts, like that of a Pectoral Sandpiper. The supercilium was faintly white and most visible when looking at the bird head-on. The mantle was uniformly gray-brown, lacking pale feather edgings. The scapulars were paler and appeared worn. The upperwing on the perched bird was uniformly dark brown, except that the outer two primaries (and possibly the third) were worn, and appeared pale brown and tattered near the tips. We were unable to ascertain the amount of wear on the inner primaries. The legs were short and jet black. The bird vocalized several times when flushed, uttering a high-pitched "kreep," short and abrupt. The call seemed shorter and higher-pitched than that of a Pectoral Sandpiper, and was immediately recognizable as the call note of a Baird's Sandpiper.

The age of this bird was difficult to determine. It was clearly not in fresh juvenal plumage since it lacked buff feather edgings on the upperparts which should have given the bird a scaly appearance. However, this scaly appearance usually disappears by October due to feather wear. Paulson (1993) indicates that Baird's usually do not molt into first-winter plumage until they reach the South American wintering grounds in October. Most adults have left the U.S. by mid-August (Richards 1988) and acquire basic plumage by mid-October on the wintering grounds (Paulson 1993). In rare cases, adults in basic plumage have occurred in the U.S. as early as July (Paulson 1993). The extremely late date for our observation would therefore suggest that the bird was a juvenile. The problem is that the molt pattern is poorly known, and there is much individual variation (Prater et al. 1977). Unfortunately, the above description may not be sufficient to age this bird. Points that favor an adult in basic plumage are the dark (not buff or scaly-appearing) upperparts, obvious white supercilium, and lack of obvious dark breast streaks. The clear white throat is more indicative of a juvenile bird (Hayman et al. 1986). While I cannot say for certain, I believe this bird was an adult that had nearly completed the molt to basic plumage.

Later that day, from 1:45-2:15 p.m., we observed and photographed the bird in the same general area, and it was also seen by Ross Silcock and Larry Malone. This represents the latest occurrence of a Baird's Sandpiper in Nebraska. The previous late date for Nebraska is 21 November 1982 in Douglas and Sarpy Counties (W.R. Silcock, pers. comm.). It is interesting to note that this was the only Baird's Sandpiper recorded on a Christmas Bird Count in North America during the 1994-95 CBC period (Ortega 1995).

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