

Seasonal Highlights

A Juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge

On Saturday, 23 September 2000, Kevin Richmond discovered a juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*) at Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge, Mason County. The next day, Justin Rink, Bob Chapel, and I saw the bird.

It was noticeably smaller than the Pectoral Sandpipers (*C. melanotos*) nearby, and its legs appeared shorter. The beak was shorter and straighter than the beaks of the Pectorals nearby.

The Sharp-tail looked surprisingly small, and although the Sharp-tail is closely related to Pectorals, the nearby Buff-breasted Sandpiper is what made us look twice to confirm the species.

Like the Buff-breasted, the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper had a large black eye and was very warm in plumage with a mostly clear breast. More specifically, the breast was streaked a little on the upper portion and washed with very bright, clear, pumpkin orange, not buff.

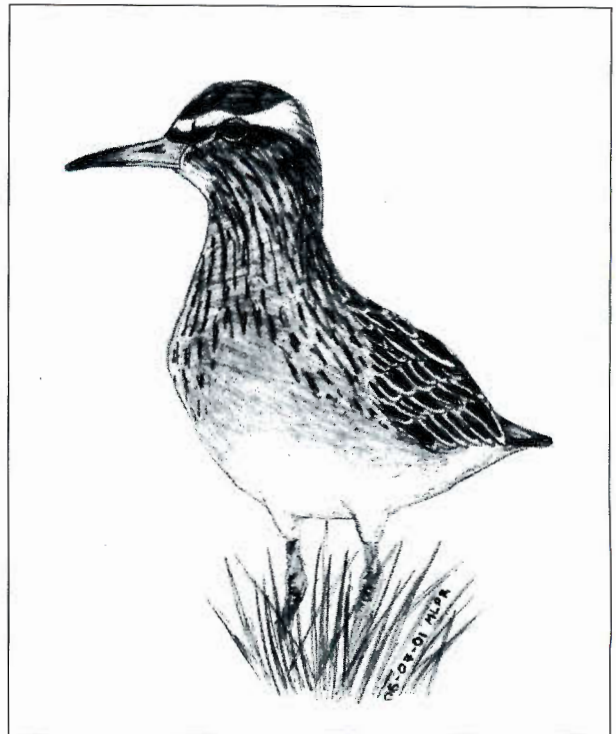
The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper had the typical "fore-tilted" cap, caused by the flaring of the white supercilium behind the eye.

Sharp-tailed Sandpipers breed in Siberia. Since Pectoral Sandpipers breed there as well, it's possible at least some of the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers that occur in North America do so because they get caught up in flocks of migrating Pectorals.

The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is a very rare vagrant in Illinois. It was first recorded and photographed in the state at Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge, 1974 September 28 and 29 (Bohlen and Sandburg 1975). Another bird was reported in Chicago 6 October 1985 (IB&B2:50). Both were immature, distinguished by the buffy breast and chestnut cap (Bohlen 1989).

Literature Cited

American Ornithologists Union. 1998. Checklist of North American Birds, 7th edition. American



Juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*). Drawing by Michael L.P. Retter.

Ornithologists Union, Washington D.C.

Bohlen, H.D. and R. Sandburg. 1975. Sight record of the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in Illinois. Illinois Audubon Bulletin 172:4-5.

Bohlen, H.D. 1989. The birds of Illinois. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN. 221 pp.

Michael L. P. Retter, R.R. 1 Box 85, Colfax, IL 61728; mretter@hotmail.com