

Status and Occurrence of Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin.

Introduction and Distribution

The Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*) is a migratory shorebird species that breeds from Finland across arctic Russia to the Chukotka Peninsula (Hayman *et al.* 1986). This species winters in Ireland, southern Great Britain, southwestern France, Italy, Greece, parts of Turkey, Egypt, across central Africa, southern Iraq, Iran, Yemen, northwestern and northeastern India, Bangladesh, Burma, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan, and southern China (O'Brien *et al.* 2006). In eastern North America, the Spotted Redshank is an accidental vagrant. There are records from Newfoundland, Nova Scotia to New York State (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). There are a few sporadic records from other regions in eastern North America from Ontario to Nebraska (Paulson 2005). The only area in North America that has a pattern of occurrence is in Alaska where the Spotted Redshank is a casually occurring species. Most records occur in either spring or fall migration on the outer western Aleutian Islands, but this species has occurred in the Bering Sea region as well (West 2008). In the rest of Alaska, the Spotted Redshank is an accidentally occurring species (West 2008). Along the west coast south of Alaska, the Spotted Redshank is classified as an accidental vagrant. In British Columbia, there are only a handful of Provincial records (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). In Washington State, the Spotted Redshank was only just recently added to the state list with a record from the Hayton Preserve, Fir Island in Skagit County between November 27-December 1, 2014 (R. Merrill Pers. Comm.). In Oregon, there is only one accepted state record by the Oregon Bird Records Committee (OFO 2012). In California, the Spotted Redshank is an exceptionally rare species with only five accepted state records by the California Bird Records Committee (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). Of interest, there is at least one accepted record from Alberta and Nevada (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). The Spotted Redshank has also been recorded as a vagrant in Barbados (Hayman *et al.* 2007).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Spotted Redshank is covered in all standard North American field guides. The Spotted Redshank is a medium-sized shorebird that measures 32 cm in length (Dunn and Alderfer 2011) just a bit smaller than a Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) which measures 36 cm in length yet a bit larger than a Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) which measures 27 cm in length (Paulson 2005, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) is a bit smaller than the Spotted Redshank with an overall body length of 29 cm (Paulson 2005, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Adults in breeding plumage are spectacular due to their almost entirely black appearance (O'Brien *et al.* 2006). The bill is long with a slight droop to the tip (Sibley 2003). The base of the

bill is dark red with the rest; towards the tip black (Sibley 2003). The head, neck, breast right down to the undertail coverts is black (Message and Taylor 2005). The wings are also black with white spotted edges to the feathers (Jonsson 1992). In flight, the upper wing is pale along the secondary edge and inner area of the wing with the primaries distinctly darker (Sibley 2003). The underside of the wing is entirely white (Sibley 2003). The back and rump are white and this has a distinct wedge shape in flight (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009.). The tail is dark with light bars giving the tail a barred appearance (Message and Taylor 2005). The legs are long and are dark red (Dunn and Alderfer 2011), in flight, they extend well past the tail tip (Sibley 2003).

Adults in winter plumage are very pale gray overall with a grey back, and paler under parts (Paulson 2005). The crown is dark with a prominent white eye stripe from the top of the bill over and past the eye (Brazil 2009). There is also a dark line from the base of the bill, through and past the eye (Brazil 2009). The upper mandible is black, and the lower mandible is red at the base with the remainder of the bill black (Brazil 2009). The legs are bright red (Sibley 2003). The wing and rump pattern is the same as in breeding plumage (Paulson 2005).

Juvenile-plumaged birds are heavily barred and dark from the throat to the under tail coverts (Jonsson 1992). The bill is the same as winter-plumaged adults in pattern (Paulson 2005). The head pattern is darker and more pronounced, but basically the same as in a winter-plumaged adult (Sibley 2003). The leg colour can vary on some individual birds from yellow to orange to red (Hayman *et al.* 1986).

The call of the Spotted Redshank is a husky “*chuwit*” or “*kawit*” which can recall the calls of a Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) (Sibley 2003). When flushed, it can give a chuckling “*chu, chu*” or a loud, slight husky “*kweep kip-kip*” (Sibley 2003).

This species is distinct enough that in any plumage should not be confused with any regularly occurring shorebird species.

Occurrence and Documentation

The Spotted Redshank is an accidental visitor to British Columbia with only six provincial records (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The first record was found and photographed at the Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary from October 17 – November 11, 1970 (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The second record was also found at the Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary on November 29, 1980 (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). It is highly likely that the same bird reappeared the following spring at the Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary and was seen and photographed from March 1 – May 1, 1981 (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The fourth provincial record was found and photographed from October 9-17, 1982, at Serpentine Fen in south Surrey (Toochin

et al. 2014, see Table 1). Until recently, all confirmed records of Spotted Redshank were found in the Lower Mainland. There is a good sight record of a Spotted Redshank seen at Chesterman's Beach near Tofino on August 19, 1992 (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). Unfortunately the bird was flushed before it could be confirmed (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.). The most recent record of a Spotted Redshank comes from the Queen Charlotte Islands. A juvenile bird was well observed in the company of eight Greater Yellowlegs on October 12, 2014 (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.). A subsequent search of the area failed to relocate the flock (R. Toochin Pers. Comm.). Likely the same bird reappeared in the same location on April 24-25, 2015, and was photographed (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). The bird was with a small group of Greater Yellowlegs, and was in mostly basic plumage, but was like a 1st winter bird (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). It is highly probable, given how rare this species is along the west coast, that this is the same bird found in the fall.

The Spotted Redshank is most often found in migration with either Long-billed Dowitchers or Greater Yellowlegs (Paulson 1993). This species feeds in estuaries, shallow marshes, and shallow ponds (Mlodinow 1999). In the fall, the Spotted Redshank is a very non-descript looking bird that could easily be overlooked (J. Fenneman Pers. Obs.). This is true of birds in winter plumage as well (J. Fenneman Pers. Obs.). In breeding plumage, the Spotted Redshank is hard to miss, and should be easily spotted by anyone looking through shorebird flocks (J. Fenneman Pers. Obs.).

Given that the Spotted Redshank is a highly migratory species, it is highly likely to be found in the future somewhere in the province. Observers are encouraged to carefully scrutinize flocks of Dowitchers and Yellowlegs for this Eurasian gem.



Figure 1: Record #6: Spotted Redshank (bird on right) with Greater Yellowlegs (bird on left) at Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary on April 24, 2015. Photo © Margo Hearne.



Figure 2: Record #6: Figure 1: Record #6: Spotted Redshank (bird on right) with Greater Yellowlegs (bird on left) at Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary on April 24, 2015. Photo © Margo Hearne.



Figure 2: Record #6: Figure 1: Record #6: Spotted Redshank at Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary on April 24, 2015. Photo Margo © Hearne.

Table 1: Records of Spotted Redshank for British Columbia:

- 1.(1) adult winter plumage October 17- November 11, 1970: S.R. Johnson, mobs (RBCM Photo 130) Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner (Crowell and Nehls 1971a, Roberson 1980)
- 2.(1) adult in winter plumage November 29, 1980: Brian M. Kautesk: Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner (Kautesk 1981, Weber 1982, Campbell *et al.* 1990b)
- 3.(1) adult molting to breeding plumage March 1-May 1, 1981: R. Foxall, mobs (RBCM Photo 699) Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner (Weber 1982, Campbell *et al.* 1990b)
- 4.(1) juvenile October 9-17, 1982: Bruce A. MacDonald, mobs (photo) Serpentine Fen, Surrey (Weber 1985, Campbell *et al.* 1990b)
- 5.(1) immature plumage October 12, 2014: Rick Toochin: Delkatla Nature Sanctuary [with 8 Greater Yellowlegs](R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 6.(1) 1st winter plumage April 24-25, 2015: Margo Hearne, Peter Hamel (photo) Delkatla Nature Sanctuary [with 6 Greater Yellowlegs](P. Hamel Pers. Comm.)

Hypothetical Records:

- 1.(1) juvenile August 19, 1992: Elaine Richardson, RT: Chesterman's Beach near Tofino (Toochin *et al.* 2014)

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Ryan Merrill and Peter Hamel for details on the recent Spotted Redshank records from Washington State and the Queen Charlotte Islands. All photographs are used in here with the permission of the photographer and are protected by copyright law. Photographs are not to be reproduced, published or retransmitted on any website without the authorization of the photographer.

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