

The First Record of Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin. Submitted: April 15, 2017.

Introduction and Distribution

The Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*) is a medium-sized shorebird that breeds in grasslands of lowland valleys beside where large rivers intersect large areas of woodland, and the shores of fresh water lakes, also in harbours or at Sawmill Factories with floating logs, and on tundra in the Old World from Finland, where there is a small, but increasing population, across European Russia to Yakutia, Chukotka and North Kamchatka, in Siberia (Hayman *et al.* 1986, O'Brien *et al.* 2006, Brazil 2009, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009, Golovatin *et al.* 2010). This species is a long distance migrant that prefers to feed during migration in brackish or saltwater wetlands (O'Brien *et al.* 2006). The Terek Sandpiper winters on both coastlines of Africa, coastlines along the Arabian Peninsula, east to southern India, also from coastal Bangladesh, south through coastal Burma, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, south into parts of Indonesia, coastal areas of Papua New Guinea, south to coastal regions of Australia, and in small numbers in coastal New Zealand (Hayman *et al.* 1986, Message and Taylor 2005, O'Brien *et al.* 2006). This species is a rare, but increasingly regular vagrant in the spring and fall throughout Europe and has overwintered (Lewington *et al.* 1992). On the East Coast of North America, the Terek Sandpiper is an accidental species with a couple of scattered records with one photographed at the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, Plum Island, Newburyport, Massachusetts, on June 23, 1990 (Stemple *et al.* 1991) and a bird photographed at Craney Island, in Portsmouth Virginia, on August 9, 2008 (Williams 2008, Adams and Haftner 2009, Gilmer 2010). There is a well-documented sight record from Churchill, Manitoba on July 13, 1972 (Godfrey 1986). In Western North America, the Terek Sandpiper is a very rare vagrant in Western Aleutian Islands, of Alaska (West 2008). This species is a casual to accidental vagrant in the Central and Eastern Aleutian Islands, and is a casual vagrant in the Bering Sea region at Nunivak, St. Paul Island, and at Gambel (West 2008). The Terek Sandpiper is also a casual to accidental vagrant at Nome and at Anchorage in Alaska (West 2008). Along the west coast of North America south of Alaska, the Terek Sandpiper is an accidental vagrant with only a couple of records. There is one photographed record for British Columbia from the Sooke area on Vancouver Island from July 21-August 6, 1987 (Goodwill and Goodwill 1988) and a single accepted record for California by the California Bird Records Committee of an adult photographed from the mouth of the Carmel River, Monterey County from August 28 – September 23, 1988 (Wilson and Harriman 1989, Hamilton *et al.* 2007). There is also a record for Baja California Sur, Mexico from April–May 2002 and presumably the same individual in August 2002–February 2003 (Galindo *et al.* 2004). In the Caribbean and mainland South America, reports of single Terek Sandpipers come from Trinidad and Tobago on June 29, 1999 (Taylor 2001), from Barbados on May 1, 2000 (Galindo *et al.* 2004) from Porto Seguro, Bahia, Brazil March 16, 1997 (Mazar Barnett 1997), and a

photographed bird at Parati, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on November 2, 2005 (White *et al.* 2005), and in Argentina from Punta Rasa, Buenos Aires Province from December 1987-January 1988 and from Saladillo, Buenos Aires province in December 1990 (Mazar Barnett and Pearman 2001).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Terek Sandpiper is covered in all standard North American Field Guides. This is a medium-sized shorebird species, but is rather oddly proportioned, appearing short-legged and stocky with a distinctively long upturned bill and steep forehead (Brazil 2009). The Terek Sandpiper measures 22-25 cm in length, with a wingspan measuring 57-59 cm, and weighing 73 grams (Paulson 2005, Brazil 2009). It appears hunched and leans forward when running, forages typically close to water or tidal edge on wet mud (Paulson 2005, O'Brien *et al.* 2006) The Terek Sandpiper wags and teeters its tail up and down similar to a Spotted Sandpiper (*Acitis macularius*) (Paulson 2005, O'Brien *et al.* 2006, Brazil 2009). This species is smaller in overall size than a Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) which measures 27 cm and larger than a Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*) which measures 22 cm in size (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). In the context of British Columbia, this species is so distinctive-looking in both plumage characteristics and behaviour, that there should be no difficulty in identification.

Adult birds in breeding plumage are brownish-grey with prominent black centers to the coverts and scapulars, forming a black bar on the shoulder (Brazil 2009). The head and neck are grey with white streaking and the under-parts are white (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The bill is long, thick, upturned, and has a yellowish colour at the base, with a black tip (Brazil 2009). The eyes are black (O'Brien *et al.* 2006). The legs are short and yellowish-orange to bright orange (Paulson 2005, Brazil 2009). Adults in non-breeding plumage are paler, grey-brown and lack black scapular line (Brazil 2009).

Juvenile birds are darker brown than adults with a less distinct black band on the back and shaft streaks on scapulars and wing-coverts that usually show a diagonal marking towards the tip, forming an anchor shape (Jonsson 1992).

At rest, blackish primary tips are just visible beyond gray-brown tertial feathers, and reach the tail tip (Brazil 2009). In flight, grey-brown wing-coverts contrast with almost black leading edge of primaries and greater covert bar and white secondaries form a prominent white trailing edge (Message and Taylor 2005, Brazil 2009). The tail and rump are both gray and the toes don't protrude beyond the tail tip (Brazil 2009). Flight style is rapid and erratic, with deep wing-beats, but often flies low along the tideline, with shallow, fluttering wing-beats on bowed wings, similar to a Spotted Sandpiper (Message and Taylor 2005).

The Terek Sandpiper makes various whistled calls, in a short series of clear liquid notes making “pwee-wee-wee” or a clattering “wick-a-wick-a” (Brazil 2009).

Occurrence and Documentation

The Terek Sandpiper is an accidental vagrant to British Columbia with only one photographic record of an adult found by the late Vic and Peggy Goodwill at the Goodridge Peninsula in Sooke and stayed from July 21- August 6, 1987 (Goodwill and Goodwill 1987). The timing of the Sooke bird and the California record fit well with the timing of when adult Terek Sandpipers conduct their fall migration (O’Brien *et al.* 2006). Adults depart breeding grounds from early July to August with fall migration taking place from early July to November (O’Brien *et al.* 2006). Spring migration starts in late March and April with birds arriving at breeding areas in Finland and southern locations in early May and areas of northern Russia in June (O’Brien *et al.* 2006). It is highly likely that the birds that were found in British Columbia and California overshot into North America in the spring migration period and summered somewhere in Alaska before heading south, down the west coast of North America, where they were found in July and August which fits the migration timing perfectly. Evidence for this comes from May and June records of Terek Sandpipers in Alaska (Howell *et al.* 2011). A good recent example is of an adult Terek Sandpiper found in Anchorage, Alaska at the mouth of Chester Creek south to Earthquake Park from June 5 – July 8, 2015 (Anchorage Audubon Society 2017). This was the 8th record for the Upper Cook Inlet Region with the previous 7 records spanning the dates of June 10 – August 14 (Anchorage Audubon Society 2017). Juvenile Terek Sandpiper departs the breeding grounds later than adults and move south from August to September (O’Brien *et al.* 2006). Though to date there are no records of juvenile Terek Sandpipers along the west coast of North America south of Alaska, it is entirely possible a future record will be found during this period.

The Terek Sandpiper is a species that should be looked for in the future by keen observers at shorebird hotspots throughout British Columbia. Though coastal locations are the most likely for a vagrant bird, a hotspot like Salmon Arm in the interior of the province is also a logical spot for this species to turn up since they do migrate through overland areas (O’Brien *et al.* 2006). Given the frequency of Alaskan records, it is highly likely the Terek Sandpiper will be found in British Columbia again in the future.



Figure 1: Record #1: Terek Sandpiper adult at the Goodridge Peninsula in Sooke on July 22, 1987. Photo © Tim Zurowski.

Table 1: Records of Terek Sandpiper for British Columbia:

1.(1) adult breeding plumage July 21-August 6, 1987: Vic Goodwill, mobs (RBCM Photo 1159)
Goodridge Peninsula, Sooke (Goodwill and Goodwill 1988)

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