

## **Status and Occurrence of Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*) in British Columbia.**

**By Rick Toochin.**

### **Introduction and Distribution**

The Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*) is a large species of shorebird found exclusively in eastern Asia (Paulson 1993). This species has a restricted breeding range found only in north-eastern Siberia in the Yakutia, Chukotka, and Koryakia regions (Brazil 2009). The Great Knot winters from coastal India, throughout South East Asia to Australia (Hayman *et al.* 1986). This species migrates from the wintering grounds to the breeding grounds in April and May and from the breeding grounds to the wintering grounds from August to October (O'Brien *et al.* 2006). In North America, the Great Knot is a casual spring migrant in the Western and Central Aleutian Islands and along the Bering Sea coast of Alaska from Cape Prince of Wales to Nome and from St. Paul and St. Lawrence Islands (West 2008). It is accidental in the fall with one record from Gambell (West 2008). Along the West Coast of North America, south of Alaska, the Great Knot is an accidental species with only a handful of records. There is no record for this species in California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2014). In Oregon there is only one state record accepted by the Oregon Bird Records Committee of a juvenile photographed at Bandon in Coos County from September 1-17, 1990 (Lethaby and Gilligan 1992, OFO 2012). There is also one accepted record for Washington State by the Washington Bird Records Committee of an adult seen at La Push on September 6, 1979 (Tweit and Paulson 1994, Wahl *et al.* 2005). In British Columbia, the Great Knot is an accidental species with a couple of well- documented sight records (Plath 2000, Campbell *et al.* 2001, Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). Incredibly, an adult Great Knot was photographed at Winfield Locks and Dam, in Putnam County, West Virginia on August 13-14, 2007 (e-bird database 2015). The Great Knot is accidental anywhere in Western Europe where there are at least 4 documented records (Lewington *et al.* 1992).

### **Identification and Similar Species**

The identification of the Great Knot is covered in some North American field guides,. The Great Knot is a large species measuring 26-28 cm (10.5 inches) in length, with a wingspan of 62-66 cm and a weight of 115-248 grams (O'Brien *et al.* 2006). In all plumages recalls a Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*) in general size and structure, but is noticeably larger (Paulson 1993, O'Brien *et al.* 2006). Amazingly in breeding plumage, the pattern on the wings can recall a Surf-bird (*Calidris virgata*), but the longer bill, legs and more attenuated rear help eliminate the Great Knot from these two this species (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). For a more detailed summary of distinguishing Great Knot from the Red Knot, observers are encouraged to read Hayman *et al.* (1986) or Paulson (1993).

The adult in breeding plumage is unmistakable and shouldn't be confused with any other *Calidris*-type wader (Paulson 1993). The bill is thick at the base, but is long in shape and dark,

slightly decurved and tapered at the tip (Message and Taylor 2005). The small round head has thin grayish streaks with thick dark streaks that are blacker on the crown (Brazil 2009). The eyes are dark and the throat white (Message and Taylor 2005). The nape, neck and sides of the neck are heavily dark spotted with light edges that extend across the upper chest. The lower breast is white with heavy dark arrowhead shaped spots that extend down to the undertail coverts. The legs are long and darkish-gray (Paulson 1993). The back has dark streaks with light edges (Paulson 1993). The folded wings are long and the dark primaries extend past the tail tip (Paulson 2005). The coverts and tertials are gray with light edges to the feathers (Message and Taylor 2005). The upper scapulars are rusty coloured with dark edges and tips to the feathers (Message and Taylor 2005). In flight the wings are long with the innerwing-coverts showing a distinct white wing bar that extends into the shafts of the primaries (Hayman *et al.* 1986, Paulson 2005). The underside of the wings is pure white (Message and Taylor 2005). The rump is white, with some dark streaks on the upper area with the lower area pure white (Paulson 1993). In flight the rump sharply contrasts with the gray tail (Message and Taylor 2005).

In juvenile plumage the overall shape and structure is the same as in the adult (Message and Taylor 2005). The crown is dark with grayish streaks with a pale face and dark eyes (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The neck has dark spots that extend down onto the sides of the neck and chest (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The breast and flanks are spotted dark brown and the breast has suffused brownish buff (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The back and wings show strongly contrasting whitish-buff fringes with centers of scapulars dark brown (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The coverts are pale brown with dark shaft-streak and a subterminal mark (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The legs are long and are a darkish greenish to greenish-yellow (Paulson 1993).

In winter plumage the upperparts are streaked, with the more prominent streaks found on the crown and hindneck (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The breast-sides show obscurely dark with some gray or blackish spotting (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The legs are gray to greenish (Paulson 2005).

The Great Knot is a rather silent species, but does give the occasional disyllabic “*nyut-nyut*” call notes (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The first syllabic part of the call is longer, with a rising inflection, and the second part is short and lower pitched (Hayman *et al.* 1986). This call is similar to that of the Red Knot (O’Brien *et al.* 2006).

### **Occurrence and Documentation**

The Great Knot is an accidental species in British Columbia with only 2 records. The first record was found by experienced observer Michael Force at the foot of 112<sup>th</sup> Street, in Boundary Bay, in Delta on May 13, 1987 (Campbell *et al.* 2001, Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). It was identified as a first year bird that was in the company of Black-bellied Plovers and very good

detailed field descriptions were made of this bird (Campbell *et al.* 2001, Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The second record was a bird found by experienced observers Mike Toochin, Mark Wynja and Rick Toochin (Campbell *et al.* 2001, Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The bird was found at Iona Island on the amazing date of January 15, 1998 (Campbell *et al.* 2001, Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The bird was first observed at close range sitting on the frozen Outer Pond with Dunlin and later by the old Outflow Pond with Long-billed Dowitchers and Dunlin (R. Toochin Pers. Obs.). This bird was well documented by written descriptions and was accepted by the Vancouver Rare Bird Committee and was published in Volume 4 of the Birds of British Columbia (Plath 2000, Campbell *et al.* 2001). There are currently only 4 records along the west coast south of Alaska. There are far too few records to establish a vagrancy pattern in British Columbia or along the west coast. The Great Knot likes to feed in migration on mudflats and sandy beaches (Paulson 2005). Observers are encouraged to carefully check through flocks of migrating shorebirds at local shorebird hotspots. It is also encouraged that observers carefully check all late occurring and juvenile Red Knots in the fall. Adult Great Knots are very distinctive and would be fairly obvious to any keen shorebird observer. This species is highly migratory in eastern Asia and there is always a chance of another record being found in British Columbia in the future.

**Table 1: Records of Great Knot for British Columbia:**

- 1.(1) 1<sup>st</sup> year May 13, 1987: Michael Force: foot of 112<sup>th</sup> St., Boundary Bay, Delta (Plath 2000, Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 2.(1) winter plumage January 15, 1998: Mike Toochin, Rick Toochin, Mark Wynja: Iona Island, Richmond (Bowling 1998b, Plath 2000, Campbell *et al.* 2001)

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