

Status and Occurrence of Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Tootchin.

Introduction and Distribution

The Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) is an elegant species of shorebird that breeds in the Old World from Great Britain to Scandinavia, and across northern Russia east to Siberia (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The Wood Sandpiper is a migratory species that winters from Africa to South East Asia (Hayman *et al.* 1986). In North America, the Wood Sandpiper is only regular in the Western Aleutian Islands (where it has bred) and the Bering Sea region (West 2008). In the rest of Alaska, this species is an accidentally occurring species with records from many parts of the state (West 2008). Along the west coast, south of Alaska, the Wood Sandpiper is an accidental species with just a handful of records. There is only 1 accepted record for Washington State by the Washington Bird Records Committee (WBRC 2014). In Oregon, there is only 1 accepted state record by the Oregon Bird Records Committee (OFO 2012). In California, there are only 2 accepted state records by the California Bird Records Committee (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2014). In British Columbia, there are only 2 Provincial records (Hamel and Hearne 1994, Tootchin *et al.* 2014). The Wood Sandpiper has also occurred as an accidental in the Yukon (Eckert 1996), Newfoundland and Labrador (Mactavish 1999), and New York State (Paulson 2005).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Wood Sandpiper is covered in most North American field guides. This species is in between the size of a Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) which measures 27 cm in length and has a wingspan of 23 cm and a Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*) which measures 22 cm in length and has a wingspan of 22 cm (Paulson 2005, O' Brien *et al.* 2006). The Wood Sandpiper is similar enough to both species that it could be passed off as either one by less experienced observers (Paulson 2005). The Wood Sandpiper measures 21 cm in length with a wingspan of 35 cm (Paulson 2005, O' Brien *et al.* 2006). The Wood Sandpiper likes to feed in fresh water ponds, estuaries, coastal marshes, and shallow pools (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). This species can appear on its own or can be loosely in the company of other "*Tringa*" species, so careful attention to detail should be given to any different looking bird (Paulson 2005).

The adult breeding-plumaged Wood Sandpiper has a dark crown with a prominent white supercilium that goes from the top of the bill and over and past the dark eye (Hayman *et al.* 1986). There is a dark line below the white line that goes from the base of the bill through and past the eye (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The bill is short with a pale greenish-yellow base and dark tip (Jonsson 1992). The head, neck, back have fine dark spots (Mullarney and

Zetterstrom 2009). The wings are dark with prominent white spots (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The upper wing in flight is dark with no wing bars (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The underwing is pale (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The breast along the flanks has dark streaks, but there is no distinct breast band (O' Brien *et al.* 2006). The belly is white (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The rump is fully white, and the tail is heavily barred with black and white bars (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The legs are long in length and are greenish-yellow and project past the tail tip in flight (Hayman *et al.* 1986).

In juvenile plumage, the Wood Sandpiper has a very prominent strong, white, eye stripe that runs from the top of the bill, over and past the eye (Jonsson 1992). Below the white line is a dark, line that runs from the base of the bill through and past the eye (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The crown is dark and the neck is dark with fine dark streaks that extend down across the breast (Paulson 2005). The belly to the undertail coverts is white (Paulson 2005). The wings are dark with prominent pale brown spots (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The wing pattern is similar to the adult (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The rump is all white and the tail pattern is the same as the adult (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The legs are long and greenish-yellow (Paulson 2005).

The flight call note of the Wood Sandpiper is a quick, distinctive, high-pitched whistling “*chiff-if-if*” with all syllables staying on the same note (Paulson 2005). The alarm call is a persistent “*gip gip*” (Paulson 2005).

The Lesser Yellowlegs in all ages is larger overall, with a larger all dark bill and bright yellow legs and feet (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The flight calls are different from the Wood Sandpiper. The Lesser Yellowlegs gives a high-pitched clear “*tew*” that is given as a single call or in a series of 2-4 notes (Sibley 2000).

The Solitary Sandpiper in all ages is slightly smaller than the Wood Sandpiper (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The species always has a strong eye ring, and only a dark line from the base of the bill towards the eye (Sibley 2000). Both the rump and central tail feathers are dark with the outer tail feathers barred black and white (Sibley 2000). The flight calls are a soft two-part “*tewitt-weet*” which is often repeated (Sibley 2000).

Occurrence and Documentation

In British Columbia, the Wood Sandpiper is an accidental species. There are only 2 provincial records, both were photographed, and both birds were found late in the fall. The first provincial record was a juvenile found on November 3-9, 1994, at the Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary by Peter Hamel and Margo Hearne (Hamel and Hearne 1994). The second record for British Columbia was a bird discovered by accident by a photographer at the Reifel Bird Sanctuary on October 12

& 16, 2010 (Toochin *et al.* 2014). The original observer was not sure which species of shorebird they had photographed. After posting the pictures to a local chat group, many readers realized it was, in fact, a Wood Sandpiper and this action allowed for others to see and photograph the bird. A third bird reported from Pacific Rim National Park on July 21, 1995, was proven through photographs to be a Lesser Yellowlegs (R. Toochin Pers. Obs.). The Wood Sandpiper is surprisingly rare south of Alaska, given that it is an annual species in spring and fall migration and even regularly breeds on the western and central Aleutian Islands (West 2008). This species is known to spend a large amount of time feeding in one area before flying a long distance non-stop to its wintering grounds (O'Brien *et al.* 2006). The Wood Sandpiper is only a little smaller than a Lesser Yellowlegs and looks similar to that species (Message and Taylor 2005). It is advised that all late Lesser Yellowlegs reports in the fall be carefully scrutinized for this potential species. As more and more observers check shorebird hot spots, it is highly likely another Wood Sandpiper will turn up in the future in British Columbia.



Figure 1: Record #:1: Wood Sandpiper juvenile at Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary, Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands on November 4, 1994. Photo © Margo Hearne.



Figure 2: Record #:2: Wood Sandpiper juvenile at the Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner on October 16, 2010. Photo © Peter Candido

Table 1: Records of Wood Sandpiper for British Columbia:

- 1.(1) juvenile November 3-9, 1994: Peter Hamel, mobs (photo) Delkatla, Masset, QCI
(Hamel and Hearne 1994)
- 2.(1) juvenile October 12 & 16, 2010: Alan and Donna MacKenzie, mobs (photo) Reifel
Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner (Toochin *et al.* 2014)

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Peter Hamel and Margo Hearne for allowing me to use their photograph of a juvenile Wood Sandpiper from the Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary in Masset. I also wish to thank Peter Candido for allowing me to use his photograph of a juvenile Wood Sandpiper from the Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary in Delta. All photos are used with permission of the photographer and are fully 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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