

WV BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE REPORT FORM

Please Type or Print Legibly

Species: Number: (leave blank)

Location: Date: Time:

Bird Seen: To: Age/Sex:

Description: In lieu of physical material substantiating a record (e.g., specimen, diagnostic photograph, vocal recordings) a complete written description can serve as verification for the biological record. Please be as thorough as your field notes allow. Do not feel constrained by the space provided. Additional supporting descriptions/illustrations may be attached. Note that photographs or recordings WILL NOT BE RETURNED but become part of the permanent record for the observation.

Structure: (Overall size and shape plus details on the head, feet, tail, etc.)

The bird was associating with four Dunlin and had the same size and general shape. The standard field guides indicate that both species are in fact the same size: 8.5 inches. The bill was long, black, and downcurved. Although the bill of Curlew Sandpiper is slightly longer than that of Dunlin, I was not able to note the difference due to the long distance from which I was observing the bird (100 to 150 yards). Besides, the difference is not enough to be able to reliably separate the two species in the field. The legs were black and relatively short, similar to those of the Dunlin. And although the legs of Curlew Sandpiper are slightly longer than those of Dunlin, I was not able to note the difference because the birds spent much of the time in water. The bird's size relative to that of the Dunlin and the downcurved bill can be seen in photographs I have submitted with this report.

Plumage: (e.g. markings, coloration, molt)

The bird was in winter plumage and was superficially similar to the winter-plumaged Dunlin. In general it had gray upperparts and whitish underparts. The upperparts were of a more pure gray color than the brownish-gray upperparts of the Dunlin. There were also a couple of other distinguishing field marks that differed from those of Dunlin. When I first noticed it, it struck me right away that the bird was very different than a Dunlin. The first field mark that stood out (even through my binoculars from 100 to 150 yards away) was a very prominent whitish supercilium that the Dunlin did not have. And as I watched the bird, I noted that it had a completely white rump. I was able to see the white rump while the bird was preening and again when it flew a short distance. Dunlin have a dark center to their rump. The white rump can be seen in photographs I have submitted with this report.

Description of any vocalizations, if heard:

N/A

Description of behavior:

The bird was loosely associating with four Dunlin, although it generally kept itself slightly apart from the other birds. During the times I observed it, the bird divided its time between foraging at the edge of the water (occasionally moving into the water up to its belly) and resting and preening along the shoreline.

Incidentally, I read dublinbirding.ie, a European website upon returning home. It discusses the differences between Curlew Sandpipers and Dunlin. One of the behavioral differences is that "Curlew Sandpipers have longer legs than Dunlin and can sometimes wade chest-deep in water. Dunlin tend to feed in slightly shallower water."

Habitat: (General and Specific)

Tygart Lake is a man-made reservoir. In the early fall, the Army Corps of Engineers draws down the water level, leaving huge areas of exposed rock and mud. The shoreline is generally steep and rocky which does not provide good habitat for shorebirds. However, at the spot where I observed the bird, there is a mudflat where a small rivulet runs into the water of the lake. This is traditionally a good location for shorebirds.

Circumstances of observation: (Include details of distance to bird, optics employed, lighting in relation to observer and the bird)

I observed the bird through my binoculars and spotting scope from 100 to 150 yards away. My binoculars are 8 x 42 Vortex Vipers and my spotting scope is a Kowa TSN-661. I did not attempt to get closer because it was a rainy day, the shoreline was muddy, and I was in dress shoes. (I stopped by Tygart Lake on my way home from work).

The day was overcast and windy with intermittent periods of rain. Despite the inclement weather, viewing conditions were generally good during the periods when it was not raining. The gloomy weather meant that there was no glare that would hinder viewing.

Previous experience with this species:

I have had relatively extensive experience with winter-plumaged Curlew Sandpipers, having observed and studied many dozens of birds in the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Tunisia, Gambia, Senegal, and Djibouti. During my trip to Tunisia, my group observed Curlew Sandpipers and Dunlin together, and I specifically asked my British guide to point out the differences between the two species so that I could learn and improve my birding skills. I noted most of these differences during my observation of the bird in question.

Experiences with similarly appearing species which are eliminated by your description: (Please be specific)

Other shorebirds with white rumps include White-rumped Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, both yellowlegs, Willet, and Hudsonian Godwit. The yellowlegs, Willet, and godwit cannot conceivably be confused with Curlew Sandpiper because they are all much larger, have very long legs (none of which are black except those of the godwit), and straight to slightly upcurved bills. The White-rumped Sandpiper and Stilt Sandpiper are rather similar to Curlew Sandpiper. Although White-rumped Sandpiper is somewhat similar to Curlew Sandpiper, it can be ruled out because it is smaller (7.5 inches vs. 8.5 inches), has streakier plumage and a much shorter straight bill. A winter-plumaged Stilt Sandpiper is similar to Curlew Sandpiper (grayish upperparts and a prominent white supercilium) but has very long greenish legs. (At first glance I thought I was looking at a Stilt Sandpiper until I noticed the short black legs).

Other observers: (Names, Addresses, E-mail please)

If the others agree with your identification they can sign this form here. If they care to provide additional details they can submit their own report.

N/A

Additional observer signature:

Additional observer signature:

Additional observer signature:

Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and especially how did these influence this description:

During my observation of the bird, there were three periods of heavy rain which caused me to retreat to my car until the squalls passed. (None were more than four or five minutes each and afterwards I was able to get out and look at the bird again). I used the time in my car to consult "The Sibley Guide to Birds" to compare my field notes to the information in the field guide and to note additional field marks that I should look for to aid in the the identification. After I returned home I compared my field notes to the information contained in the "National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America" (Fifth Edition) and the "Princeton Field Guide to the Birds of Europe". I also looked at photographs of winter-plumaged Curlew Sandpipers on the internet that afternoon. All these sources confirmed my confidence in the identification of the bird.

How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?

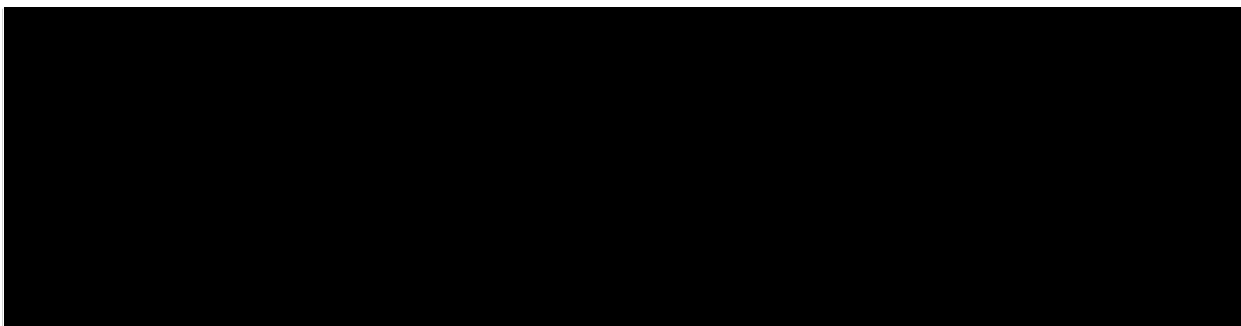
This description was written three weeks after the observation, but was based on extensive notes I took in the field while observing the bird as well as details I recalled.

Name:

Address:

Date:

Signature:



Mail to: WV Bird Records Committee
Attn: Wil Hershberger
170 Stallion Ct..
Hedgesville, WV 25427
Or E-mail to: wilhershberger@mac.com

Please use the space below to add any appropriate details you feel were missing from the above form or to expand on any answers whose allotted space was insufficient for a complete response:

I am submitting four photographs with this report. Two are as originally taken through my spotting scope and two are enlargements of the first two. One set of photographs depicts the bird in question with two Dunlin and shows its size in relation to the Dunlin. The other shows the bird's downcurved bill. All of the photographs depict the white rump. Unfortunately, the quality of these photographs is poor, since they were taken at a distance of 100 to 150 yards in windy conditions, which caused my spotting scope to vibrate.

Once I was confident of the identification of this bird, I called two other birders, [REDACTED] informing them that I found what I thought was a Curlew Sandpiper. I wanted others to see the bird and hopefully confirm its identification. Both birders live in Morgantown, which is about 45 minutes from Tygart Lake. (I would never have called anyone to come so far unless I was sure about my sighting). Unfortunately, by the time they arrived the bird had gone. I never saw the bird leave, since it apparently left during one of the periods in which it was raining and I was taking shelter in my car. [REDACTED] arrived first, and [REDACTED] arrived a little later with two other birders, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Terry Bronson stayed a while and looked without success, and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] stayed until dark, looking all along the shoreline, also without success. [REDACTED] and I returned to Tygart Lake the next day (at different times and not together) and tried to relocate the bird, but we never did.

I did not prepare this report until three weeks after the sighting. I initially did not think that my photographs were adequate to establish a first state record (and maybe they are not). It wasn't until just a few days ago that I recalled hearing of a website called Whatbird where members can submit pictures of birds and get the opinions of others about a bird's identification. I therefore registered with Whatbird and submitted my photographs. Four members looked at my pictures and three out of the four thought the bird looked good for Curlew Sandpiper, based on the photographs and my description. The fourth thought better photographs would be needed. This feedback prompted me to submit this report.







