Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* in Bolivia: first documented record for South America

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Un Correlimos Acuminado *Calidris acuminata* fue hallado el 14 de noviembre de 2014 en Laguna Colorada, Bolivia. Numerosas fotografías fueron tomadas para documentar este ejemplar. Una combinación de características observadas en las fotografías claramente elimina otras especies de correlimos que se podría confundir con esta especie. Correlimos Acuminado reproduce en el noroeste de Rusia y pasa los meses no reproductivos en Australasia. Son visitantes regulares pero nómadas raros en Norteamérica, especialmente a lo largo de la costa del Pacífico. Este récord representa el primer registro de la especie en Sudamérica.

On 14 November 2014, at Laguna Colorada, in the Eduardo Avaroa Andean Fauna National Reserve, Bolivia, near the Chilean border, while observing three Baird's Sandpipers *Calidris bairdii* and a Puna Plover *Charadrius alticola* feeding near the shore of the lagoon at 16h30, I noticed a larger sandpiper foraging nearby. It was initially passed off as a Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, due to its larger body and longer neck and legs compared to the nearby Baird's Sandpipers. A few photographs were taken, however, and when reviewing them I immediately realised it was a juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *C. acuminata*. More photographs were taken as it continued foraging nearby, along the shore. I observed the bird for c.20 minutes before I had to leave the area.

Description

The following is based on notes taken the day after the sighting and my photographs. *Size, shape and structure*.—Medium-sized sandpiper, slightly larger than Baird's Sandpiper, with longer legs and a more elongated neck. Folded primaries did not extend beyond the tail tip. Heavy-chested look apparent. *Head*.—Crown bright rufous with dark streaks extending towards nape. Contrasting sharply with dark crown was a long white supercilium that lacked distinct streaking. Distinct white eye-ring. Lores and ear-coverts rufous/brown. Neck-sides streaked brown, and chin and throat white. *Upperparts*.—Boldly streaked mantle, with dark brown streaks; dark rump and uppertail-coverts. *Underparts*.—Breast buff, with necklace of fine rufous streaking across upper breast. Belly, flanks and undertail-coverts white. *Wings*.—Scapulars and coverts dark with buffy fringes. Tertials dark with pale, buffy fringes. Primaries did not visibly project beyond tail. *Tail*.—Not clearly visible. *Bare parts*.—Bill dark, except slight pale base, and slim with slightly decurved tip. Long, yellow/green legs. *Vocalisations*.—None heard.

Identification

The identification of sandpipers can be tricky, especially when trying to separate species with similar morphology. My photographs (Figs. 1–3) highlight key characteristics that identify the Bolivian bird as a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.

Nine species of *Calidris* regularly spend the non-breeding season in South America[9]. Of these, Pectoral Sandpiper is the most similar in appearance to Sharp-tailed Sandpiper[1]. Both are similar-sized, with similar bill lengths and shapes, and have yellow/green legs[8]. On other continents, the two species are sometimes found together[10]. Juvenile Pectoral Sandpiper can be separated from juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper by (1) less contrasting crown; (2) not as bold supercilium that does not broaden behind the eye; and, most noticeably, (3) by the heavily streaked breast[1,2,8,10]. All plumages of Pectoral Sandpiper are very similar, unlike the distinct plumages based on age and season of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper[1]. Therefore, other age and plumage characteristics of Pectoral Sandpipers are not discussed here.

Non-vagrant *Calidris* species that spend the non-breeding season in South America can also all be safely eliminated. Species such as Baird's Sandpiper and White-rumped Sandpiper *C. fuscicollis* are smaller, have black legs, and their primary tips extend well beyond the tail[8]. White-rumped Sandpiper also usually has an all-white rump[8,10].

Other species of Eurasian sandpipers can also be eliminated. Juvenile Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* is probably the only species that could be potentially confused with juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper[1]. It can also show bright buff on the breast, bright upperparts and occasionally has similarly coloured legs[1], but is differentiated by its larger body, less boldly patterned head and lack of extensive white belly[1,2,8]. Ruff also has long tertials,

Figures 1–3. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*, Laguna Colorada, Eduardo Avaroa Andean Fauna National Reserve, Bolivia, 14 November 2014 (Will H. Knowlton)

creating the appearance of a short, or non-existent primary projection[8].

Adult Sharp-tailed Sandpipers in basic plumage have similar plumage compared to juveniles, but the colours are not as bright and sharp, especially on the wing-coverts[1]. The distinctly bright and crisp rufous fringes to the scapulars and wing-coverts, along with the bright buffy chest, identify the Bolivian bird as a juvenile. The combination of characters, such as a brightly coloured crown contrasting sharply with the supercilium that broadens behind the eye and a buff-coloured breast that is not highly streaked, match only one species: Sharp-tailed Sandpiper[1]. This species' behaviour and structure are most similar to those of Pectoral Sandpiper.

Distribution and occurrence

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is a long-distance migrant that breeds over a restricted area of Arctic coastal tundra in north-east Russia and winters in Australasia[3,6]. Adults commence southbound migration in July via an inland continental route through Asia[3]. Juveniles start to move in late August, with many making a detour en route to western Alaska[3,6], where they re-fuel for c.1 month, some remaining as late as mid November before presumably making a non-stop flight south to their wintering grounds[4,6]. In North America, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers are rare, but regular, autumn migrants outside of Alaska, especially along the northern Pacific coast[6]. It is therefore possible that small numbers regularly winter in the Neotropics, just as apparently occurs among Pectoral Sandpipers in Africa[5].

This observation is the southernmost in the Americas, and is the first published record of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper for Bolivia and South America. The latitude where this record was made is similar to that of the non-breeding range in Australasia. Given that, on average, 20–25 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper are found annually along the Pacific coast of North America, south of Alaska, it is interesting that this is the first record for South America[7]. This is presumably an artefact of limited coverage and lack of knowledge of the species there among field ornithologists.

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