

FIRST DUNLIN AND WESTERN Tanager for Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba

by W. J. WALLEY*

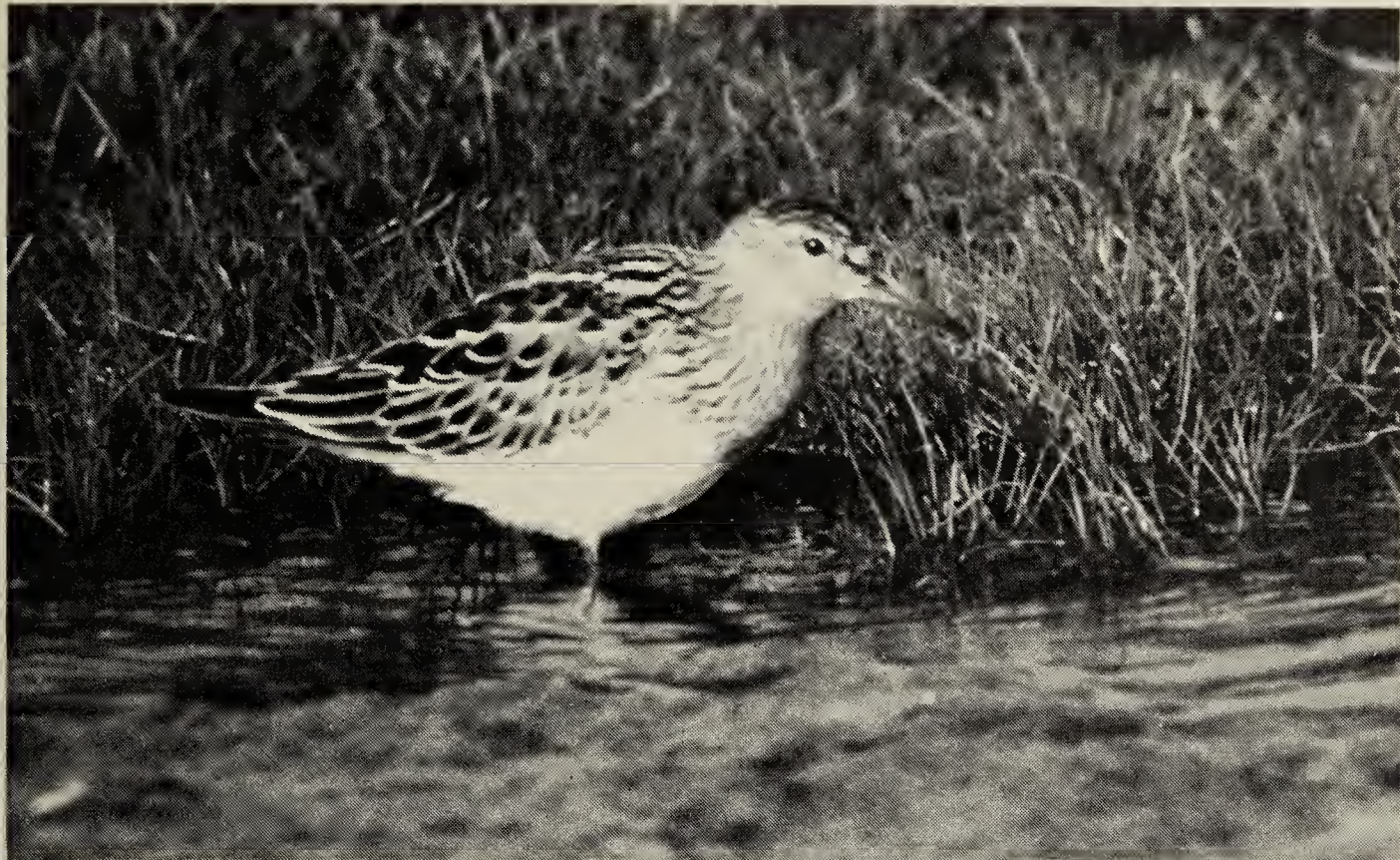
DUNLIN. Lack of shore bird habitat in Riding Mountain National Park has resulted in the identification of relatively few species of this suborder of the Charadriiformes. Of 32 species of shore birds which are known to occur regularly in Manitoba, either as summer residents or migrants, only 22 had been listed for the park prior to this sighting of the Dunlin. Of these, 12 have been classified as being very rare.^{4 5}

At approximately 9 a.m. on November 3, 1973, I identified and photographed the only Dunlin ever recorded for Riding Mountain National Park when one was seen on the north shore of Clear Lake. The temperature that clear, calm morning was -10.5° C. About 6 inches of snow covered the ground. Except for small isolated areas of shallow water close to and at the edge of the shore, ice had formed for about 50 to 60 feet out into the lake. Visibility beyond the edge of the ice-water interface was very poor due to the mist which was rising from the lake.

The bird was first noticed as it foraged in the shallows. Shore birds are often difficult to identify, especially in fall plumage. However, the rather long decurved bill observed in this bird eliminated most species and the unpatterned grey back and grey suffusion across the breast described for the Dunlin in fall and winter plumage by Godfrey were also observed in this bird.³ Bent states that some writers have noted that Dunlins are nervous and active while feeding, but he found that they were sluggish and inactive and easily approached.¹ The bird seen on November 3 was extremely active and seemed to be frantic in its search for food. With a careful approach I was able to come to within 8 feet of it. Ice was observed on its outer tail feathers causing them to bend downward when the tail was otherwise held in a horizontal plane. Suddenly it took flight into the mist giving alarm calls, only to return to the same spot in a few minutes and resume foraging.

This bird was doubtless a straggler as Bent states that the southern migration separates into two widely divergent routes with only stragglers in between.¹ One route is southward along the Pacific coast; the other is southeastward along the west coast of Hudson Bay, then across the eastern Great Lakes to the New England coast

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Pectoral Sandpiper, Herschel Island, Y.T.

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and south. He further states that the Dunlin seems to be a rare bird in fall migration in the interior provinces of Canada and that his Manitoba correspondents had no fall records. However, the sighting at this time of year may not be so unusual as Wayne notes that the Dunlin is a very hardy bird — not appearing to be affected by temperatures as low as 6° F. (-14.4° C.).⁶ Furthermore, Bent does give a previous late date of fall departure from Manitoba — October 31 at Lake Winnipeg.¹ According to Godfrey, this holartic species winters from Alaska to Baja California on the west coast and from Massachusetts to Florida and the Gulf Coast in the U.S.A.³

WESTERN TANAGER. On Sunday, May 25, 1975 the Dauphin-based Inter-mountain Naturalists Society combined a spring canoeing and bird migration observation trip near the isthmus between Clear and South lakes in Riding Mountain National Park. The isthmus, which is about 1/2 mile in length and from 20 to 100 feet in

width, is an excellent area in which to observe birds, especially warblers in spring migration. However, on this day strong southwesterly winds caused the birds to seek shelter in the woods at the east and west sides of the isthmus.

Prior to canoeing, a short excursion was made into the woods on the west side of the isthmus. It was just after 11 a.m. when Joan Wells spotted a different bird and turned our attention to it. It was in an aspen less than 20 yards away and about 20 feet up. With its back toward us we could see that it was basically yellow, though not a brilliant yellow such as is seen in many of the warblers. It had black wings with two distinct light wing bars and a black band over the back. We did not notice that the wing bars were a light yellow, probably because we observed the shaded side of the bird only. Suddenly it turned on the branch and faced us. The reddish head and throat that it displayed indicated that it was either a Western Tanager or a female Scarlet Tanager — I was not that familiar with these birds. After perching for about

20 seconds it flew off through the trees along the lakeshore toward the isthmus. About 65 yards away it perched. As we began our approach the bird took flight again and it was at this time that I believed I saw 2 yellow birds with black back bands. I did not confuse these with female Northern (Baltimore) Orioles which were also in the area. Upon checking our field guides, the male Western Tanager was confirmed — the first record of this species occurring in the park. Then Judy Walley said that she had definitely seen 2 of these birds when they were first seen perched, but one did not have the red on the head and throat. However, she could not remember seeing wing bars hence there is a possibility that the other bird she saw was a female Scarlet Tanager, but her experience in birding has been limited and she says she may have overlooked the presence of wing bars. From the observations made, there may have been as many as 3 Western Tanagers — 2 males and a female but we could not be sure. The sighting of the male was the only positive identification.

Cuthbert observed a male Western Tanager in the Carberry Spruce Woods area of Manitoba on June 16, 1973.² He also cited the records of the late A. J. Lawrence from "Chickadee Notes" in the *Winnipeg Free Press*. These included pairs seen at St. Vital, Brandon and Starbuck in June, 1933, July, 1938 and early July, 1963, respectively. Sightings of single birds have been made at Ponemah and Winnipeg.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. I would like to thank Ron Rutledge, Park Naturalist, for providing information on the temperature at Clear Lake for November 3, 1973.

¹BENT, A. C. 1929 (Dover Edition 1962). *Life histories of North American shore birds*. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull. 146.

²CUTHBERT, CALVIN. 1974. *Western Tanager sighting in Manitoba*. Blue Jay 32:241-242.

³GODFREY, W. E. 1966. *The birds of Canada*. Natl. Mus. of Canada Bull. 203, Ottawa. 428 pp.

⁴MANITOBA MUSEUM OF MAN AND NATURE. 1974. *Field check list of Manitoba birds*. Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, Winnipeg.

⁵PARKS CANADA. 1974. *List of birds Riding Mountain National Park*. Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Canada.

⁶WAYNE, A. T. 1910. *Birds of South Carolina*. Contributions from the Charleston Museum No. 1. (In Bent, A.C. 1929. Life histories of North American shore birds. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull. 146).



SASKATCHEWAN CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 1975

List the number of each bird species seen on the one best day from Saturday, December 20, 1975, through Sunday, January 4, 1976. Each area should be a circle, 15 miles in diameter. See the March, 1975, *Blue Jay* for examples and details. Send reports as soon as possible and by January 12, 1976, at the latest, to

**Mrs. Mary Houston,
863 University Drive,
Saskatoon, Sask. S7N 0J8.**

CHRISTMAS MAMMAL COUNT 1975

For the 3rd year, Wayne Harris will be compiling reports of mammals seen during the Christmas Bird Counts. When making your Christmas Bird Count, please note the number of each species of mammal seen and the species of tracks that you can positively identify. Last year 16 of the 44 bird counts reported 15 species of mammals. Send the results to Mary Houston, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, S7N 0J8, by January 12, 1976.