



# Birds Australia Rarities Committee Unusual Record Report Form

<b>Full Name:</b> Bill Betts (BB), Dan Mantle (DM) & Plaxy Barratt (PB), and Robyn Pickering (RP).	Office Use
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<b>Species Name:</b> <b>Baird's Sandpiper</b>	<b>Scientific Name:</b> <i>Calidris bairdii</i>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nairns, Peel Inlet, Mandurah, WA (first found and photographed by BB)</li> <li>South Yunderup, Peel Inlet, WA (re-found and distantly photographed by DM, PB, and RP)</li> <li>Lake McLarty, WA (near Peel Inlet) (re-found by BB and Birdlife Australia WA branch outing)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15<sup>th</sup> December 2016, 7.06am – 7.09am</li> <li>14<sup>th</sup> January 2017; 9.30am – 11.30am (disappeared presumably to Lake McLarty where it was re-found later in the day, before returning to South Yunderup until the 17<sup>th</sup> January).</li> <li>14<sup>th</sup> January 2017, 4.45pm (and again at first light on the 15<sup>th</sup> January before relocating back to South Yunderup – only ~10km in a straight line.</li> </ol>
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	The bird was briefly seen (several minutes) on the 15 <sup>th</sup> December by BB and identified later from photos. It was not re-found until almost a month later when DM, PB and RP found the bird at South Yunderup. On this occasion the bird was watched for almost 2 hours before it disappeared from the area. Amazingly it was then re-found that afternoon, approximately 10km away at Lake McLarty by BB during a Birdlife Australia WA branch photography outing.
First and last date of occurrence:	15 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2016 to 17 <sup>th</sup> January 2017
Distance to bird:	Down to 30m.

<b>Site Location:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nairns, Peel Inlet, Mandurah, WA.</li> <li>South Yunderup, Peel Inlet, WA (red line shows ~4km distance from Nairns to South Yunderup).</li> <li>Lake McLarty, WA (red line shows ~11.75 km distance from South Yunderup to Lake McLarty).</li> </ol>
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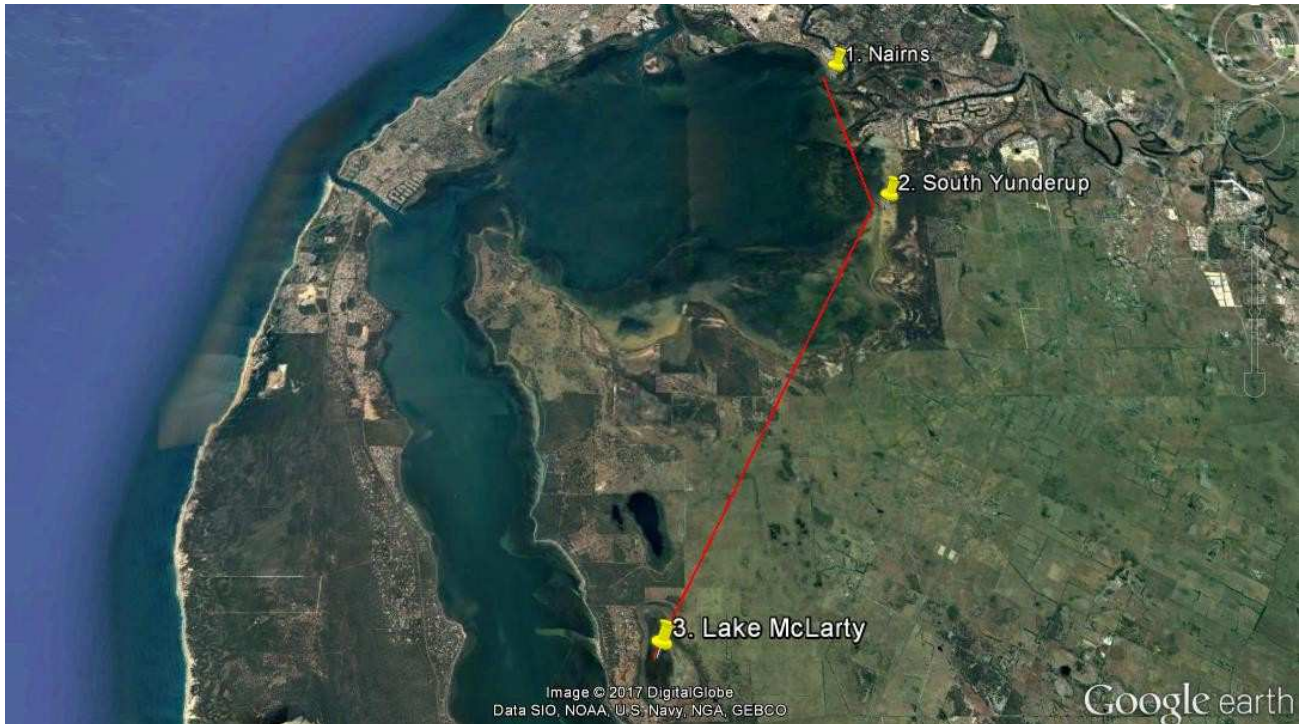


Figure 1. Google Earth image of the Peel Inlet, Western Australia. Urban area to the north of Nairns is Mandurah.

**Habitat:**

1. Nairns, Peel Inlet, Mandurah, WA – tidal mudflats with samphire hinterland (regular shorebird roost for a small numbers of waders)
2. South Yunderup, Peel Inlet, WA – tidal mudflats that are used irregularly as a feeding area by very large numbers of shorebirds (particularly Red-necked Stint – up to 5000 at the time of the Baird’s Sandpiper sighting).
3. Lake McLarty, WA (near Peel Inlet) – seasonal freshwater lake that had almost dried up completely by the 14<sup>th</sup> January when the Baird’s Sandpiper was observed there. Only the last few shorebirds for the season were still using the site.

**Sighting conditions:**

Good bright conditions at all sights.

**Optical aids used:**

The group used a wide array of binoculars, scopes and cameras (too many to list here).

**Were other observers present? Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification?**

The bird was also seen by Alan Collins, John Graff, Nick Brown, Damian Baxter, Mark Newman and others.

**To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site?**

No, this is a very rare nearctic visitor to Australia with only 4 previously accepted records.

1. Eyre, WA, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1979
2. Palmerston, NT, 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1983
3. Lake Connewarre, Vic, 8<sup>th</sup> February, 1986
4. Buckland Park Lake, SA, 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1987

**Did you use a field guide?**

Field guides were not used in the field. References used to help prepare this report were:

MENKHORST, P., ROGERS, D., CLARKE, R., DAVIES, J., MARSACK, P. & FRANKLIN, K. (2017): The Australian Bird Guide. CSIRO publishing.

MESSAGE, D. & TAYLOR, D. (2007). Waders of Europe, Asia, and North America. Christopher Helm Publishers. London.

SIBLEY, D. (2000). The Sibley Guide to Birds. Alfred A. Knopf Inc. New York.

SVENSSON, L, MULLARNEY, K. & ZETTERSTROM, D. (2009). Birds of Europe, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. HarperCollins Publishers. London.

**How confident are you of your identification?** 100%

### **Other details:**

Despite there being a month between the first and second sightings, the images of the bird seem consistent with it being the same individual and the two sites are only 5km apart. It would seem unlikely that two Baird's Sandpipers would turn up within 5km of each other in Western Australia within a month! The second and third sightings were slightly further apart (approx. 10km) but were made on the same day and again appear very likely to be the same wandering individual. Unfortunately when relocated in mid-January, the bird was only seen sporadically over a 5 day period and was often difficult to pick out from the 2000-5000 Red-necked Stints also using the South Yunderup mudflats to feed. This meant only a small number of birders were able to successfully connect with this bird.

### **Physical Description**

#### Summary description:

(1) **Number:** one individual was observed.

(2) **Age, sex:** non-breeding adult. Sex unknown.

(3) **Size and shape:** a small long-winged calidrid, about 10-15% larger than the nearby Red-necked Stints and noticeably smaller and shorter-legged than the close-by Curlew Sandpipers. The flattened oval body when viewed straight on was quite distinct. Perhaps the key identification criteria is the very long primaries, extending well beyond the tip of the tail.

(4) **Plumage colour and pattern:** the warm brown-plumaged upperparts allowed the bird to be readily picked out from the much greyer Red-necked Stints. This included a well-defined brownish buff breast band with diffuse brown streaking that contrasted sharply with the off-white throat patch and white lower breast and belly. The mid-brown wing and mantle feathers had darker shafts and only very thin, marginally paler edges of an adult rather than the very distinct pale edges of a juvenile Baird's Sandpipers. Thus the bird is aged as a non-breeding adult rather than a neat, scaly juvenile (a juvenile bird would not be expected to have worn off this classic 'scaly' appearance by December). The uppertail coverts and central rump were also brown with only white edges to the rump and darker tail feathers. In flight the bird showed a narrow white wing bar and darker brown remiges.

The bird also had moderately well-defined buffish supercilia that met above the bill and extended well behind the eye (another feature that favours aging the bird as an adult rather than juvenile), a complete white eye-ring and a noticeable white 'loral spot' at the base of the upper mandible.

(5) **Bill shape and structure:** a shortish, mostly straight black bill with a fine tip; only very slightly downcurved. Clearly longer than the nearby Red-necked Stint.

(6) **Colour of bill, eyes and legs/feet:** both the upper and lower mandibles were fully black. The legs were dark grey to black and quite long, trailing well behind the very short tail in flight.

(7) **Behaviour, movements, flight pattern, feeding, interactions with other birds, comparisons with other species:** The first sighting consisted of the bird landing briefly in shallow water at the Nairn's roost before taking off again and being lost to sight. When re-found a month later at South Yunderup, over the next five days, the bird was seen to feed and rest on the tidal mudflats and associated pools well back from the water's edge (hundreds of metres away). It would often feed amongst, but not closely associate with, large numbers of Red-necked Stints and a few Curlew Sandpipers. It would feed with a steady action, quickly picking at prey items from the muddy surface. At Lake McLarty, the bird was only seen relatively briefly one evening (14<sup>th</sup> January) and first thing the next morning; it was resting near to/amongst a small group of Red-necked Stints on the muddy/grassy fringes to the drying lake.

**Photos:**



Figure 2. Nairns, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2016 (photo: Bill Betts): note the very long wings extending well beyond the tip of the tail. Also note the brownish-buff breast band with darker streaking, the white throat, the white loral spot, buffish supercilium, white eye-ring and shortish, mostly straight, fine-tipped bill.





Figure 3. Nairns, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2016 (photo: Bill Betts): white loreal spot is particularly obvious front on.



Figure 4. Nairns, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2016 (photo: Bill Betts): the elongated primaries were again very obvious in flight.



Figure 5. Nairns, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2016 (photo: Bill Betts): note the short tail.



Figure 6. Nairns, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2016 (photo: Bill Betts): note again the short tail, the brown central rump and white edges to the rump. The weak white wingbar is also evident in this photo.



Figure 7. South Yunderup, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2017 (photo: Dan Mantle): although very distant, note the obvious buffish-brown breast band and the flattened oval bodyshape when viewed head on.



Figure 8. South Yunderup, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2017 (photo: Geoffrey Groom): note the very long primaries, short tail, white loral spot and straight-ish, fully black bill.





Figure 9. Lake McLarty, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2017 (photo: Bill Betts): note the long primary extension, buff breast band, pale loreal spot and straight-ish, fully black bill.

**Other species seen [Total Seen (max seen at one time)]:**

South Yunderup 14<sup>th</sup> January 2015: area also being used by 5000 Red-necked Stints, 80 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and smaller numbers of both resident and migratory waders.

**Other species with which you think it might be confused and how these were eliminated?**

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*– the lack of a white rump or yellow-pinkish-brown base to the lower mandible immediately eliminate this species. The straighter bill, complete white eye-ring and somewhat scaly plumage also rule against this species.

All stints – the very long primaries projecting well beyond the tail rule out all smaller calidrids. Also the marginally longer bill and larger size meant the submitted bird readily stood out amongst the smaller Red-necked Stints. The warm brown plumage tones (particularly the buffish breast band) also helped to readily pick this bird out from the many wintering Red-necked Stints.

**Was the description written from notes and/or sketches made (tick box):**

during the observation or;  shortly after the observation or;  from memory;  with the aid of the photographs

**Please indicate supportive evidence available.**

Was the bird:  photographed,  taped or  video taped? If yes to any of these, by whom? Bill Betts, Plaxy Barratt, Dan Mantle, Robyn Pickering, and Geoffrey Groom.



**What experience have you had with the species in question?**

DM has experience of this species from North America and also of the similar White-rumped Sandpiper from both North American and Europe.

BB, PB, and RP all have considerable experience of most regular and scarce Australian resident and migratory waders.

**Signature: Dan Mantle & Plaxy Barratt**

**Date: 5 June 2017**