

Submission to Bird Australia Rarities Committee

Species: Little Stint *Calidris minuta*
Location: West Island, Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Indian Ocean
Observation Date: 22 and 25 May 2014
Submission Date: 20 August 2018
Submitted by: Geof Christie & David James
Correspondence:

Circumstances

On 22 May 2014 Geof Christie found and photographed a lone *Calidris* stint in full definitive alternate (adult breeding) plumage at the “Elephant’s Graveyard” (a former quarry, SW of the runway) on West Island in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Indian Ocean (CKI). After heavy rain the waterbug population explodes in the old quarry scrapes, which regularly attracts birds. On 25 May Geof photographed it again at the same location. At the time Geof assumed that the bird was a Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*, which is a regular summer migrant to the CKI. In 2018, he re-identified the bird as a likely Little Stint *Calidris minuta* after seeing photographs of Little Stint from South Africa on-line and consulting the new *Australian Bird Guide* (Menkhorst *et al* 2017). He sent some photographs to Jeff Davies and Ian McAllan, who both agreed that the bird was indeed a Little Stint.

Description

Please refer to the photographs in Plates 1-3.

Identification

The strong and extensive orange-rufous plumage on the head, sides of neck and scapulars indicates adult alternate plumage and easily eliminates all the small stints and peeps except Little and Red-necked Stints (e.g. Grant & Jonsson 1984; Veitt & Jonsson 1984; Hayman *et al.* 1986; Chandler 1989; Harris *et al.* 1989. Higgins & Davies 1996; Beahman & Madge 1998; Menkhorst *et al.* 2017). Some features that identify the bird as a Little Stint and not a Red-necked Stint include the following:

- White throat and foreneck.
- Broad rufous fringes to the tertials (‘summer-plumage appearance’).
- Prominent whitish mantle V.
- Split-supercillium effect (weak).
- Finely base and tip to bill.

Status

BARC has accepted 14 Australian records of Little Stint recorded between 1977 and 2010 (BARC Cases 10, 14, 98, 104, 326, 403, 482, 574, 632, 653, 665, 666, 667, and 668), from Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania. Only one record is accepted from tropical Australia, Case 632 from Broome WA. HANZAB (Marchant & Davies 1996) listed

over 50 other Australian reports, some of which, but certainly not all, were considered unverified.

If accepted, this will be the first confirmed record for Australia's Indian Ocean Territories. The species is not listed for CKI or Christmas Island (Johnstone & Darnell 2017; James & McAllan 2014). BARC Case 685 involved a claimed Little Stint on CKI in December 2010, but it was not accepted. We are aware of no other claims of the species in the IOT.

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Acknowledgments

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References

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Plate 1. Little Stint at West Island, CKI, 22 May 2014 (Photo G Christie)

Note the extensively orange-rufous head, scapulars and tertials, white throat and fine bill.



Plate 2. Little Stint at West Island, CKI, 22 May 2014 (Photo G Christie)



Plate 3. Little Stint at West Island, CKI, 25 May 2014 (Photo G Christie)

Note the pale scapular V (just visible) and the hinted split supercilium.