

Section A: Submitter details	
Your name(s) Joint submissions are fine	Jennifer Spry Mike Carter Richard Baxter
Your email, phone or address	malurus.jenny@gmail.com

Section B: Record details	
Common and scientific names Include subspecies if relevant	(Hudsonian) Whimbrel; <i>Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus</i>
Site location (with GPS if possible)	Boigu Island, Torres Strait; map below (image 10). 9° 15' 06" S 142° 11' 03" E & 9° 14' 35" S 142° 11' 16" E
Date(s) and time(s) of record (First and last date of occurrence if known)	09/03/2020 @ 16.20 and earlier at 15.22
How many individuals were there?	Claim is for a single bird but probably two and possibly three were present.
What was the distance to the bird(s)?	Between 20 and 40 metres
Habitat description	Roosting with other Whimbrel at high tide on dead tree limbs above a mangrove-edged creek where they foraged at low tide.
Sighting conditions (e.g. weather, visibility, light conditions)	Light conditions were good with no wind. Visibility perfect.
How confident are you in the identification (as a %) and why?	100% based on a series of diagnostic photos (see below) showing pattern of underwing in combination with wholly dark back.
Did you find and/or identify the bird initially? Who else recorded the bird and do they agree with the identification?	JS found the bird and 9 other birders in two tenders from the boat, Eclipse FNQ saw it. All on trip agree with identification. See below for a list of names.
What experience have you had with this species?	All on board had extensive experience with Whimbrels and were particularly looking for this subspecies as it had been reported in Torres Strait in February 2009.
Has this subspecies been seen at this location before? When?	We believe likely in 2009 but based solely on wholly dark back. Currently BirdLife Australia treats it as a subspecies but IOC has accepted it as a distinct species.
Have photographs of the bird or discussion of it occurred on the internet? (Please provide the site name, a summary, electronic link, etc.)	There has been some discussion of the bird on Facebook groups Australian Twitchers and Australian Bird Taxonomy but no photos posted
Do you permit BARC to display your images etc. electronically (credited with your name)	Yes



Image 1: Three whimbrel @ 1620; *hudsonicus* upper right, *variegatus* lower centre.

Also, based on warm brown colour of bird and no white showing on rump, lower left may also be *hudsonicus*.

Photo by Jenny Spry

Identification and Confusion species

That the subject bird is one of the group of shorebirds often collectively referred to as ‘Curlews’ is immediately obvious. Within the Australian perspective, the medium length of its bill proclaims it to be a Whimbrel *N. phaeopus* ruling out Eastern Curlew *N. madagascariensis* and Eurasian Curlew *N. arquata* (Hayman et al. 1986). Lack of a plain unmarked cinnamon coloured rump as seen in the field (see image 7 below) eliminates Bristle-thighed Curlew *N. tahitiensis* (Hayman et al. 1986).

The wholly very dark back, rump and uppertail (image 7) means that it is either the subspecies *N. p. hudsonicus* or a very dark example of *N. p. variegatus* (van Duivendijk 2011). *Variegatus* normally has a mainly white rump that merges with a white wedge on the back (HANZAB; Menkhorst *et al.* 2019) but it can have a dark rump and a back that appears wholly dark (Beaman & Madge 1998; Robson 2008; Brazil 2009). With respect to *variegatus* van Duivendijk (2011) states ‘can resemble *hudsonicus* by often having some patterning on rump. Some 1st winter birds have extensive patterning on rump but most show variable amount of plain white’.

We claim that it is the former on the basis of the diagnostic pattern and colour of the underwing as described in van Duivendijk (2011), see image 3, supported by two less significant but indicative characters as stated below (van Duivendijk 2011). We demonstrate the distinctions by direct comparison with a companion bird that is an example of a dark *variegatus*. These were cropped from the same photo taken at 1620 according to the Exif data. The camera Exif data was set to the local Queensland time via Telstra on-line.

In the discussion, below, we use the ‘species’ names Eurasian Whimbrel for the taxon *Numenius phaeopus variegatus* and Hudsonian Whimbrel for *N. phaeopus hudsonicus*. These are the names used in van Duivendijk (2011).



**Image 2: Whimbrels: subject hudsonicus (on left) with variegatus, crops from Image 1.
Note absence of central rectrices creating fork in tail of subject bird**

Photo by Jenny Spry taken on 9/3/2020 @ 16.20

Differences between these individuals evident in the above

- 1) The ground colour of the underwing is a warm buff in the subject bird (left) but cold white in its companion.
- 2) The darker more heavily streaked flank and undertail coverts of the subject bird (left).
- 3) The less streaked, more buff-coloured breast of subject bird (left).

All of the above are characteristic of *hudsonicus* with number (1) universally considered diagnostic. Therefore we claim the subject bird to be that taxon (Hayman *et al.* 1986; HANZAB = Higgins & Davies 1996; Beaman & Madge 1998; Message & Taylor 2005; Paulson 2005; van Duivendijk 2011; Sibley 2014; Cornell Birds of the world on-line 2020). A scan of the entry in van Duivendijk (2011) is below. Note emphasis on *yellow-brown ground colour* to underwing in that text.

Eurasian Whimbrel <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		L 42cm 16.5"
all plum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively short bill, basal half straight (in some Eurasian Curlew juv ♂ very short bill); base of lower mandible hardly any paler ⇔ Eurasian Curlew. • Distinct pale central crown-stripe ⇔ in Eurasian Curlew sometimes very narrow pale central crown-stripe). • Distinct eye- and loreal-stripe (in Eurasian Curlew sometimes also rather obvious). • Usually slightly darker, colder-brown upperparts than Eurasian Curlew. • Legs slightly shorter than in Eurasian Curlew (resulting in usual lack of leg-projection in flight). • Scaps grey notched, usually not creating obvious pale lines ⇔ Eurasian Curlew. • In autumn fresher and more contrasting plumage than ad (but differences often small). 	
1w	• Molt-limit in cov and prim ⇔ ad.	
1s	• Rare in the WP; most ind spend summer in winter range.	
fl all plum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rather uniform upperwing ⇔ in Eurasian Curlew usually a little contrast between paler sec and inner prim and darker outer prim. • Usually no leg-projection beyond tail ⇔ in Eurasian Curlew usually slightly. 	
moult	• Ad moults completely in winter range. 1w moults partially in winter, prim only from May on. Ind with prim-moult in summer are 2cy.	
geog var	<i>N.p. variegatus</i> (Siberia)	
all plum	• Can resemble <i>hudsonicus</i> by often having some patterning on rump. Some 1w have extensive patterning on rump but most ind show variable amount of plain white. Rest of plumage as Eurasian.	
geog var	<i>N.p. alboaxillaris</i> (steppe north of Caspian Sea)	
all plum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paler than <i>phaeopus</i> with mainly whitish background. • Fringes to feathers of upperside pale buff, paler than in <i>phaeopus</i>. • Dark lateral crown-stripe less distinct than in <i>phaeopus</i>. • Underparts finely streaked (breast densely streaked); bars restricted to flank. • Underwing-cov and axillaries white, (almost) unpatterned. • Status unclear; possible extremely rare or even extinct. 	
fl all plum		
note		
Hudsonian Whimbrel <i>Numenius hudsonicus</i>		L 44cm 17.5"
all plum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As Eurasian Whimbrel but paler head with (much) more contrasting pattern (ear-coverts often pale). • Central crown-stripe slightly broader than in <i>Eurasian</i>. • Often with slightly yellow-browner ground-colour than Eurasian. • Breast often more faintly marked and flank more finely streaked than in Eurasian. 	
1w	• See Eurasian 1w.	
1s	• See Eurasian 1s.	
fl all plum ⇒	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Back, rump and uppertail-cov dark patterned, concolorous with mantle ⇔ in Eurasian unpatterned white. • Underwing, axillaries and flank strongly and densely barred on <i>warm, yellow-brown ground-colour</i> ⇔ in Eurasian more finely marked on white background. 	
moult	• See Eurasian moult.	

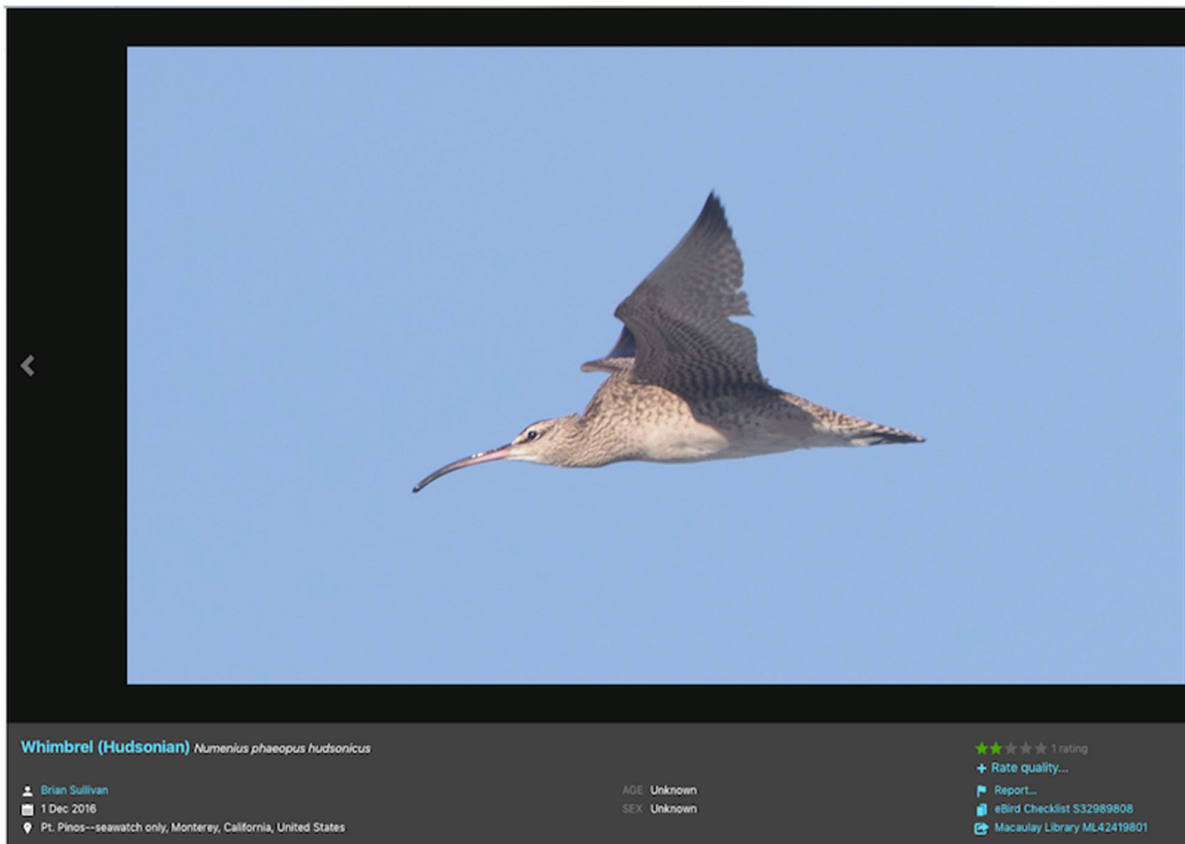
Figure 3: Text on Eurasian & Hudsonian Whimbrel in van Duivendijk (2011)

We have compared the image of the subject bird presented above with those of *hudsonicus* on the Cornell web site and find them a very good match (e.g. images 5 & 6 below).

It might be argued that the companion bird's claimed here as *hudsonicus* and *variegatus* plumage differs because the birds are of different ages, one being in its first year whilst the other is at least a year older. Evidence available on-line from Cornell (2020) suggests that there is little or no change morphologically due to age after year 1.

In image 2 above, both birds, especially the subject bird on the left, are tilted away from the camera thus obscuring the supercilia. This renders comparison of the strength of this potentially helpful feature impossible in this instance.

Hudsonicus tends to have brighter and bolder supercilia but not invariably as can be seen in images 5 & 6.



Images 5 & 6: Macaulay Library eBird images taken in North America showing *hudsonicus* with a supercilium similar to subject bird. Note also that flank pattern & colour is similar to subject bird.



Image 7: Dorsal view of *hudsonicus* taken @ 15.20 showing absence of white on back. Note also fork in tail created by absence of both central rectrices.

Photo by Jenny Spry

Status in Australasia and specifically in Australia

After stating 'Polytypic', the introduction to this species in HANZAB says 'Subspecies *variegatus* and *hudsonicus* recorded in HANZAB area'. A similar statement in that text is under 'Geographical Variation'. We believe that this conclusion was based mainly on examination of specimens although we do know of some published sightings prior to publication of that tome in 1993. Thus this subspecies has previously been recorded in Australasia but we don't know precisely where although Danny Rogers (responsible for much of the relevant HANZAB text), once told MC that there are Australian specimen records. We have not checked banding data but consider it unlikely that any sight reports prior to that herein would meet the standard of acceptance required today, the ID being based solely on possession of a wholly dark back. There are no BARC accepted records for Australia but sight reports of this taxon include one by co-author Mike Carter. This was seen on Mud Islands in Port Phillip Bay on 10th December 1967. It was 'published' without verification details in *The Bird Observer* May 1968. The ID of that bird was based wholly on its uniformly dark back and rump. That report is not mentioned in HANZAB.

However, there is a HANZAB report for a Darwin sighting of *hudsonicus* in Vol 3, page 106, para headed "Movements". This report is published (McKean *et al.*, 1976). The sightings were in September 1974 and February 1975. The identifications were based solely on back colour of a bird standing on the ground facing away from the observer.

There are on-line comments re coastal Queensland sightings on various Facebook sites from various people. None provided proof; they just claimed they had seen one, mainly based on the colour of the back.

Having searched the Birdlife on-line databases for Austral-Emu/Emu and ABW/AFO we can find no other published mentions of *hudsonicus* Whimbrel. The latest reference book/field guide *The Australian Bird Guide* Menkhorst *et al* (2019) does not mention the HANZAB records and lists *hudsonicus* as a "potential vagrant" and gives no illustration or Australian reports.

Richard Baxter's Birding Tours Australia conducted 4 trips in Torres Strait in 2020 spanning from early February to mid-March. On these trips, in most creeks on Boigu ~30 Whimbrel were seen flying or/& roosting. On the low tide mudflats of Saibai this number could get up to ~50. A *hudsonicus* whimbrel was also reported from a similar trip in 2009. All three authors were on that trip and saw the bird in question.

Status in Region:

Sagar et al (1999) quotes Heather & Robertson (1996) “American Whimbrels [*hudsonicus*] regularly visit New Zealand in small numbers.” It also says “Two American Whimbrels [*hudsonicus*] were at Te Whanga Lagoon Chatham Island in November 1994 (Oates 1996).”

Pratt *et al* (1987) says for *hudsonicus*: “visitor throughout Micronesia, Fiji, Tuvalu, and Samoa, rare in the Hawaiian Islands.” “*Hudsonicus* has been found widely and occurs regularly in low numbers in New Zealand.”

Observers:

Jennifer Spry, Mike Carter, Richard Baxter, Darryel Binns, Graham Barwell, Robert Shore, Tom Wheller, Hickson Ferguson, Carol Butler & Bob James

Location

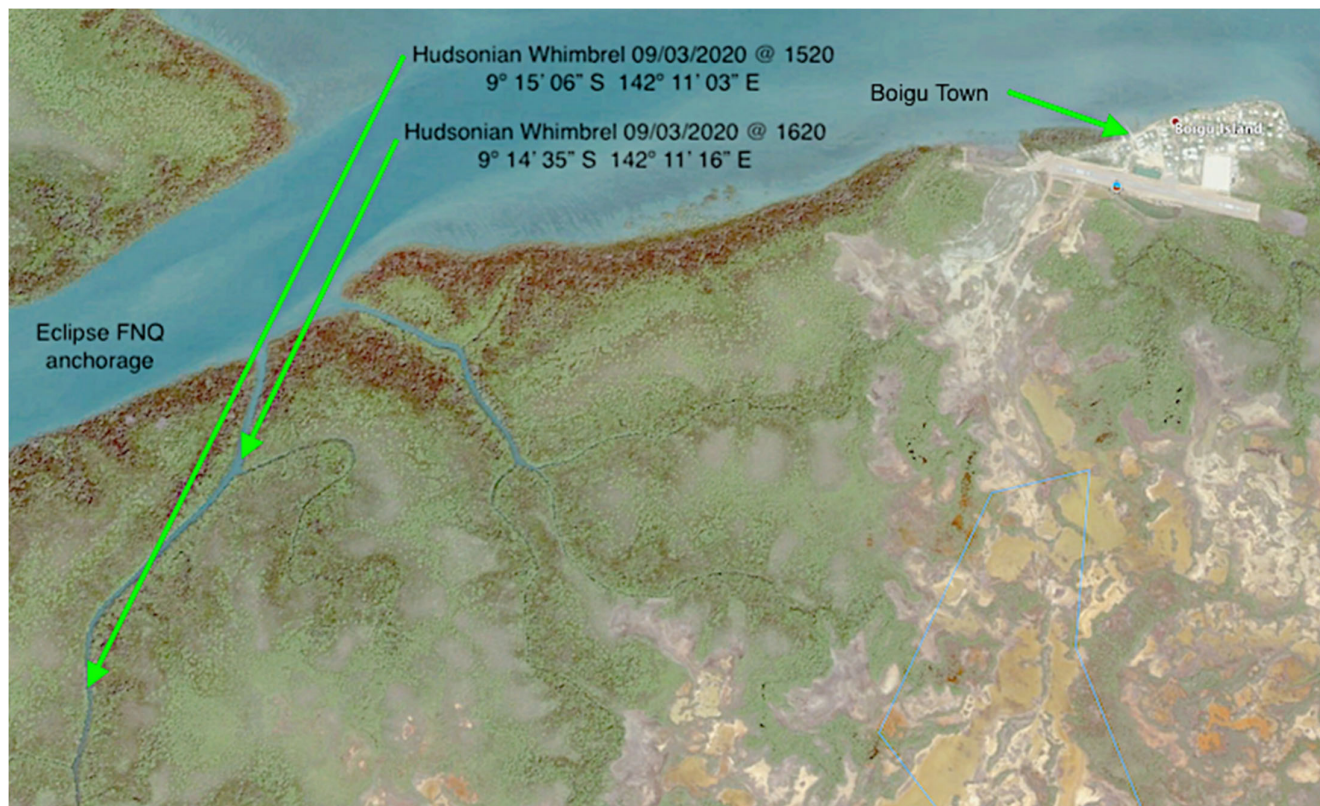


Figure 10: Creek on n-w side of Boigu Island, Torres Strait

We travelled up the creek in two tenders from the Eclipse FNQ and saw more than 30 Whimbrel roosting in the trees. They flushed ahead of the boats and circled back behind them. Everyone saw them.

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