

Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Charadrius subruficollis*

at Bundaberg Port, QLD 28th February to 24th April, 2009

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Summary

A Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Charadrius subruficollis* was found and photographed by Chris Barnes (CB) and Nev Capell (NC) during a scheduled shorebird survey in restricted access area at the Bundaberg Port on 28/02/2009. The bird was present on site for at least two (2) months with last reported date on 24/04/2009, during which time over 100 birdwatchers visited to twitch the bird including the remaining authors Jack (JM) and Bill Moorhead (BM). The Buff-breasted Sandpiper was immediately identified in the field due to the bright yellow legs, plain face, buff colouration, erect stance, obvious black eye etc, with photographs taken to confirm the identify.

If accepted, this will be the first (1st) chronological record from Queensland, with subsequent records from Brisbane and Cairns areas. 14 records are currently accepted by BARC, with HANZAB also detailing historical reports which have not been submitted.

Introduction

CB and NC were completing a monthly shorebird survey in restricted access area at the Bundaberg Port on 28/02/2012 when the Sandpiper was located. The habitat in the area is a combination of brackish samphire dominated spoil ponds and grasslands, of which the Sandpiper was regularly seen in both. The area is approximately 1.5 km inland from coastal mudflats, and is frequented by a large number of migratory waders particularly during high tide.

The Sandpiper was immediately identified as a Buff-breasted Sandpiper in the field and photographed extensively. Over a two (2) month period the Sandpiper was regularly seen by twitchers from around Australia, typically frequenting a small grass island in loose association with Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. The final reported sighting was 24/04/2009 before a likely northbound migration, with monthly surveys completed through the winter and no further sightings.

The Sandpiper was reporting on Birding-Aus and local networks, with visitors coming to the area once a system was resolved for access to the restricted area.

Description

The below three (3) high quality figures illustrate the key features of the Sandpiper taken by CB & BM.

Figure 1: Buff-breasted Sandpiper by Chris Barnes (18/04/2009)



Figure 2: Buff-breasted Sandpiper by Bill Moorhead (16/04/2009)



Figure 3: Buff-breasted Sandpiper by Chris Barnes (18/04/2009)



Size and Structure

The size of the bird was generally similar to nearby Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, however slightly smaller with a very different structure. The structure of the Sandpiper is very erect, with long legs, small head and short bill. The structure is diagnostic for Buff-breasted Sandpiper of which all the authors are very familiar with.

Bare Parts

The key bare parts of the bird are;

- Legs are long, and bright yellow / orange in all lighting conditions.
- Large black eye, especially noticeable due to the generally plain face and diffuse white eye-ring.
- Short black bill which is slightly paler at the base (however not bicoloured).

Plumage

Key plumage features of the bird are;

- Plain buff face, with a diffuse white eye-ring.
- Fine black streaks on crown.
- Underparts clean buff.
- Upperparts feathers have dull dark centres with buff fringes.

Aging

Complete post-Juv moult begins after arrival in non-breeding areas, and a juvenile is probably not distinguishable after February when the bird was located. The plumage was generally consistent with a non-breeding adult, with the general appearance of the bird becoming a 'brighter' buff over the 2 months however the upperparts better represented a non-breeding bird with no black and coarsely scaled upperparts noted.

Identification

Buff-breasted Sandpiper is one of the more distinctive shorebirds and easy to identify. The most similar species is a juvenile Ruff, which can be ruled out by the below key features. Some other key features are also noted.

- Very plain buff face, with diffuse white eye-ring, exaggerating a large dark eye. No dark loreal stripe, and a much 'blanker' face than a juv. Ruff.
- Short stubby bill, around equal to the width of the head in profile view.
- Long, bright yellow legs.

Location

The Buff-breasted Sandpiper was located in restricted access area in the Bundaberg Port region, approx. 1.5km inland of the Bundaberg Port Marina. The approximate GPS location is 24°46'12"S 152°23'34"E. The Sandpiper was generally loyal to a small island, and typically only strayed moved within a ~300m radius of the initial sighting for the full 2 months. Almost all visits to the site resulted in seeing the bird.

Previous Reports

Buff-breasted Sandpiper has been recorded as a semi-regular vagrant to Australia over a long period of time. There are currently 14 accepted records by BARC, with a further 2 under review. Numerous other historical records are also listed in HANZAB which have not been submitted. At the time, the Bundaberg Port Buff-breasted Sandpiper was the first (1st) record for Queensland known to the authors and the first twitchable bird of this species in Australia for a long time and gained significant interest in the nations birding community.

Table 1: Summary of BARC Submitted Records (Accepted or Under Review)

Case No.	Location	State/Territory	Sighting Date	Decision
61	Richmond	NSW	Dec 82 to Jan 1983	Accepted
97	Kooragang Island	NSW	10/03/1979	Accepted
128	Barilla Bay	TAS	26/01/1988	Accepted
159	Lake Bathurst	NSW	8/01/1993	Accepted
366	Bushells Lagoon	NSW	14/12/2002	Accepted
382	Lake Wollumboola	NSW	26/03/1999	Accepted
416	Ash Island, Newcastle	NSW	14/02/2004	Accepted
435	ICI Saltfields, Adelaide	SA	21/02/1986	Accepted
808	Hexam Swamp	NSW	18/01/2014	Accepted
988	Lake Murdeduke	VIC	Jan to Mar 2017	Accepted

Case No.	Location	State/Territory	Sighting Date	Decision
1019	Seaford Swamp	VIC	1/04/1984	Accepted
1066	Jerseyville	NSW	Nov to Dec 2018	Accepted
1087	Bald Hills, Brisbane	QLD	27/10/2019	Accepted
1143	Wrights Creek	QLD	19/11/2019	Accepted
1175	Eighty Mile Beach	WA	28-29 Nov-20	Under review
1180	Lake Wollumboola	NSW	Dec 20 to Mar 2021	Under review

References & Bibliography

BARC Case Summaries No. 646, 648, 871, 873, 982, 1086, 1166
<https://birdlife.org.au/conservation/science/rarities-committee>

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