

FIRST RECORDS OF WOOD SANDPIPER, RUFF, AND
EURASIAN TREE SPARROW FROM THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

by Manfred Temme*

Ornithological observations were made incidental to other research activities from 7 to 23 November 1977 and again 21 March to 12 April 1978 on islets of Enewetak (Eniwetok) Atoll (11° 30'N, 162° 15'E) in the northern Marshall Islands. Birds also were observed during the Northern Marshall Island Radiological Survey from 11 October through 21 November 1978 when 31 islets from Likiep, Wotho, Bikini, Ujelang, Kwajalein, Enewetak, and Ailuk Atolls, as well as Jemo and Mejit Islands, were visited for relatively short periods. During these trips several new sights and breeding records for the northern Marshalls were made.

Wood Sandpiper (Tringa glareola)

I observed a Wood Sandpiper on Aomon islet, Enewetak Atoll, 9 and 21 November 1977, and saw and photographed one to three individuals 24 and 25 March and 7 and 8 April 1978 (Fig. 1). The birds were noted in the company of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers (Calidris acuminata), Golden Plovers (Pluvialis dominica), and Ruddy Turnstones (Arenaria interpres).

Aomon was the only islet at Enewetak Atoll which had permanent freshwater ponds with some marginal and low emergent vegetation. These shallow, rain-filled ponds, created in 1972 by bulldozing off most of the coral sand cover and exposing the reef substrate, were scattered over approximately six of the islet's 40 hectares.

Woodbury (1962), Pearson and Knudsen (1967), Carpenter et al. (1968), Amerson (1969), Johnson and Kienholz (1975), and Owen (1977a, b) did not mention any sightings of Tringa glareola on Enewetak Atoll or other atolls of the Marshall Islands. However, one female specimen

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(USNM 544196) in the National Museum of Natural History was collected on Runit (Yvonne) islet (Enewetak Atoll) on 8 September 1968 by the Smithsonian's Pacific Ocean Biological Survey Program (POBSP) (G. E. Watson in litt.). The specimen was collected too late to be included by Amerson (1969), and the record has remained unpublished.

The Wood Sandpiper breeds throughout northern Eurasia from Norway to the Bering Strait. It is a common migrant in Europe and southern Eurasia and winters in Africa, India, mainland southeast Asia, including the Greater Sundas and Philippine Islands, and Australia (Delacour and Mayr 1946; duPont 1971; McClure 1974; Temme 1974).

Wood Sandpipers have been recorded from Midway Atoll (Clapp and Woodward 1968), and two birds were collected at Kure Atoll (Woodward 1972). This species previously had been reported from western Micronesia. In the Marianas Baker (1971) considered it an uncommon visitor; in the Palau Islands, a regular visitor.

There can only be speculation as to the origin of the birds at Enewetak Atoll. New breeding records exist from the Pribilof Islands and the Aleutians (White *et al.* 1974); and numerous records (about a dozen specimens are in the USNM collection) are known from this area (G. E. Watson in litt.). That the birds could have been members of the pioneering Western Hemisphere population rather than Asian birds, which may migrate regularly as far as the Philippines and extreme western Micronesia, is suggested by the existing Alaskan and Hawaiian records. Therefore, the species should be considered a straggler and looked for elsewhere in Micronesia.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

On 6 October 1978 one Ruff was observed on Kwajalein islet (Kwajalein Atoll). The bird was in its winter plumage and near Golden Plovers on the golf course. The bird was closely approached several times, and flushed to expose additional distinguishing features of this species. The relatively large size of the bird suggests that it was a male.

At Enewetak islet (Enewetak Atoll) another sighting of a Ruff was made on 21 November 1979, when O. W. Johnson pointed out a bird not familiar to him. Subsequently several photographs were obtained (Fig. 2). The bird appeared smaller than the one seen on Kwajalein islet and may have been a female (Reeve). It stayed in close company with 64 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers.

These two records, in addition to one collected on Enewetak (Clapp in litt.), are the only ones known for the northern Marshall Islands. Ruffs have been recorded from the Palau Islands (Owen 1977a), and specimens have been collected at Kure Atoll (Clapp and Woodward 1968) and Pearl and Hermes Reef in the northwestern Hawaiian Islands (Amerson, Clapp, and Wirtz 1974) and at Johnston Atoll (Amerson and Shelton 1976).

The Ruff breeds throughout northern Eurasia from Denmark to the Bering Strait and winters in Africa, Pakistan, Burma, southeast China and casually in Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, Borneo, and Australia (A.O.U. 1957; McClure 1974; Temme 1974; King and Dickinson 1975). It is a straggler in the Marshall Islands.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow (Passer montanus)

On 6, 7, 9, 29, and 31 October 1978 the only sparrow I observed on Kwajalein islet (Kwajalein Atoll) was the European Tree Sparrow. Several birds were seen in coconut palms near the town plaza and at gas tanks. Previously only the House Sparrow (Passer domesticus) had been noted (sight and call note records only) from this islet (Amerson 1969). However Clapp (in litt.) suggests that P. montanus has been newly introduced, perhaps via the Hawaii-Kwajalein-Guam Continental Airlines flight. Anderson (1981) saw a maximum of 20 Passer sp. in 1977 but did not make specific identification.

The European Tree Sparrow replaces the House Sparrow at about the 90th meridian and is common in South Asia (McClure 1974; King and Dickinson 1975). In the Philippines it is an introduced species and frequents human habitations (own obs.). It has been reported in Micronesia apparently only from the Marianas (Owen 1977b). The observation of this introduced species constitutes the first recognized sight record for the northern Marshall Islands, though they may have been there a year earlier (Anderson 1981). These birds also were observed there by Clapp (in litt.) in 1979 (summer).

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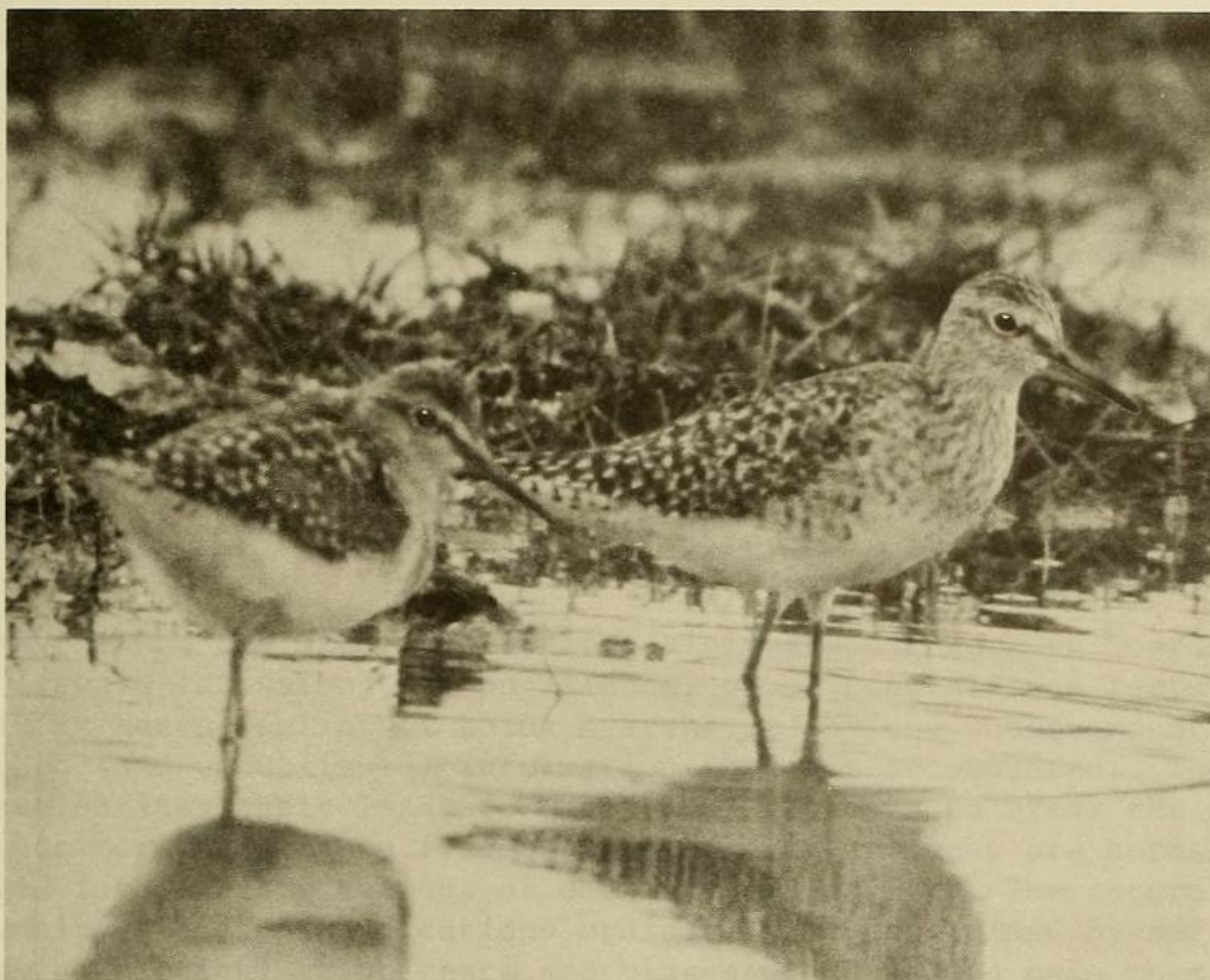


Fig. 1. Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola on Aomon islet, Enewetak Atoll, Marshall Islands (April 8, 1978)

Fig. 2. Ruff Philomachus pugnax among Sharp-tailed Sandpipers Calidris acuminata on Enewetak islet, Enewetak Atoll (November 17, 1978)

