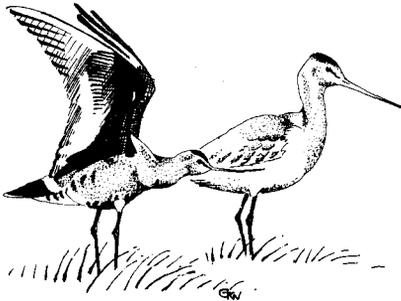


# Notes



**Hudsonian Godwit in Devon** On 22nd October 1981, at about 09.30 GMT, I was walking towards the sewage-works at Countess Wear, Exeter, Devon, when I stopped to look at half-a-dozen waders feeding on a riverside meadow. There were five Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* and a smaller and darker individual that was frantically probing in a fashion recalling a dowitcher *Limnodromus*. I scrutinised it with my 25× telescope from a range of 80m. Whilst I was watching it, the group flew up, and striking black underwings of the smaller bird immediately caught my eye and I realised that I was definitely onto something interesting. It soon dropped back in again and remained for a further 40 minutes before flying downstream. From what I had heard about the Blacktoft, Humberside, individual earlier that autumn (*Brit. Birds* 76: 496; 80: 466-473), I knew that a black underwing was diagnostic of Hudsonian Godwit *L. haemastica*. Later reference to Peterson (1980) made me confident of this initial identification. The next day, it was again seen by myself, G. Peplow, R. Knightbridge and several other University students.



It was smaller and slimmer than a Black-tailed Godwit, with a narrower and slightly upcurved bill similar to a Bar-tailed Godwit *L. lapponica*. The general body plumage, however, was noticeably browner and dusky; in flight it showed a narrow white wingbar and a black tail.

The Hudsonian Godwit remained in the area for a month and entertained many observers well pleased with the bird's faithfulness to this one and easily accessible field: it hardly ever mixed in with the main flock of 700 Black-tailed Godwits that wandered over the estuary farther downstream. It was last seen in the area on 22nd December. The following details were noted:

**PLUMAGE** Head and neck, down to breast, uniform grey-brown, with more-chocolate crown. Lores dark, with broad white supercilium from bill to eye. Underparts darker and retaining summer feathers in contrast to pure white on Black-tailed Godwits. Flanks uniform grey, with dark blotchy belly, particularly between legs, where more-chestnut tones of unmoulted

summer feathers. Top sides of flanks had half-a-dozen prominent black bars. Vent white, but sides to undertail-coverts with black spots.

Fresh mantle and most of scapulars a uniform 'Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* grey'. Dark band of retained summer feathers to upper and lower edges of scapulars, more prominent on left. Wing-coverts buffer in tone:

brownish centred, with paler fringes. Tertiaries in poor condition, dark brown with broken white terminal fringe. Secondaries dark brown. Primaries dark brown-black, with paler tips; they projected beyond tail by 1½ feather tips, as compared with equal length on Black-tailed Godwit, and perhaps added to impression of slimmer build. Tail black, with thin white terminal band.

**BARE PARTS** Bill-shape similar to that of Bar-tailed Godwit: narrow and slightly upcurved. Flesh-orange base, extending half way down

lower mandible and only around nostril of upper, merged into dark tip. Legs dark grey.

**IN FLIGHT** Underwing diagnostic: black underwing-coverts and axillaries; secondaries dusky, with narrow pale wingbar showing through. Upperwing showed narrow white wingbar, not nearly so distinct as on Black-tailed, being indistinct at base of secondaries and more pronounced at 'elbow'. Narrow white base to tail feathers, rest of tail black.

During its stay, the Hudsonian Godwit had a routine of arriving at its field early in the morning, spending the day voraciously feeding on earthworms, and flying off downstream at around 15.00 hours, presumably to roost with the Black-tailed Godwits around Exminster marshes or Powderham. It remained in the area until heavy snowfall in mid December caused its feeding ground to freeze over.



245 & 246. Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*, alone and (below) with Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* and Black-tailed Godwit *L. limosa*, Devon, November 1981 (A. J. Croucher)



It was very quiet during its stay. I heard it make a noise only once: a cackling recalling a Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, directed at some Black-tailed Godwits flying overhead. As with many vagrant waders, however, it was often aggressive to nearby waders, and was frequently seen chasing off Black-tailed Godwits.

Whether this individual was the same bird as at Blacktoft is a matter of personal opinion. Although the localities are some 400 km apart, one on the East Coast and the other in the Southwest, it must be remembered that around 17% of Britain's wintering Black-tailed Godwits are found on the River Exe, and that this was the species with which this transatlantic wader was in company at Blacktoft. Also, both sightings involved individuals in adult plumage.

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 PRATER, A. J., MARCHANT, J. H., & VUORINEN, J. 1977. *Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holarctic Waders*. Tring.

This note was accepted for publication in December 1985, but held over pending receipt of the typescript concerning the original Humberside observations. Eds

**Little Whimbrel in Norfolk** The coastal path which extends between Blakeney and Cley, Norfolk, runs along an elevated sea-wall which divides the mud-flats of Blakeney harbour from a series of rough grazing fields on the landward side. These fields prove particularly attractive to the less estuarine species of wader which occur on the North Norfolk coast, in particular Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, Curlew *Numenius arquata*, and Whimbrel *N. phaeopus*.

On the afternoon of Saturday 24th August 1985, P. Antrobus, JG, RJW and E. J. Whittaker were walking along this sea-wall. At 13.45 GMT, at a point approximately equidistant between Blakeney and Cley, PA and RJW independently noticed a small brown wader flying low above the surface of one of the rough grazing fields, at a distance of about 50 m. Unsure of its identity, they alerted JG and EJW to its presence, and all four observers watched the bird through binoculars as it continued its flight across the field and alighted alongside a loose feeding-flock of Lapwings, Golden Plovers and Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* at the far end of the field. The bird started to feed actively, occasionally flying short distances around the field, and eventually joining up with a small flock of Curlews and Whimbrels also in the field.

When first picked up in flight, it was obviously a small *Numenius*, with its streaked brown plumage and relatively long, down-curved bill. The most noticeable feature, however, was that its upperparts were wholly brown, and lacking the white rump of its more familiar congeners. It also seemed to have paler supercilia, similar to Whimbrel, and first thoughts were that it could be a Whimbrel of the North American subspecies *N. p. hudsonicus*, which does not show a white rump—yet this individual seemed too small, and its bill too short for that possibility. When it landed, a truer impression of its size was obtained: in body size it was approximately the same as, or a

little smaller than, the accompanying Golden Plovers, but with relatively longer bill and legs. Under closer scrutiny with telescopes, it was confirmed that the bird did have paler supercilia, and also a paler crown stripe, further emphasised by a dark line through the eye and a dark lateral crown stripe.

By now, it was apparent that it was either a Little Whimbrel *N. minutus*



**247 & 248.** Little Whimbrel *Numenius minutus*, Norfolk, August 1985 (David M. Cottridge)



or—extremely unlikely as it may be—an Eskimo Curlew *N. borealis*. Good views in flight in bright sunshine revealed that its underwing was a warm buff in colour, thus eliminating Eskimo Curlew, which shows a cinnamon underwing. Convinced that it was a Little Whimbrel, a species PA, JG and RJW were all familiar with, one of the party was despatched to 'Nancy's Cafe' in Cley to spread the word to the many other birders in the area. The bird stayed around until dusk, feeding almost continually and occasionally flying for short distances, but invariably associating with Curlews and Whimbrels, and allowing good views for the assembled crowds.

The following day, it was again seen in the same area, but later in the day it flew to Cley, where it fed for a short time in the Eye field before moving farther down the coast to Salthouse. Thereafter, it seemed to divide its time between Blakeney and Salthouse until its last reported sighting on 3rd September 1985. During its 11-day stay, it was seen by several hundred observers.

The following description is compiled from notes taken by JG and RJW:

**JIZZ** An obvious *Numenius*, resembling small, slim, short-billed Whimbrel. Appeared elegant and delicate whilst feeding, and reminiscent of Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda* due to erect carriage and 'pump-action' mode of feeding. Marginally smaller than Golden Plover in size; bill noticeably less down-curved than Whimbrel's, and proportionately shorter—estimated to be 1-1¼ times length of head.

**HEAD** Narrow buffish crown-stripe extending from base of bill onto rear of crown, bordered by dark lateral crown-stripe. Prominent creamy buff supercilium, and dark smudgy eye-stripe, barely noticeable in front of eye, but broadening slightly beyond eye and terminating on ear-coverts. Eye-stripe broken immediately before and after eye, giving appearance of thin eye-ring. Head otherwise creamy buff and unstreaked. Appeared generally pale-faced, with large, dark eye.

**UPPERPARTS** Neck finely but densely streaked with brown, generally washed greyish buff. Density of streaking often caused appearance of darker, ill-defined triangle on side of neck when head held in certain position. Mantle and rump noticeably darker brown than neck, with bolder, more substantial dark

streaking and mottled with buff. Tail mid-brown, with darker, narrow, evenly spaced barring.

**WINGS** Appeared long-winged, with black-looking primaries and long, dark tertials, broadly edged buff with prominent notchings. Scapulars dark brown, edged with creamy and rufous-buff spots. Upperwing-coverts dark brown with broad buff edgings giving 'spangled' appearance. In flight, upperwing-coverts appeared as paler wing-panel, this effect being emphasised by black primaries and very dark leading edge to wing. Secondaries dark brown.

**UNDERPARTS** Upper breast washed greyish buff, with fine, darker streakings which terminated on breast, there forming indistinct pectoral band. Remainder of underparts paler, with very faint buffish wash. Indistinct darker streaking in form of short, thin, evenly spaced bars on flanks and below carpal joint of closed wing. Undertail-coverts washed buffy grey with darker spots. Underwing-coverts warm buff, with very fine, close brown barring.

**BARE PARTS** Bill dark brown, with pinkish basal half to lower mandible. Legs and feet pale bluish grey. Eye large and dark.

With reference to Prater *et al.* (1977, *Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holarctic Waders*), the bird was adjudged to be a juvenile, as the tertials lacked the 'tiger bars' characteristic of adults of this species, the broad buff edgings and notches being a feature of immatures. Similarly, the scapulars of an adult should show larger, better-defined creamy-white spots. The bird was considered to be in fresh plumage, again indicative of a juvenile.

When the Little Whimbrel was first sighted, the weather was warm and bright, with fresh, variable (though mostly westerly) winds: conditions

which had been prevalent for several days. A study of the weather maps for the middle two weeks of August 1985 suggests no obvious weather pattern which could have carried a bird whose breeding grounds are situated in Eastern Siberia and whose wintering grounds are in Eastern Indonesia to Australia, to the shores of Great Britain. When the bird was first seen to alight, its immediate and voracious feeding was suggestive of its having newly arrived following a long flight. We conjecture that the bird had just arrived from Scandinavia, having rested there for several days following a 'reverse migration' which carried it over the North Pole. Indeed, the only other reported sightings of this species in the Western Palearctic tend to suggest that the species undergoes an early migration. The first record was from Norway on 14th July 1969, whilst the only previous record for Britain and Ireland—a juvenile at Sker, Mid Glamorgan, from 30th August to 6th September 1982 (*Brit. Birds* 76: 438-445)—constitutes almost a carbon-copy occurrence of the Norfolk record, since both conveniently turned up over the August Bank Holiday weekend.

We are grateful to D. M. Cottridge for supplying the accompanying photographs (plates 247 & 248)

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We have consulted John Marchant, whose opinion was that this individual was 'almost certainly an adult'. Eds

**Feral Rock Dove displaying to and attempting to copulate with corpse of another** On 27th June 1983, we saw a feral Rock Dove *Columba livia* alight on the A65 trunk road in the centre of Settle, North Yorkshire, as traffic had temporarily halted at a crossing. Almost immediately, however, it was killed by a car, which ran over its head, but left the body untouched with the wings slightly spread and supporting the torso, which was tipped forward on to the sternum; following cars avoided the corpse. As soon as the traffic had cleared, a second dove alighted by the corpse. Clearly a male, it began to 'parade' by the headless body, puffing out its chest and strutting back and forth. Despite receiving no response, it mounted the corpse and engaged in vigorous copulatory movements. It was so stimulated that it did not move when cars approached, and a small queue of cars built up as the dove went through its energetic performance. It then flew off. We subsequently examined the corpse, which appeared to be close-ringed. It may, therefore, have been exhausted from racing at the time it made its fatal landing on the road.

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In observations of blue waxbills *Uraeginthus*, Derek Goodwin suggested that 'males in breeding condition may respond with copulation attempts whenever they recognize an "inability to resist", whether this inability is due to readiness as in the soliciting female or physical weakness as in the fledgling or ill bird.' (*Ibis* 107: 307). Eds

**Apparent aerial mating by Collared Doves** At about 17.00 GMT on 16th April 1984, at West Bagborough, Taunton, Somerset, I saw two Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* perched one behind the other on a horizontal

branch of a Grecian fir *Abies cephalonica*. I was standing about 33 m from the tree and the branch was about 12 m up. Suddenly, one of the doves, presumably the male, mounted the other. After brief contact, the presumed female flew about 10 m from the tree and then almost vertically upwards in a fluttering flight; she was followed by the male about 0.5 m behind her. Having ascended about 4 m, the female hovered rather clumsily and, as she did so, was mounted by the male; contact was maintained for three or four seconds and then both doves flew off; no calls were uttered in the course of this behaviour.

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Derek Goodwin has commented as follows: 'Coition by Collared Doves is normally followed by the excitement cry being uttered, so I wonder if this was actually not copulation by a pair.'

'Perhaps the birds were an adult and a fledged young. Many young birds, when they first start to fly after the parents or to fly towards them when begging food or expecting it, often alight on the parent and usually then slip or are displaced so that they perch near or beside it. I have not seen this happen with Collared Dove, but have with Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* and the domestic Barbary Dove *S. risoria*. Young doves, when begging for food, sometimes jump onto a parent for a moment. Perhaps the observer happened to look first just when a young dove, which had just been fed (or refused), its parent not being willing to feed it again, had jumped onto the parent's back. The parent displaced it (by moving away), and then started to tower up in display flight (perhaps because it had seen *another* Collared Dove flying near), but before it could "flatten out" and start the downward glide, the importuning young bird flew at it and tried to alight on it in the air.'

'Alternatively, if the birds were two hostile adults (of either sex), perhaps the observer came in when one bird had jumped on the other's back. Once there, if the other was temporarily exhausted or remained still for any other reason, the copulation reflex might have "taken over". Or the observer may have mistaken hostile for copulatory behaviour. The underdove got out, the vertical fluttering flight might have been (as suggested above) the start of a display flight, or perhaps the weak flight of a beaten bird (though it is odd that it should fly vertically upward). The other flew after it and alighted on it to continue the fight or to drive the other off. This behaviour seems less likely than the first, but if two adults were involved then I cannot think of a better.

'If either violence or sex (or both) between two adults was involved, we are faced with a "the dog that did not bark in the night" type of problem: it is *most odd* that the excitement cry was never uttered by either bird.' Eds

**Pallid Swift in Dyfed** At 15.00 GMT on 12th November 1984, I was walking along the road past Tresinwen Farm, near Strumble Head, Dyfed, when a swift *Apus* appeared overhead. Both the late date and the preceding weather conditions (force 9 southerlies) suggested the possibility of a Pallid Swift *A. pallidus*. Owing to the poor light, however, I was unable to see any plumage features until the bird flew away and, as it dipped below a distant ridge, I noted the pale secondaries panel and mouse-brown plumage typical of Pallid Swift, which frustratingly strengthened my initial suspicions. After a short wait, I continued on to Fishguard, where I telephoned G. H. Rees about the bird, unfortunately convinced that it had 'got away'.

The next morning, at 09.00 hours, I was walking in the same area when the swift appeared again. This time, I had slightly better views than the previous evening, and, in addition to confirming the features noted then, I was able to see the extensive white on the throat. The bird then disappeared and, despite a frantic search, I was unable to relocate it. An hour later,

however, it reappeared low over the cliff in front of the sea-watch shelter. By now, the overcast sky had cleared, and I obtained views down to 1 m in excellent light. The bird remained in this area for about 40 minutes, and I took the following notes:

**SIZE AND STRUCTURE** Similar to that of Swift *A. apus*, but with blunter wing-tips.

**UPPERPARTS** Forehead whitish, paler than rest of upperparts. Crown, nape, wing-coverts, mantle, rump and tail mouse-grey brown, distinctly paler than on Swift. With exception of tail, all these areas had pale scaling, which in certain light gave milky appearance to plumage. Secondaries paler than wing-coverts, creating pale panel, although this was not as noticeable as when viewed from below. Primaries darker than

rest of upperparts, but several had pale inner webs.

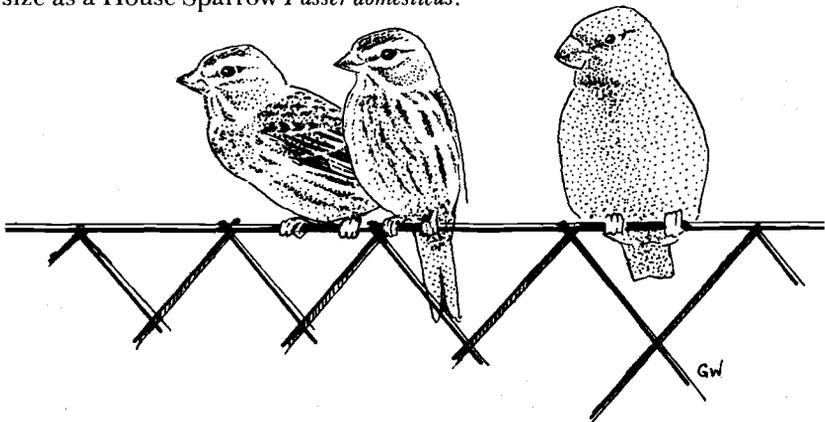
**UNDERPARTS** White on throat more extensive than on Swift, and, combined with pale forehead, gave pale head-on appearance. Remainder of underbody mouse-grey brown, with pale scaling, similar to upperparts. Axillaries, underwing-coverts and primaries dark, contrasting with paler secondaries; this produced obvious pale panel, which was bird's most conspicuous feature.

The bird disappeared at about 11.00 hours, and I was unable to relocate it despite an extensive search. I subsequently learned that two Pallid Swifts had been seen in Dorset two days earlier, on 10th November (*Brit. Birds* 78: 563), and one in Kent two days later, during 14th-16th November (*Brit. Birds* 79: 559), clearly indicating that there had been an influx of the species at the time. These four records raised the British and Irish total to six.

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**Trumpeter Finch in Essex** At about 08.00 GMT on 21st September 1985, I was birding in the area known as Fisherman's Head on Foulness Island, Essex. The weather was warm and calm and there seemed to be plenty of activity, with many Linnets *Carduelis cannabina*, Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* and Reed Buntings *Emberiza schoeniclus* zipping about. As I quickly scanned through a group perched on wire fencing, 30 m away, a dumpy, bright sandy-pink bird brought me to a sudden standstill. With the morning sunlight behind me, the bird positively glowed as it sat head-on and easily stood out amongst the drabber Linnets and pipits. The bird was a lot dumpier and heavier than a Linnet, it had a heavy bill recalling Greenfinch *C. chloris* or Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* and was about the same size as a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*.



I had no idea as to its identity. Just as I focused onto it, the bird flew from the fence, passed head-high in front of me and landed on top of a blockhouse aerial, no more than 20 m behind me. In flight, it appeared short-tailed and bulky, with a large head that recalled a Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*. The brightness of its plumage was as striking as that of a male Crossbill, but was of a different tone, being far more washed out and sandy—rather similar to the breast colour of an autumn Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*.

When the bird landed on the aerial it began to call, and it was this that gave me my first suspicions as to its identity. The call was a loud, far-carrying and drawn out 'tzap' note of highly nasal quality and was quite unlike anything else that I have heard. The nasal tone rang a mental note! The bird perched up against the sky, still facing head-on, and repeatedly called for about 1½ minutes before it flew off silently towards the saltings in the company of Linnets and pipits. It was never seen again.

The following description was taken in the field:

**SIZE AND STRUCTURE** Bulky, thickset finch, far heavier than accompanying Linnets. Similar size to House Sparrow. In flight, heavy body and large head, together with short tail, recalled Crossbill.

**UPPERPARTS** Head uniform sand-buff, in which the small, black beady eyes noticeably stood out. At close range, gentle grey suffusion noted running around base of bill to eye and passing through eye to rear of ear-coverts, giving somewhat capped effect to forehead. No detailed views of back were obtained, since bird always perched head-on,

but in flight appeared uniformly sandy brown without any obvious wingbars.

**UNDERPARTS** Chin, throat, breast and belly unstreaked sandy buff, same colour as head, resembling breast colour of autumn Wheatear.

**BARE PARTS** Bill large, conical, similar to Bullfinch; fleshy grey in colour. Legs noticeably pink. Eye small, beady, black.

**VOICE** Very distinctive and quite unlike anything else that I had ever heard. Loud and far-reaching, nasal or buzzing 'tzap'.

This constitutes the fifth record of Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus* for Britain and Ireland, the previous ones being in Suffolk and Sutherland in May/June 1971 (*Brit. Birds* 70: 45-49), Orkney in May 1981 (*Brit. Birds* 76: 523) and West Sussex in May 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 79: 299-300).

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**Ovenbird in Devon** On 21st October 1985, F. Williams found a dead bird lying on his garden path. Puzzled as to its identification, he described it to K. Partridge, who was equally baffled. The next day, K. Partridge received the corpse of the small olive-and-white bird, which had spots on its breast. When he described the bird to me over the telephone, it sounded interesting, so I went straight around to his house. I was amazed to find the body of an Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapillus*. It was immediately recognisable, with its orange crown, olive upperparts, silver-white underparts and black spots on breast and flanks.

The following description was taken:

**SIZE** Similar to plump Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*. Weight when freshly dead 22.0 g. Wing length 78 mm.

**UPPERPARTS** Head, mantle and back olive-green, but rump and tail bright yellow/olive, similar to that of Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo*

*olivaceus*. 'Face' plain, except for white eye-ring. Lateral crown stripe black/dark brown, extending from lores and meeting at nape. Central crown stripe golden-bronze, broken up by flecks of olive. Wing-coverts more brown/green than rest of body, making them



**249 & 250.** Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapillus*, Devon, October 1985 (Nick Ward)

darker. Faint wing-bars created by pale buff tips to median and greater coverts. Primaries and secondaries as coverts.

**UNDERPARTS** Silver-white, except flanks which were buff. Black streaks formed malar stripe, which merged with black spots which extended from sides of neck and seemed to form lines down breast, on to flanks. Underwing-coverts pale yellow.

**BARE PARTS** Bill pink/horn, stout and almost thrush-like, with a few bristles on either side at base of bill. Eyes black. Legs flesh-pink.

This bird was found at Spriddlestone, Wembury, south Devon, 1½ km inland in an area of open cornfields, hedges and scattered bushes. The garden in which the bird was found is quite large, with overgrown areas, and with shrubs and bushes surrounding it.

Late October 1985 was amazing for American landbirds around the Plymouth area, with Wilson's Warbler *Wilsonia pusilla* (record still under consideration) and Northern Parula *Parula americana* (*Brit. Birds* 79: 580). What a pity the Ovenbird was not found alive as well.



Of the three previous records of Ovenbird in Britain and Ireland, one was based merely on a wing found on the tideline at Formby, Lancashire, on 4th January 1969 (*Brit. Birds* 63: 289), and another was also found dead, at Lough Carra Forest, Co. Mayo, on 8th December 1977 (*Brit. Birds* 74: 491). The only one seen alive was on Out Skerries, Shetland, on 7th-8th October 1973 (*Brit. Birds* 68: 453-455).

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