

# Identification of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers

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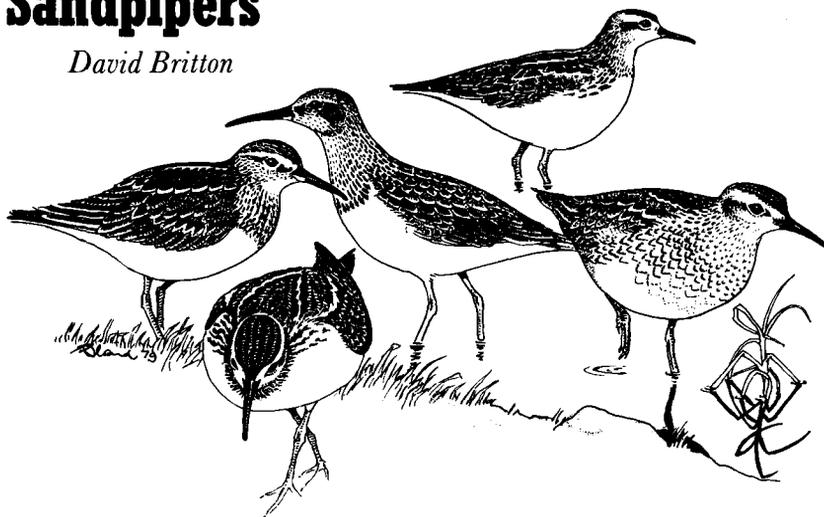


Fig. 1. Group of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *Calidris acuminata* (juveniles, front and rear; summer adult, right) and Pectoral Sandpipers *C. melanotos* (juvenile, left; autumn adult, centre) showing common jizz: flattish back, pot belly, short legs, long rear-end, and smallish head on normally short (though sometimes surprisingly long) neck. Note, however, tendency of Sharp-tailed to appear larger, more portly, shorter-necked and flatter-crowned (Bryan Bland)

**T**wo recent summer adult\* Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *Calidris acuminata* were identified initially as Pectoral Sandpipers *C. melanotos* by observers with experience not only of Pectoral but also of juvenile Sharp-tailed. One, at Seal Sands, Cleveland, on 3rd September 1977, was watched for two hours by a dozen observers before it was identified as a Sharp-tailed. Another, on St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, from 20th to 29th September 1974, although conveniently accompanied by three Pectorals, was overlooked until 25th, by which time the 'four Pectorals' had been observed by many birdwatchers (Flumm 1975).

The first three British records, including two summer adults, were first identified as Pectorals, but the skins fortunately survived to be properly

\* In this paper, 'summer adult' refers to adults in autumn which have not completed the autumn body moult, rather than to 'spring adults' in the bright fresh nuptial plumage acquired in early summer.

Continued . . .

assigned to Sharp-tailed half a century later (Rivière 1930). A summer adult at Bedford in 1961 was initially reported as a 'peculiar Pectoral' (I. J. Ferguson-Lees *in litt.*). It is clear that summer adult Sharp-tailed can be—and doubtless has been—overlooked. Fortunately, individuals in winter and juvenile plumage are more obviously different from Pectoral.

This paper is concerned mainly with the field separation of the two species, rather than with the elimination of other waders, which is generally straightforward, but Purple Sandpiper *C. maritima* and Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* can cause difficulties and are discussed briefly. It is based on personal experience of one adult and one juvenile Sharp-tailed, the descriptions of all the British and Irish sight records, and an examination of three of the 19th-century specimens (the fourth could not be located). Pectoral Sandpiper details were taken from personal notes on over 30 individuals seen in Britain and others in the USA.

### British and Irish records

One previously accepted record, at Staines Reservoir, Surrey, on 28th September 1966 (*Brit. Birds* 60: 319), has been reconsidered by the Rarities Committee and, in the light of present knowledge, cannot now be regarded as fully proven; this decision is approved by the observer concerned. The remaining records up to 1978—one Irish and 14 British—are listed in table 1. All but two (January 1868 and April 1978) occurred between 6th August and 18th October, and nine were in eastern England. Of those in autumn, there have been nine summer adults, three juveniles and one first-winter; the high proportion of adults (69%) is unusual for a vagrant, particularly as summer adults are the most likely to be overlooked.

**Table 1. British and Irish records of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* up to 1978**

The bracketed references following three of the Norfolk records are the permanent accession numbers assigned by the Castle Museum, Norwich

	Age	Locality	Dates
1	Summer adult	Yarmouth, Norfolk	September 1848 (25.50)
2	Summer adult	Caister, Norfolk	16th September 1865 (45.87)
3	Not known	Terrington Marsh, Norfolk	9th January 1868
4	Summer adult	Breydon, Norfolk	29th August 1892 (125.937)
5	First-winter	Hamilton, Strathclyde	18th-21st October 1956
6	Summer adult	Bedford Sewage-farm, Bedfordshire	4th-11th September 1961
7	Summer adult	Cowpen Marsh, Cleveland	21st-24th August 1963
8	Juvenile	Ballycotton, Co. Cork	30th August 1973
9	Juvenile	Shotton, Clwyd	14th-24th October 1973
10	Juvenile	Morfa Harlech, Gwynedd	14th-15th October 1973
11	Summer adult	St Mary's, Scilly	20th-29th September 1974
12	Summer adult	Reading, Berkshire	17th-22nd August 1975
13	Summer adult	Staines Reservoir, Surrey	6th August 1976
14	Summer adult	Seal Sands, Cleveland	3rd September 1977
15	Winter adult	Langton Herring, Dorset	2nd April 1978

### Moult

The two species have broadly similar moult cycles (Witherby *et al.* 1940). The body plumage of adults is moulted in autumn, Pectoral starting as early as August. The St Mary's adult Sharp-tailed was in summer plumage



**178.** Adult Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* (left) with juvenile Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos*, Scilly, September 1974 (*D. B. Hunt*). Superficial resemblance strong, but note messy lower breast markings, scallops rather than streaks, and clean pale supercilium most prominent behind eye; looks pale-faced, but this feature more useful on juveniles

**179.** Adult Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*, Scilly, September 1974 (*D. B. Hunt*). Note messy sides of breast, dark ventral streaking, prominent supercilium behind eye and rather flat crown; otherwise, resemblance to Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos* is strong, with similar shape, pale bar on inner wing and pale mantle and scapular lines



**180.** Adult Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*, Scilly, September 1974 (*D. B. Hunt*). Identifiable even in this odd pose by combination of pale scapular line, messy sides of breast, with dark chevrons extending along fore flanks, and dark ventral streaking



**181.** Adult Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*, Scilly, September 1974 (*D. B. Hunt*). Identifiable as *acuminata* or Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos* by characteristic bill shape, small head on short neck, prominent supercilium and pale scapular line; seems to show ventral streaking, but safe identification barely possible on this view



in late September. The wings and tail are moulted in winter, or early spring, and the body feathers are moulted again between February and June.

Juveniles moult into first-winter plumage between October and January. They then closely resemble winter adults, but are separable by chestnut, or bright buff, edges to some wing-coverts. The juvenile Sharp-tailed at Shotton, Clwyd, in 1973 showed no sign of moult on 20th October, but the individual at Hamilton, Strathclyde, was in first-winter plumage on 18th October 1956 (Meiklejohn *et al.* 1959).

Thus, individuals seen between August and October can be summer adults, juveniles or birds in winter plumage. These three plumages are basically similar for Pectoral, but each is different for Sharp-tailed, particularly on the underparts. In autumn, both species can also be in transitional plumage.

### Field characters

#### General jizz

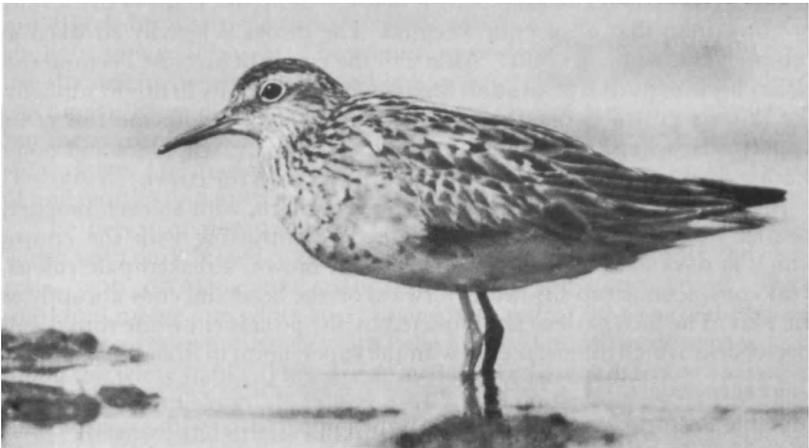
Both species vary in size between slightly larger and considerably larger than Dunlin *C. alpina*, a species which is itself very variable in size. Each has a flattish back, pot belly, short legs, rather long rear-end, and smallish head on a neck which, although normally appearing short, can become surprisingly long when the bird is alert. There were no significant differences in jizz between the Seal Sands adult and a Pectoral watched the same day on Coatham Marsh, Cleveland. The St Mary's adult, apart from being a little larger in size and broader about the head, was similar in jizz to the accompanying Pectorals. The adult at Cowpen Marsh, Cleveland, in 1963 was 'slightly bigger and if anything more portly' than Pectoral (Stead 1965). According to Johnson *et al.* (1974), the Shotton juvenile Sharp-tailed was 'much less upright in posture and stockier in appearance with shorter neck and legs', but, to my eyes, although very stocky, it was no stockier than some Pectorals, and measurements show that Sharp-tailed actually has

**182.** Adult male Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, Chukotski Peninsula, USSR, July 1970 (A. Kistchinski). Throat- and supercilium-streaking already very reduced, but extensive arrowheads remain on lower part of well-defined breast band





183. Adult Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*, Gulf of Amour, USSR, May 1969 (*M. Omelko*). Classic spring adult with considerable pot belly



184. Adult Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*, Gulf of Amour, USSR, September (year not known) (*T. Shibnev*). In heavy moult, but a dozen or so chevrons remain on sides of breast slightly longer legs. Sharp-tailed often has a flatter, less rounded crown than Pectoral (cf. *Brit. Birds* 67: plates 50 & 51 and 68: plates 44a & 44b).

While differences in jizz are not diagnostic, the tendency of Sharp-tailed to appear larger, more portly, shorter-necked and flatter-crowned does provide useful supporting characters. The sharp tail (Witherby *et al.* 1940) is of no value in the field.

#### *Head and crown*

Both species have a conspicuous pale supercilium, contrasting with dark crown, brownish ear-coverts and lores, and paler lower cheeks. The off-white to pale grey supercilium of Pectoral is generally broader in front of the eye, but rather thinner and tapering behind, sometimes finely streaked darker. The crown is chestnut-brown, streaked darker, but, in autumn, adults are duller and may lack chestnut. The supercilium normally con-



**185.** Three winter-plumaged Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *Calidris acuminata* (left) with one juvenile moulting into first-winter plumage, but retaining necklace and head-pattern (right), and one Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea* (preening), Australia, winter 1972/73 (Peder Weibull)

trasts quite strongly with the crown, but may be inconspicuous on adults. The throat is streaked on summer adults, but off-white, sometimes faintly streaked, on individuals in other plumages.

The supercilium of adult Sharp-tailed is rather broader and whiter than that of Pectoral and contrasts more with the crown. It is broader behind the eye than in front and can be faintly streaked darker. The crown is rufous-brown or chestnut-brown, streaked black-brown, and is generally a little brighter than that of juvenile Pectoral. The throat is heavily streaked in summer, but white in winter. Although the crown of juvenile Pectoral can be as chestnut as that of an adult Sharp-tailed, especially in bright sunlight, the latter's crown is outstandingly bright compared with the rest of its upperparts, whereas Pectoral has fringes to tertials, scapulars and outer mantle feathers which are brighter and rustier than the crown.

Juvenile Sharp-tailed has a striking face pattern, with an even broader, cleaner and whiter supercilium, markedly contrasting with the crown, which is dark chocolate-brown or chestnut-brown, streaked pale rufous. This conspicuous cap sits rather forward on the head and ends abruptly at the rear. The face pattern is completed by the prominent white throat and fore-cheeks which almost merge with the supercilium in front of the eye.

#### *Other upperparts*

Juvenile Pectoral has dark blackish-brown upperparts, with a conspicuous white mantle line and a rather broader, but less pure white, scapular (lower) line. Many feather edges are bright chestnut or rusty, particularly the tertials and outer mantle (between the mantle and scapular lines). Adults in autumn, from as early as July, are much duller, with obscured mantle and scapular lines and the chestnut feather edgings dulled by wear, but the scapular and especially the tertial edgings are still rustier than the crown.

The upperparts of adult Sharp-tailed in autumn are decidedly grey-brown, in striking contrast to the rufous-brown crown. The feather edges are brown and whitish and there is no rust or chestnut except that some individuals have rusty-buff inner edges to the tertials. White scapular and mantle lines can be vague or distinct, but the scapular line is usually the most distinct.

Juvenile Sharp-tailed has very dark upperparts, with large blackish mantle and scapular feathers, finely edged bright buff. The tertials and some wing-coverts are also edged pale rufous to buff, but do not approach

the rust of juvenile Pectoral. There is a thin white mantle line and a broken, less white scapular line, but both may be obscure. Although the crown is brighter than the rest of the upperparts, the contrast is less marked than on adults.

The number and intensity of pale Vs on the back is not a useful character, but the relative brightness of crown and back is diagnostic of adult Sharp-tailed and is at least helpful in separating juveniles.

#### *Underparts*

Summer adult, winter adult and juvenile Sharp-tailed each have very different underparts and all are distinct from those of Pectoral. Precise observation of the underparts of a suspected Sharp-tailed should always ensure correct identification.

In all plumages, Pectoral has dark blackish-brown streaks, on a warm buff background, across the entire width of the breast, forming a uniform gorget which contrasts sharply at the lower edge with the white belly. This 'pectoral band' has a slight downward point in the centre and is conspicuous, even in flight. Its general colour varies, some individuals having quite grey-brown breasts in dull light which are transformed by bright sunlight to a rich brown. The remaining underparts are white, although usually one or two streaks extend below the gorget at the extreme sides of the breast. Most individuals have a few vague dark streaks on the flanks, but these are often concealed by the closed wings and are apparent only at close range. The markings of the centre and lower part of the gorget consist of fine mottles and arrowheads on summer adult males.

The breast of summer adult Sharp-tailed is covered across its entire width with dark brown or ochraceous-brown scallops, crescents and chevrons, with streaking and spots restricted to the upper breast. These markings merge into white lower underparts and, at the sides of the breast, become ventral-pointing chevrons, which extend in two or three rows right along the white flanks. They are aptly described as 'boomerang shaped' in the Australian field guide (Slater 1970). The undertail-coverts are white, with extensive, and prominent, thin, dark brown streaks.

**186.** Four winter-plumaged Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *Calidris acuminata*, Australia, winter 1972/73 (Peder Weibull)



Winter adult Sharp-tailed lacks the breast markings and flank chevrons, but may retain some dark brown streaks on the undertail-coverts. It has a very pale grey to greyish-buff breast, merging into white belly, with thin dark streaks mainly restricted to the sides of breast, extending down in front of the carpal joint, but has a very few dark spots or streaks in the centre of the breast.

Juvenile Sharp-tailed has a rich orange-buff breast, recalling a bright juvenile Ruff, which is unique among *Calidris* waders. This colour, which was well illustrated in Witherby *et al.* (1940), shades into the white lower breast and belly and extends farther down at the sides by the carpal joint. In profile, the white belly shows extensively. A narrow collar of very fine, dark brown streaks encircles the lower throat, and there is a small area of thicker dark brown streaks within the orange-buff by the carpal joint. The flanks and undertail-coverts are unmarked white.

Both species may rarely have a faint buff wash on the flanks.

#### *Bare parts*

Sharp-tailed has a slightly shorter and straighter bill than Pectoral: a field impression which is supported by measurements. The bill is blackish, with only a trace of flesh or yellow-brown at the base of the lower mandible, whereas Pectoral's similarly coloured bill has a much larger pale basal area.

Pectoral has rather 'dirty' yellow-ochre legs, often tinged green, occasionally tinged brown. Sharp-tailed has pale greenish-grey or dull olive-green legs, which tend to be tinged yellow on juveniles. Witherby *et al.* (1940) accurately portrayed the typical leg colour of both species and support the field impression of a yellow tinge on juvenile Sharp-tailed which is not present on adults.

A Sharp-tailed at Zuidelijk Flevoland, Netherlands, from 1st to 26th November 1969 was in poor condition and atypically had flesh-coloured legs (Oreel 1974). Although such aberrant individuals underline the need for caution, leg colour is nevertheless a useful supporting field character.

#### *Measurements*

Prater *et al.* (1977) gave bill-, tarsus- and wing-lengths for both species, with data separated into the four age/sex combinations. These data are summarised in table 2. Within each species, there are no significant differences between adults and juveniles, but males average 6-10% larger

**Table 2. Comparative measurements (in mm) of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* and Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos***

The ranges and, in brackets, averages are derived from Prater *et al.* (1977)

		Sharp-tailed	Pectoral
Wing	♂	133-145 (140.0)	136-150 (143.6)
Wing	♀	124-137 (130.7)	124-136 (130.3)
Bill	♂	23- 28 ( 25.5)	26- 32 ( 28.9)
Bill	♀	22- 26 ( 24.0)	24- 30 ( 27.4)
Tarsus	♂	29- 32 ( 30.4)	26- 31 ( 28.6)
Tarsus	♀	26- 31 ( 28.4)	25- 28 ( 26.8)

than females in all measurements. On average, Sharp-tailed has a similar wing-length to Pectoral, slightly longer legs and a shorter bill, but all measurements show considerable overlap between the two species.

*Call*

Pectoral's usual note on passage is a reedy or hoarse 'kriiek', 'kreeek', 'tchree-eep', 'tirrp-tirrp' or 'trrit-trrit' often repeated and recalling—but distinct from—a Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea*. Sharp-tailed's calls are distinctly different, being less reedy and less harsh: 'plee', 'pleep', 'trrt',



**187.** First-winter Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, Kent, September 1978 (*R. J. Chandler*). Note good scapular lines and less distinct mantle lines, strong supercilium, broad wing-covert edgings and generally bright appearance compared with adult (plate 188)

**188.** Summer adult female Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, Kent, September 1979 (*R. J. Chandler*). Note heavily streaked throat and sides of neck, coarsely marked upperparts, absence of scapular line and inconspicuous pale mantle line, streaked and rather vague supercilium. Breast markings lacking arrowheads suggests female, confirmed by this individual being the smaller of two seen together



'príp', 'riup', 'whít', 'weep', 'weet' or 'cheeip', variously described as soft, metallic, dry or musical. Combinations such as 'prtt-wheet-wheet' or 'teet-teet-trrt-trrt' recall a Swallow *Hirundo rustica*. Both species call mainly in flight and can be very vocal, or frustratingly silent.

**Table 3. Summary of differences in autumn between Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** *Calidris acuminata* **and Pectoral Sandpiper** *C. melanotos*

	Sharp-tailed	Pectoral
Jizz	Basically similar, but tends to be slightly larger, more portly, shorter necked and flatter crowned	
Supercilium	Broader and whiter than Pectoral's, broader behind eye than in front; most pronounced on juveniles	Generally broader in front of eye, tapering behind; conspicuous, but may be obscure on adults
Crown	Adult: outstandingly chestnut compared with back. Juvenile: conspicuous chestnut-brown cap sits rather forward on head. A little brighter than back	Can be bright rusty, but less rusty than outer mantle and tertials
Face pattern	Juveniles: striking; extensive white throat and forecheeks almost merge with supercilium in front of eye	
Rest of upperparts	Variable white mantle and scapular lines. Juvenile: bright buff or pale rufous edges to outer mantle, scapulars, tertials and some wing-coverts are rather less bright than crown. Adult: decidedly grey-brown, in striking contrast to crown	Juvenile: rusty edges to tertials and outer mantle brighter than crown; prominent white scapular and mantle lines. Adult: duller, with obscured scapular and mantle lines
Breast and belly	Summer adult: breast heavily marked with brown scallops, crescents and chevrons, merging into white belly. Juvenile: breast rich orange-buff (unique among <i>Calidris</i> waders), merging into extensive white belly. Narrow collar of fine dark brown streaks encircles lower throat. Thicker streaks by carpal joint. Winter: breast very pale grey to greyish-buff, merging into white lower underparts. Thin dark streaks by carpal joint	Heavily streaked blackish-brown on warm buff background; ends abruptly at lower edge, contrasting strongly with white lower underparts. 'Pectoral band' conspicuous even in flight
Flanks	Summer adult: two or three rows of dark brown ventrally pointing chevrons. Winter/juvenile: unmarked white	Unmarked white. At close range, most show a few vague dark streaks
Undertail-coverts	Summer adult: extensive and prominent thin dark brown streaks. Winter adult: white, but may retain some streaks. Juvenile: unmarked white	Unmarked white
Bill	Straighter and slightly shorter. Blackish; trace of flesh or yellow-brown at base	Slightly longer. Blackish, more extensive pale at base
Legs	Dull olive-green or pale greenish-grey. Yellowish tinge on juveniles	'Dirty' yellow-ochre, often tinged green, occasionally tinged brown
Call	Soft dry 'pleep', 'cheep', 'trrt', etc., recalls Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Reedy harsh 'kriick', 'tirrp-tirrp', etc., recalls Curlew Sandpiper <i>C. ferruginea</i>

*Other features*

Other features of Sharp-tailed shared by both species, which are therefore not useful for separation, are mentioned here for completeness. The flight is generally sluggish, occasionally swift, with measured wing-beats recalling a female Ruff and making the bird appear larger in the air than on the ground. In flight, it shows very dark centre to the uppertail, with a conspicuous whitish oval area at each side of base, again recalling a Ruff, and a pale bar along the inner wing. Dark streaks on the sides of neck tend to form lines, especially on summer adults. Both species are usually very approachable.

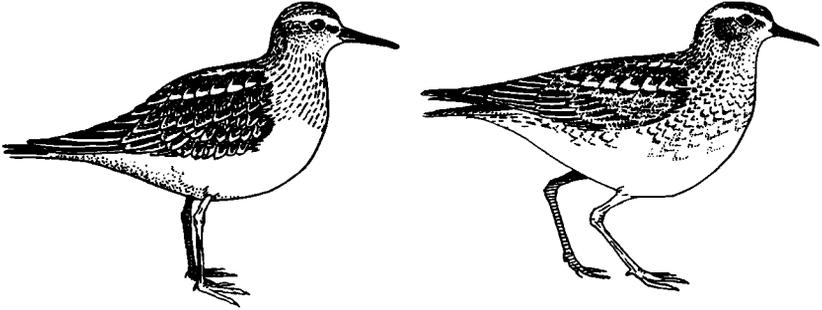


Fig. 2. Juvenile Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*. Note (1) conspicuous supercilium (which may be obscure on adults), generally broader in front of eye, tapering behind; (2) bill slightly longer than that of Sharp-tailed *C. acuminata*; (3) pale area at base of bill more extensive than on Sharp-tailed; (4) pectoral band; (5) flanks and undertail-coverts unstreaked white; and (6) prominent white scapular and mantle lines (*Bryan Bland*)

Fig. 3. Adult Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*. Note (1) supercilium broader and whiter than that of Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos*, broader behind eye than in front; (2) outstandingly chestnut crown; (3) bill straighter and slightly shorter than that of Pectoral; (4) breast heavily marked with brown scallops, crescents and chevrons, merging into white belly; (5) flanks showing two or three rows of ventrally pointing chevrons; (6) undertail-coverts extensively streaked; (7) upperparts grey, in contrast to crown and (8) scapular line usually more distinct than mantle line (*Bryan Bland*)

*Spring adults*

Pectorals are now regular in Britain in spring, but Sharp-tailed has yet to be recorded in spring plumage. The individual in Dorset on 2nd April 1978 was still in winter plumage: the nuptial plumage of a spring adult being acquired in May or June. Generally, the differences between summer adults (in autumn) of the two species also apply to spring adults, the underparts providing the most useful characters. Spring adult Sharp-tailed differs from autumn adult in having rufous edges to some mantle feathers, scapulars, tertials and wing-coverts, more evident dark streaks in the supercilium, an even brighter chestnut crown and a chestnut-buff wash on the upper breast. Although the crown is still more chestnut than the rest of the upperparts, the contrast is less marked.

Spring adult Pectorals have bright upperparts—like juveniles—but otherwise generally resemble autumn adults. In both species, first-summer birds are inseparable from adults.

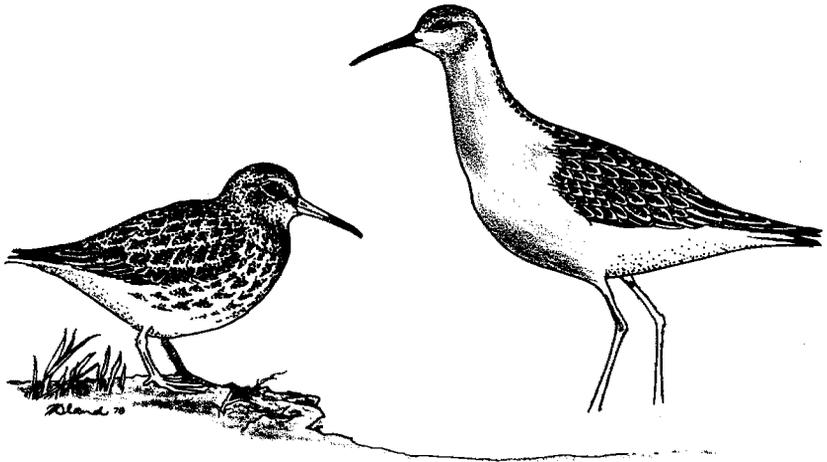


Fig. 4. Surprisingly, both Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima* (left) and Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* have been identified as Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *C. acuminata*. Note brown blotchy streaks on breast and flanks, poor supercilium, and bill : leg ratio of Purple Sandpiper; and longer legs, rounder head, longer neck and absence of white belly on Ruff (Bryan Bland)

#### Other confusion species: Ruff and Purple Sandpiper

The superficial resemblance between a small (female) juvenile Ruff and a juvenile Sharp-tailed is strong. A female Ruff is only a little larger, has a buff breast, bright upperparts, which can show one distinct bright V, a weak wing-bar and white lateral uppertail-coverts. The flight is similar, and the bill, although a little longer, is of similar shape. Ruff, however, is slimmer, has longer legs (usually of the wrong colour), a much longer neck and a rounder head. Although sometimes exhibiting a fairly distinct supercilium, it lacks the striking face pattern of juvenile Sharp-tailed. The buff breast can be quite orange, but this suffuses back close to the legs, so that, in profile, Ruff lacks the extensive white belly of Sharp-tailed.

It is less easy to see how a Purple Sandpiper can be identified as a Sharp-tailed, but this has occasionally happened. The outstanding instance was a juvenile at Benacre Broad, Suffolk, in August 1977, which, although seen by many observers and widely regarded at the time as a Sharp-tailed, was undoubtedly a Purple (G. J. Jobson, D. J. Holman, A. J. Prater *in litt.*). Most Purple Sandpipers seen in Britain are in the slate-grey winter plumage, feed on wave-splashed rocks and look nothing like Sharp-tailed. A juvenile or summer adult, however, with short legs, short neck, round belly, 'dirty' yellowish legs and chestnut on crown and foremantle is another matter, especially when seen in atypical habitat. The main distinctions are the very poorly marked, or absent, supercilium and the underparts which, with brown blotchy streaks on the breast and flanks, are quite different from all plumages of Sharp-tailed. Also, Purple's bill is considerably longer than its tarsus, whereas Sharp-tailed's is clearly shorter (Prater *et al.* 1977).

AJP has pointed out that the very unworn edges to the mantle and coverts, and the down in places on the head, clearly made the Suffolk bird a

juvenile; yet thoughts which made it seem like a Sharp-tailed had to assume that it was an adult. If the importance of ageing any rare wader had been appreciated, the original misidentification could not have occurred.

### Acknowledgments

Grateful thanks are due to the many people involved in the preparation of this paper, especially to Bryan Bland, P. A. Dukes and D. S. Flumm for reviewing an early draft; J. G. Goldsmith for providing facilities at the Castle Museum, Norwich; M. J. Rogers and the *British Birds* Rarities Committee for making descriptions available; P. J. Grant for his constant encouragement; and Dr Irene Neufeldt for her help in obtaining photographs. Valuable assistance was also given by R. H. Dennis, I. J. Ferguson-Lees, D. J. Holman, G. J. Jobson, B. A. E. Marr, B. Nightingale, A. J. Prater, M. J. Seago, B. Walker and N. Williams.

### Summary

The 15 accepted British and Irish records of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* are listed in table 1. The main identification features separating Sharp-tailed from Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos* are summarised in table 3. The only other likely confusion species are Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* and Purple Sandpiper *C. maritima*.

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