

**FIRST RECORD OF THE SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER  
(*CALIDRIS ACUMINATA*) IN ALABAMA**

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Figure 1. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at farm pond near Leighton in north Alabama. (Photo by Ned Piper)

The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*) breeds in northern Siberia and winters from New Guinea, New Caledonia, and the Tonga Islands south to Australia. In western Alaska it is a casual spring and fairly common fall migrant, and is a rare but regular fall migrant along the entire Pacific coast of North America. It is considered a very rare migrant across the North American continent and most records are of juvenile birds in fall (AOU 1983, National Geographic Society 1983, Haymen et al. 1986). To the best of our knowledge, the following report documents at least the eighth spring record for North America, the second for eastern North America, and the first record for any season in Alabama (Table 1).

On 30 April 1988 at approximately 1030, Floyd Sherrod and the authors discovered a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at the edge of a three acre pond along County Road 22, approximately four miles west of Leighton, Colbert County, Alabama (Fig. 1). The pond receives waste runoff from

two large hog barns and is a regular feeding and resting site for migrating shorebirds. The bird associated with 24 Pectoral Sandpipers (*Calidris melanotos*) and was last seen at 1930 on 1 May. During the two day period, approximately four hours of observations were made by the authors under excellent light conditions at a distance of 25–30 meters with 15–60x 40x spotting scopes, and 7 x 35 binoculars. The following description is compiled from notes and photographs taken during that period.

**Size:** Similar to that of a Pectoral Sandpiper but chunkier and slightly taller.

**Head:** Crown brownish red with fine dark streaks. Supercilium pale, and becoming broader and more distinct posterior to the eye. Eye ring pale contrasting with dark eye stripe that passed through the lores and broadened in the auricular region. Nape and hindneck finely streaked with black across a white background. Chin and throat finely streaked with black across a white background. Auricular region very finely streaked with brown across a buff background.

**Underparts:** Breast heavily marked with dark streaks, chevrons, and spots across an orange-buff background. Streaking turned to spots and chevrons on the lower breast and upper belly. Belly white; distinct chevrons and streaks continued along the flanks, vent, and undertail coverts across a white background. Lacked sharp line of demarcation between the streaked breast and unstreaked belly as seen in Pectoral Sandpiper.

**Upperparts:** Mantle feathers dark brown and fringed with buff or rust color. Mantle "V" rust colored. Scapulars dark brown with rusty fringe and contrasting with smaller grayish lesser coverts. Lesser coverts were fringed with white and gave proximal portion of folded wing a scaly appearance. Median coverts, greater coverts, and tertials dark brown and fringed with either buff or rust color. In flight, upperparts similar to Pectoral Sandpiper. Broad dark median stripe passed through the rump. Sides of rump white. Rectrices dark brown.

**Bill, legs and eyes:** Bill shorter than Pectoral Sandpiper's and slightly deeper at the base, but shape similar. In good light, bill two toned, with proximal third to one-half being yellowish and the rest black. Legs yellow but slightly longer than Pectoral Sandpiper's. Iris black.

**Behavior:** Foraging behavior similar to Pectoral Sandpiper. Pecked and probed in mud along edge of pond, but also foraged in water up to its "knees." On two occasions seen lowering its head in horizontal position and chasing a Pectoral Sandpiper a short distance (<1 meter).

**Similar Species:** The Pectoral Sandpiper is the species most similar

to the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. The field marks that best distinguish the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper from the Pectoral Sandpiper are: (1) presence of spots and chevrons on the breast, sides, and crissum rather than the finer streaks that are found on just the breast and sides, (2) lack of a sharp demarcation between the markings on the breast and the unmarked belly, (3) bright rusty crown, mantle, and scapulars, and (4) bright buffy breast.

**TABLE 1. SPRING RECORDS FOR SHARP-TAILED SAND-PIPER IN NORTH AMERICA**

Location	Date	No. of Ind.	Citation
Alaska, Juneau.	17 May 1970	2	*AFN 24:634
Connecticut, Milford Pt.	8 May 1977	1	**AB 31:974
Canada, Alberta	23 May 1978	1	AB 32:1023
Canada, Saskatchewan	25 May 1980	1	AB 34:788
Alaska, Attu	26 May 1980	1	AB 34:806
California, Lancaster	5-9 May 1982	1	AB 36:894
California, Kern N.W.R.	8-10 May 1984	1	AB 38:960
Alabama, Muscle Shoals	30 April-1 May 1988	1	AB 42:447

\* AFN = Audubon Field Notes \*\* American Birds

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### Literature Cited

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