

Notes on sighting of a Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*)

Date : 27 November 1999

Time : between 4.15 pm and 5.15 pm

Location : reclaimed land beside Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal

Weather : slightly overcast, with a short, light drizzle

Observers : Alfred Chia, Kenneth Kee and Chris Artuso

Equipment : Leica 10x42; Swarovski 8x30; Kowa TSN 823 spotting scope

Distance : variously from 30m to 50m

Background/Events

I received an e-mail from Ed Hagen on 27/11/99 at 12.06 pm on a sighting of a Pectoral Sandpiper between 8 to 9 am on 27/11 itself. The same bird was seen a day earlier by Sonny Wing. News that a Pectoral Sandpiper was around had been circulating for about 2-3 weeks prior to this sighting, but was however not located on the few trips that were made there.

Kenneth and myself arrived at about 3.50 pm. We searched in vain for the bird for the first 20 minutes. We were at the wrong location, it seems. We decided to drive further ahead where we met Chris Artuso (who was birding alone and was not aware of the Pectoral's presence). This was about 200 metres after the "estuary" where the local birders used to watch the shorebirds from.

Three of us then continued the search on the hardened earth (this was on the right side of the track heading in towards the jetty). At certain locations, the substrate was soft and small pools of collected rain-water were formed.

After a 5 minute search, we flushed a Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*). It flew a short distance and landed behind a low mound. We immediately had our binoculars on the location where it had landed. This was about 50 metres away from the track. Another 30 seconds and we had found our bird! The Pectoral Sandpiper was standing exposed nearby the plover. It was about 35 metres from where we were. Unfortunately, the bird sensed our presence and flew away, but not before we got an unobstructed look at its diagnostic belly features. We had it in view for about 20 seconds.

I located the bird again further inland about 10 minutes later. Again, it was in the company of the Little Ringed Plovers. This time round, we managed to "scope" the bird. It then flew off again and went over a small "hump", together with the plovers. This time, it landed about 30 metres from the track. It was here where the bird stayed the longest – about 25 to 30 minutes. Its features and habits were noted and a sketch drawn.

Discussion

The Pectoral Sandpiper is easily confused with the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*). As I have no experience with *C. acuminata*, I am not disposed to do a comparison here. But the clear demarcation between the streaky brownish breast and its white belly, together with its flight call have been good aids in helping to ascertain the identity of *C. melanotos*.

Pectoral Sandpipers breeds in Siberia and Arctic North America. Nearly the entire population migrates to South America to winter. Small numbers however also winters in Australia and New Zealand. Transatlantic depressions and storms also bring juveniles regularly to Western Europe and is the commonest Neararctic wader to Europe. (Hayman et al 1986 & Rosair & Cottridge 1995) In Hong Kong, singles *C. melanotos* have been recorded almost annually at Mai Po during spring passage since 1986 (Viney et al 1994). It has not been recorded in Wallacea yet but is listed as being likely to reach Wallacea occasionally (Coates & Bishop 1997). Pectoral Sandpiper is however listed as a probable addition to Singapore's list (Lim 1997). If accepted, *C. melanotos* will be a new addition to the checklist of Singapore.

Acknowledgements

A word of thanks is in order here for Ed Hagen for filling us in in quick time on this sighting.

References

Hayman, P; Marchant, J & Prater, T 1986 – Shorebirds: An identification guide to the waders of the world. Christopher Helm (Publishers) Ltd. London, UK.

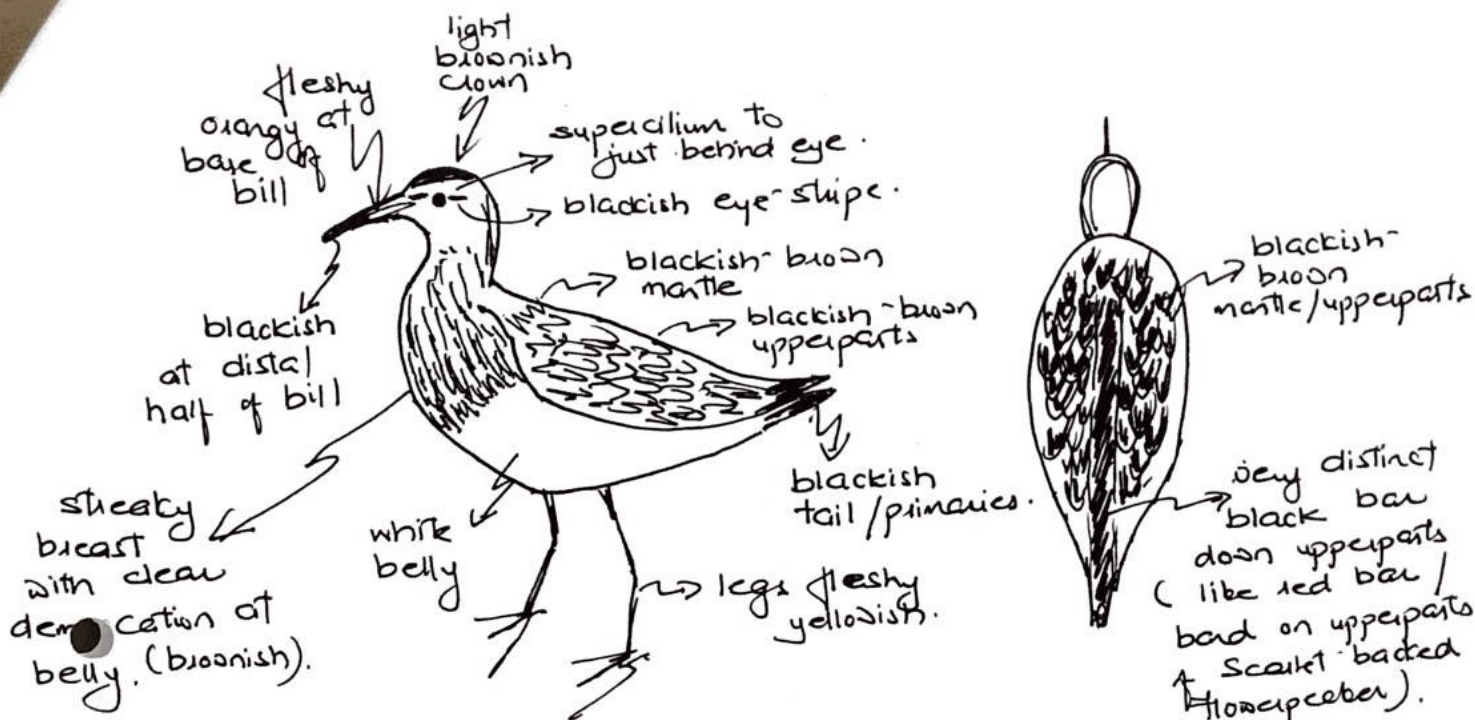
Rosair, D & Cottridge, D 1995 – Photographic Guide to the Waders of the World. Hamlyn Limited. London, UK.

Viney, C; Phillipps, K & Lam, C.Y. 1994 – Birds of Hong Kong and South China. Government Printer. Hong Kong.

Coates, B & Bishop, D 1997 – A Guide to the Birds of Wallacea. Dove Publications Pty. Queensland, Australia.

Lim, K.S. 1997 – Birds: An Illustrated Field Guide to the Birds of Singapore. Sun Tree Publishing Ltd. Singapore.

Report by Alfred Chia
28/11/99



Description

1. Size recalls Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)
2. Slightly decurved bill with distal half blackish and orangey-yellow at base.
Bill size approximately 2.5 cm?
3. Eyes black, with a thin black eye-stripe extending across it.
4. Crown a lighter shade of brown, but visible enough to give a "capped" appearance when seen at a correct angle.
5. White supercilium stretching to just behind eye.
6. Mantle, upperparts and scapulars all appear a blackish-brown, giving the bird a mottled look.
7. Tail black.
8. Very streaky brownish breast, with a distinct, clear demarcation with white belly.
9. Underparts whitish.
10. Legs orange-yellow.
11. Flight call is a single "kreet" sound, repeated at approximately 2 seconds interval.
12. Feeds by walking slowly on hardened earth, stopping many times, and on a few occasions standing exposed on raised "humps". It also has a habit of walk, stop, and stretching its neck, as if "looking" for something.