

## **The Buff-breasted Sandpiper : a second Australian sight record**

By E. S. HOSKIN and K. A. HINDWOOD

The first known occurrence of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper, *Tryngites subruficollis*, in Australia was recorded by Frederick Smith who published in 1962, detailed notes on the plumage and habits of a bird of that species seen on March 18, 1962 at Altona, near Melbourne. In the following weeks more than fifty interested observers watched the sandpiper, which was last seen in the same locality on May 5, 1962.

We are now able to record a second occurrence of the species in Australia. On Sunday, April 4, 1965, we were watching numerous waders, of some ten species, on the estuarine sand-and-mud flats on the northern shore of Botany Bay near the old mouth of Cook's River. Among a mixed party of Little Stints, Curlew Sandpipers and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, one wader stood out because of its orange-yellow legs. Closer observation showed that it was, or appeared to be, slightly larger than the Sharp-tailed Sandpipers nearby; it had the full "rounded" shape and the high forehead of a plover, a rather thin bill, and its movements were more akin to those of a plover than a sandpiper.

During more than twenty-five years of fairly regular observations at Botany Bay we have listed some thirty species of waders, but here was one that was "new" to us and different from any previously seen in the locality.

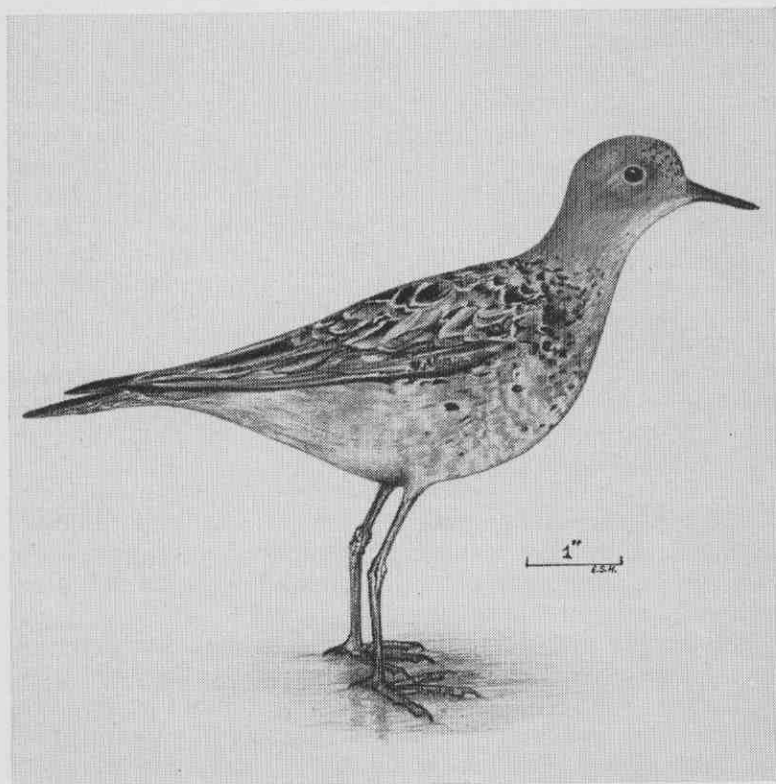
The bird was under observation for more than half an hour. Notes on its plumage, leg and bill colours, and habits were taken. There was no doubt in our minds that we were watching a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, a conclusion subsequently confirmed when relevant literature and colour plates were consulted.

At a casual glance the bird seen by us could have been mistaken for a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, mainly because the back and wing markings of both species are similar. However, apart from its much brighter (orange-yellow) legs, its underparts were a warm or rich buff, somewhat brighter on the middle of the breast, with light spotting or flecking near the shoulders of the wings. The cream-coloured eye-ring was obvious and the bill was recorded as being blackish, slender, and not as long as that of a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.

Conditions were quite good for observation—an afternoon sun and very little wind. Several times the bird was disturbed by people walking across the flats and we were able to note the tail and rump pattern, which was generally dark with some lighter markings, but without any white edgings to the tail-feathers. The white of the under-wing, said to be a noticeable field character, was not

seen by us, possibly because the bird generally flew away from us and fairly low. When it finally left the area it rose a couple of hundred feet into the sun and was watched until it was a speck in the distance, when it came down, apparently in the Mascot airfield which adjoins Botany Bay.

The fore part of the crown was finely marked, the crown itself appeared to be greyish-brown; the occiput, and the area extending round to near the eyes, was a rufous colour. The head markings differed from those in several illustrations examined, in all of which the entire crown and nape is marked.



Buff-breasted Sandpiper. Head markings based on field notes on bird seen at Botany Bay on April 4, 1965.

Drawn by E. S. Hoskin.

On a further visit to the flats on April 18, 1965 a very brief view was obtained of the same, or another, Buff-breasted Sandpiper. The only obvious difference noted in the extremely limited time the bird was under observation was in the colour of its legs, which appeared to be dull reddish instead of orange-yellow as in the earlier record.

An excellent illustration of the species is given in the *Book of Birds* (1937) published by the National Geographic Society. The attitude of the bird seen by us on April 4, generally resembled that picture rather than the more upright pose depicted in the colour plate accompanying Smith's field notes in the *Australian Bird Watcher* (1962).

The Buff-breasted Sandpiper breeds in northern Alaska and normally migrates through the central Americas to Argentine. It is considered a comparatively rare bird in coastal localities within its usual range. Casual occurrences, and stragglers, have been noted in such countries as eastern Siberia, Japan, England, France, Switzerland, Egypt and Australia.

#### REFERENCES

*The Book of Birds*: National Geographic Society, vol. 1, p. 280.  
Smith, Frederick T. H. An Australian Sight Record of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper. *The Australian Bird Watcher*, vol. 1, No. 7, pp. 185-192, pl. 42.

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Manuscript received May 26, 1965.

*Editor's Note*: Since the receipt of this paper the Buff-breasted Sandpiper has been again sighted in Victoria by F. T. H. Smith and others at Carrum Swamp, and at Cherry Swamp at Altona, and by V. T. Lowe and others at Mystic Park.—J.H.

**Display of the Yellow-tailed Thornbill.**—In the open country about Jandowae, Queensland, the Yellow-tailed Thornbill, *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*, seems to be nomadic in the autumn and winter months, when small flocks of from six to a dozen birds are often seen about the property for a few hours and then move on.

On the morning of May 22, 1964 I was watching one such flock of about eight birds feeding on the ground and calling in their characteristic fashion when one bird picked up a small feather. It crouched down and, with head held upward, fluttered its wings, apparently in courtship display. A second bird several feet away flew to the bird with the feather and copulation was attempted. The bird with the feather still in its bill flew to a low fence wire and the second bird followed and again copulation was attempted. At this stage a third bird flew to the wire and endeavoured to chase the second bird away. The bird with the feather flew to the ground where it dropped it and a moment later all three birds flew off.

It would appear that the picking up or the sight of the feather, which is used so much for nest building purposes, triggered off a sexual urge, stimulating a display and the attempted copulation.—LLOYD NIELSEN, Jandowae, Queensland.

**The Little Whimbrel in Tasmania.**—The occurrence of the Little Whimbrel, *Numenius minutus*, in Tasmania, although having been suggested on more than one occasion, has never been