

New Bird Records for Micronesia and Major Island Groups in Micronesia

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Abstract.—Since Baker (1951) published his comprehensive work on the birds of Micronesia, several ornithologists and other observers have seen or collected additional bird species in Micronesia. This list of 15 species new to Micronesia, and 11 species new to major island groups in Micronesia, increases the published knowledge of Micronesian birds on the basis of birds observed or collected by the author.

Introduction

Most, but not all, of these new records are sight records based on the author's long residence in the Palau Islands and extensive travel throughout most of the rest of Micronesia during the past 26 years. Intensive bird observation and record keeping took place over the past four years.

Sight records of birds without verification by other observers or good photographs can always be suspect. However, the author was fortunate in having exceptional observation conditions for the Palau records because most of these new records were seen at a seaside garbage dump on the island of Koror where it was possible to approach the birds very closely in a vehicle on a series of causeways intersecting the garbage dump. Eight power binoculars were used for the observations and most of the new records were observed from a distance of 6 to 15 m, often for extended periods of time without flushing the birds. A good reference collection of literature on Asiatic, Pacific, Australian and North American birds enabled the author to carefully compare the observed birds with descriptive literature and illustrations.

Although a fair number of ornithologists have traveled in Micronesia in the last one hundred years, none remained long, and though the resident birds of Micronesia are now adequately reported, and no new species are likely to be discovered, the migrant and vagrant birds are less well known and many have been missed by the itinerant ornithologists. Some of the birds for which new records are listed in this paper are regular migrants to or through Micronesia.

Sooner or later, most of the birds listed in this paper will probably be collected, deposited in the bird collections of reputable institutions and identified and published on by ornithologists. Present bird protection laws in Palau do not allow the scientific collection of most species of birds even under permit. This situation does not obtain

in most other parts of Micronesia. In the meantime, the author feels that it is worthwhile to publish these new records which considerably increases the knowledge of bird species and distribution in Micronesia.

The scientific names of the birds are in accordance with the world list of birds published by Morony, Bock and Farrand (1975). The English names of the birds are derived from a variety of sources.

Birds New to Micronesia

Egretta garzetta (Linnaeus) 1766 — LITTLE EGRET

First observed on Koror Island, Palau Islands, Caroline Islands at the garbage dump as a single bird on 23 March 1974 and subsequently 24 times during the rest of 1974 as singles or in twos and threes. Observed during both spring and fall migrations of 1975 and 1976, the last observation being of 3 birds at the Koror garbage dump 8 November 1976. This all white plumaged egret is readily separated from all other east Asiatic and western Pacific egrets by its size, black bill, black legs, bright yellow or greenish-yellow feet (some with the color running up the back of the legs) and the two long neck plumes in breeding plumage, which plumes were observed on some of the spring migrants in Palau. Some of the observations of this bird were made when they were in the immediate company of white phase *Egretta sacra*, *Egretta intermedia* and winter plumage *Bubulcus ibis*, thus facilitating comparisons. The Little Egret is a regular spring and fall migrant through Palau (and sometimes winter resident) though apparently in small numbers.

Glareola maldivarum J. R. Forster 1795 — ORIENTAL PRATINCOLE

Observed at the garbage dump on Koror: one bird on 4, 7 and 8 December 1973, one bird on 26, 27 and 28 April 1974, one bird on 18 May 1974, one bird on 16 June 1974, two birds on 19 and 23 July 1974, a dozen sightings during 1975 and three birds on 20 August 1976. Observed on an antenna field on Moen Island, Truk Atoll, Caroline Islands, one bird, 16 to 20 March 1975. The bird on Moen Island was also observed by Eugene Kridler, Wildlife Biologist with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Honolulu, Hawaii. This very distinctive bird was observed both on the ground feeding on insects and in various attitudes of flight. The reddish brown coloration on parts of the underwings was easily seen, which characteristic separates this bird from *Glareola nordmanni* (Black-winged Pratincole). The shallowly forked, rather than deeply forked, tail separates this bird from *Glareola pratincola* (Collared Pratincole). Other characteristics noted were the black tail band, white rump, black-edged cream colored throat and reddish color at the base of the beak. This bird is an irregular migrant to Micronesia, probably on an east-west migration route rather than north-south.

Limosa limosa (Linnaeus) 1758 — BLACK-TAILED GODWIT

Observed at the Koror garbage dump, one bird on 21 April 1974, three birds on 20 and 24 August 1974, and one bird on 2 May 1976. Three sightings were also made during 1975. The long bicolored bill, white tail with broad black terminal

band and the white upper wing bars distinguish this bird from any other shore bird known from the western Pacific or Asia. Some of the birds observed during spring migration were in the rusty breeding plumage. Probably a regular migrant through Palau, though in small numbers.

Numenius minutus Gould 1841 — LITTLE CURLEW

Observed a flock of 9 of these birds in a grassy field on Malakal Island, Palau Islands, Caroline Islands on 4 April 1974. One bird observed at the Koror garbage dump on 12, 20 and 26 October 1974 and one observed on 3 November 1974. One bird observed on the lawn of the Trust Territory Biology Laboratory on Koror on 2 May 1976. This bird resembles *Numenius phaeopus* (Whimbrel) except that it is smaller, the bill is shorter, more slender and less down-curved, and there is no white rump patch. Apparently an irregular migrant through Palau.

Tringa erythropus (Pallas) 1764 — SPOTTED REDSHANK

Observed on an antenna field on Moen Island, Truk Atoll, Caroline Islands on 18 March 1975. This is a medium sized shorebird with red legs and a white rump patch. Separable from *Tringa totanus* (Common Redshank) by the lack of white secondaries on wings. Probably an irregular migrant in central and western Micronesia.

Tringa totanus (Linnaeus) 1758 — COMMON REDSHANK

Observed at the garbage dump on Koror, one bird on 17 October 1973, two birds on 20 August 1974, one bird on 11 September 1974 and two birds on 15 September 1976. As in the preceding bird, this bird has red legs, a white rump patch, and in addition white wing secondaries which are very obvious in flight. An uncommon fall migrant through Palau.

Tringa stagnatilis (Bechstein) 1803 — MARSH SANDPIPER

Observed at the garbage dump on Koror, 1 bird on 2 May 1974, 21 birds between 7 September and 17 November 1974, including 6 on 27 September 1976, 10 birds during 1975 and 2 birds on 1 May 1976. This bird looks like a small delicate version of *Tringa nebularia* (Common Greenshank) with a very slender medium long bill (not upturned), greenish legs and white rump patch extending up back. This bird and Common Greenshanks have been observed feeding together at the garbage dump facilitating comparisons. Probably a regular migrant through Palau.

Xenus cinereus (Güldenstädt) 1774 — TEREK SANDPIPER

Observed at the garbage dump on Koror, 1 bird on 4 October 1973, 26 birds between 21 April and 25 June 1974, 18 birds between 2 August and 9 November 1974, more than 50 birds during spring and fall migrations in 1975 and 22 birds in one flock on 8 May 1976. This medium sized grey sandpiper with yellow to orange legs and long upturned bill is so distinctive it cannot be confused with any other shorebird. A regular migrant through Palau.

Calidris canutus (Linnaeus) 1758 — RED KNOT

Observed at the garbage dump on Koror, one bird on 6 May 1976. The one

bird observed was obviously in breeding plumage as the rust color was very striking and separates this bird from *Calidris tenuirostris* (Great Knot). The straight bill separates this bird from breeding plumage *Calidris ferruginea* (Curlew Sandpiper) and *Calidris alpina* (Dunlin).

Philomachus pugnax (Linnaeus) 1758 — RUFF

Two Ruffs were observed at the garbage dump on Koror, 21 September to 12 October 1974, one Ruff was observed 27 May to 6 June 1975 and three Ruffs were observed 18 September 1976. This bird has the general appearance of *Charadrius dominica* (Lesser Golden Plover), but is longer legged, has a longer bill and has white patches on the sides of the tail in flight. One of the observed birds had bright orange-red legs. Probably a regular migrant through Palau.

Larus ridibundus Linnaeus 1766 — BLACK-HEADED GULL

Observed at the garbage dump on Koror, 11 birds on 9 December 1973 which remained until 27 March 1974, 3 birds on 14 January 1975 which remained until 1 March 1975, and 8 birds on 20 December 1975 which remained until 15 March 1976. Thus Black-headed Gulls have over-wintered in Palau for the past three years. Most of them have been immature gulls with white leading edges to the wings, grey mantles, black tips to the outer wing primaries, dark ear patches on white heads, white tails with black terminal bands and dull red to orange-red bills and feet. In the winter of 1973-74 and in the winter 1975-76 one adult gull in winter plumage accompanied the immatures. The adults had pure white tails (without the black bands) and full color medium-red bills and feet. The above characteristics separates this gull from any other gull which could possibly show up in Palau. Apparently a regular migrant and winter resident in Palau.

Clamator coromandus (Linnaeus) 1766 — CHESTNUT-WINGED CUCKOO

Collected on Koror near the Trust Territory Biology Laboratory on 4 June 1967. Specimen identified by National Museum of Natural History ornithologists and stored in that institution's collections under NMNH number 526212. This specimen is no doubt a vagrant from the Philippine Islands or Indonesia.

Motacilla flava Linnaeus 1758 — YELLOW WAGTAIL

Observed at the Koror garbage dump, two birds 26 to 28 April 1974, two birds 2 to 27 September 1974, one bird 20 October 1974 and one bird 1 December 1974 and 11 April 1975, and one bird 28 October 1976. Six birds observed in scrubland on Koror 20 April 1976. Three birds observed on Tomil-Gagil Island, Yap Islands, Caroline Islands 4 April 1974. All the birds seen were in various stages of winter or immature plumage. All had some yellow on the underparts and all had the white outer tail feathers. Upperparts were olivegreen to brownish, blue-grey head cap on some, white eye-strip noticeable. Considered a regular migrant or winter resident in Palau. Those birds observed at the garbage dump on Koror were often bullying and aggressive towards the shorebirds present, sometimes chasing them for long distances.

Motacilla alba Linnaeus 1758 — WHITE WAGTAIL

One bird observed at the Koror garbage dump 10 and 11 March 1975. About the same size as the Yellow Wagtail, above with grey back, black bib on breast, white throat, forehead and belly. The one bird seen was no doubt a straggler from the Philippine Islands or Indonesia.

Emberiza melanocephala Scopoli 1769 — BLACK-HEADED BUNTING

Collected at the garbage dump on Koror 5 April 1976. Identified by National Museum of Natural History ornithologists and stored in that institution's collections as NMNH number 536692. This vagrant bird constitutes a very interesting record as its normal range is between southeast Europe and central India.

Birds New to Major Island Groups in Micronesia*Fregata minor* (Gmelin) 1789 — GREAT FRIGATEBIRD

Previously recorded from several parts of Micronesia by Baker (1951) and others, but not from the Palau Islands. Observed 25 to 30 of these birds soaring over Helen Island 15 May 1969. Helen Island is the single island on Helen Atoll which is about 483 kilometers south-west of the Palau Islands and is politically a part of Palau District of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The birds were soaring and flying immediately above the small uninhabited island at altitudes of from 15 to 152 meters. The all black underparts of the males separate this frigatebird from any others that occur in this part of the world.

Fregata ariel (Gray) 1845 — LESSER FRIGATEBIRD

Previously recorded by Baker (1951) and others from several parts of Micronesia, but not from the Palau Islands. Observed more than one hundred of these birds soaring above Helen Island on 15 May 1969 in company with the *Fregata minor* (Great Frigatebirds) mentioned above. The male of this frigatebird is easily distinguished from other species of frigatebirds by the all black underparts with small white body patches under each wing. One male of this bird was seen on a nest on Helen Island. On occasions between 1969 and 1974, the author has returned to Helen Island, and on each occasion has observed both Great Frigatebirds and Lesser Frigatebirds soaring over the island, but no dates or numbers were recorded.

Bubulcus ibis (Linnaeus) 1758 — CATTLE EGRET

Previously recorded in Micronesia from Palau by Baker (1951) and from Guam by Drahos (1977). One bird observed on an antenna field on Moen Island, Truk Atoll, Caroline Islands on 18 March 1975. This bird was all white with black legs and feet except that it had a rusty patch on the forehead which indicates that it was beginning to change into breeding plumage. Lack of yellow feet separate this bird from *Egretta garzetta* (Little Egret), and shorter neck and legs separate this bird from *Egretta intermedia* (Plumed Egret), Leg color and general shape separate this bird from white-phase *Egretta sacra* (Pacific Reef Egret). Although this species regularly migrates through Palau and probably regularly through the Mariana Islands, this Truk sighting is probably a vagrant.

Egretta intermedia (Wagler) 1829 — PLUMED EGRET

Previously recorded from Micronesia by Baker (1951) from the Palau Islands, Mariana Islands and Ulithi Atoll (politically a part of Yap District of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands). Observed one of these birds on an antenna field on Moen Island, Truk Atoll on 17 March 1975. This is a medium-sized all white egret with an orange-yellow bill, black legs and feet. Separated from white-phase *Egretta sacra* (Pacific Reef Egret) by leg color, from *Egretta garzetta* (Little Egret) by not having yellow or yellow-green feet and from winter plumage *Bubulcus ibis* by longer neck and legs and brighter colored orange-yellow bill. It is possible that this bird is a regular migrant through central Micronesia as well as western Micronesia.

Anas penelope Linnaeus 1758 — EURASIAN WIDGEON

Previously recorded from Micronesia in Yap and the Mariana Islands by Baker (1951) and in the Marshall Island by Amerson (1969). Observed one male bird 28 December 1974 on a fresh water reservoir on the southern part of the island of Babelthuap, Palau Islands, Caroline Islands. Although this bird was observed at a distance of about 183 meters, it remained in view for a considerable period of time. The rusty head, buff crown, white wing patch and grey sides were clearly seen and separates this bird from other ducks. Probably an irregular migrant to Palau.

Charadrius squatarola (Linnaeus) 1758 — GREY PLOVER

Previously reported from Micronesia in the Mariana Islands, Truk, and the Marshall Islands by Baker (1951) and on Nauru Island by Pearson (1962). Observed at the garbage dump on Koror, one bird on 27 and 28 April 1974, one bird on 10, 11 and 12 May 1975 and one bird on 1 May 1976. This bird in winter plumage looks like *Pluvialis dominica* (Lesser Golden Plover) but is basically grey rather than brown in color, has black axillary underwing markings and a white rump patch. Apparently an occasional migrant in Micronesia.

Charadrius dubius Scopoli 1786 — LITTLE RINGED PLOVER

Previously recorded from Micronesia in Yap by Baker (1951). Observed one bird each time at the garbage dump on Koror on the following dates: 18 and 22 February 1974, 5 April 1974, 31 August 1974, 11, 14 and 21 September 1974, 11 April 1976 and 10 November 1976. Also observed this bird several times in 1975, but no dates were recorded. This small plover is readily distinguished from other related plovers by small bill, complete white neck ring, flesh colored or yellow legs, black or brown breast band and no wing bars on the upper wings. The most likely bird with which this plover could be confused is *Charadrius hiaticula* (Common Ringed Plover) which does have white wing bars on the upper wings. This bird is a regular migrant through Palau, but in small numbers.

Calidris alba (Pallas) 1764 — SANDERLING

Previously reported from several parts of Micronesia by Baker (1951) and others, but not from Palau. Observed at the Koror garbage dump, one bird 19–20 November 1973, 8 December 1973, 13 February 1974, 1 May 1974, 20 October

1974, 2 May 1975 and 4 October 1976. This small sandpiper readily identified in winter plumage by very light grey coloration on back and white underparts and particularly by black shoulder patches which were on all of these birds seen in Palau. Apparently an irregular migrant in Micronesia.

Calidris melanotos (Vieillot) 1819 — PECTORAL SANDPIPER

Previously reported from Micronesia in Ponape by Baker (1951) and in the Marshall Islands by Amerson (1969). Observed at the garbage dump on Koror, one bird 3 November 1974, 9 November 1974, 10 March 1975, two birds 11 April 1975, three birds 9 May 1975, two birds 20 May 1975, one bird 8 September 1976 and 5 November 1976. This small sandpiper most closely resembles *Calidris acuminata* (Sharp-tailed Sandpiper) but is readily distinguished from it by the absence of any rufous color in the head and by the abrupt cut-off of the breast streaking from the white belly. Apparently a regular migrant through Palau.

Calidris alpina (Linnaeus) 1758 — DUNLIN

Previously recorded in Micronesia from Wake Atoll by Johnston (1967). Observed one bird at Koror garbage dump 9 November 1974 and 11 April 1976. Observed one bird at the airport on Ponape, Caroline Islands 22 March 1975. Distinguishable from other small sandpipers by medium-long slightly decurved bill, white sides to upper tail and narrow white wing stripes on upper wings. Bill not broad as in *Limicola falcinellus* (Broad-billed Sandpiper) and no white rump patch as in *Calidris ferruginea* (Curlew Sandpiper).

Sterna albifrons Pallas 1764 — LITTLE TERN

Previously reported from Micronesia in the Mariana Islands by Baker (1951) and on Ocean Island by Pearson (1962). Observed at the garbage dump on Koror, two birds 21 September 1974, four birds 27 September 1974, two birds 12 October 1974, two birds 15 October 1976 and 1 November 1976. The very small size of this tern and its peculiar flight readily separate this tern from any others that could show up in this part of the Pacific. Apparently an irregular migrant to Micronesia.

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