

**NOTE**  
**New and Unusual Bird Records from the Northern Mariana  
Islands, 1988–1990**

DEREK W. STINSON,<sup>1</sup> JAMES D. REICHEL,<sup>2</sup> ROBERT J. CRAIG, and  
DAVID T. ALDAN

*Division of Fish and Wildlife, Saipan, MP 96950*

**Introduction**

We report 27 species accounts documenting new bird records from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). These include 10 sight, 7 photographic, and 11 specimen records. This represents 23 island records, 8 Mariana Island records, 5 Micronesian records, and at least 2 tropical Pacific records. Records are new for a particular island only unless a wider geographical area is mentioned in the text. Additionally photo and specimen records are reported for islands when only sight records were previously known. We use the definition of Pratt et al. (1987) for tropical Pacific: Micronesia, Polynesia, and the Hawaiian Islands. All specimens are or will be sent to Charles R. Conner Museum (CRCM), Washington State University, Pullman, WA 99164-4220. Photographs are on file at the CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife, Saipan (DFW). Some of the accounts in this paper document records referred to by the citation “Stinson and Reichel, in prep” cited in Reichel & Glass (1991); the remaining records are more recent than the checklist and were not recorded there. Other museums for which specimen numbers are given for previous collections include the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution (USNM), and Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley (MVZ).

**Species Accounts**

**Bonin Petrel (*Pterodroma hypoleuca*)**

DWS obtained a specimen that struck a hotel on Saipan the night of 4 Jan. 1990 (DFW #392). This bird had the distinct underwing pattern (white with blackish margins and diagonal bar extending from carpal patch inward across coverts) pictured in Harrison (1985). There are sight records of this species at sea (>48 km from any island) for the Marianas (Tanaka & Kaneko 1983, Tanaka, pers. comm.).

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<sup>1</sup> Present Addresses: <sup>1</sup>P.O. Box 342, Moxee, WA 98936, <sup>2</sup>Wildlife Resource Management Program, Yakima Indian Nation, P.O. Box 151, Toppenish, WA 98948

Matsudaira's Storm-petrel (*Oceanodroma matsudairae*)

JDR collected a specimen on 11 July 1989 at sea 13 km off Saipan (CRCM #89-3040). Its all dark coloration and diagonal light bars on upper wing and white bases to the primaries identified this bird. Previous Mariana reports were all sight records (Glass et al. 1990, King 1976).

Little Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*)

DWS and JDR saw this bird at a small pond on Saipan, 5 Dec. 1989, and obtained photographs (Fig. 1) on 6 Dec. This record is the first from Saipan; there are two sight records from Pagan (Glass et al. 1990). This species is a common resident of Palau.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

DWS and JDR made the first sight record of this species on Pagan at Lake Lagona on 26 Apr. 1989. JDR viewed the head and body closely; the bill was black and the lores appeared to blend from black to light gray-green just forward of the eye. It had a more gradually rising forehead and snakelike neck than a Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*). DWS saw the black legs and yellow feet.



Figure 1. Little Pied Cormorant on Saipan, 6 Dec. 1989.

DWS photographed another Little Egret (Fig. 2) on 8 Dec. 1989 at a small fresh water pond on Saipan. Sight records on Saipan have been made in all months from November through May (DFW files, Engbring & Owen 1981).

Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*)

An emaciated adult female was collected by DTA on Rota, 24 Nov. 1989 (DFW #112). The bird's measurements and bill coloration identified it as *C.c. bewickii* (Madge & Burns 1988). This record is the first for Micronesia and only the second for the tropical Pacific, it being "found once" on Midway (Pratt et al. 1987). This subspecies winters in coastal lowlands of southeast Asia and Japan and occasionally to Taiwan. There is at least one record from the Volcano Islands south of Japan (Madge & Burn 1988).

Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)

On 30 Nov. 1989, JDR and DWS saw a single male in near eclipse plumage on Lake Susupe, Saipan. With the aid of a 35× spotting scope, we noted the rust colored head, somewhat sloped bill and forehead (not as much as *A. valisineria*) and slightly peaked crown. The blue bill was dark at its base and tip. The back



Figure 2. Little Egret on Saipan, 8 Dec. 1989.

was light gray, the chest dark and the tail black. Another individual was at a small pond 5 December and two individuals were present 6–7 Dec. 1989. These are the first records of this species in the CNMI. Maben & Wiles (1981) previously reported this species on Guam.

#### Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*)

The first Micronesian record of this species was obtained 20 Aug. 1990 when E. Borja found a sick or injured female on the Tinian breakwater. The bird was turned into DFW and later euthanized (DFW #396). Pratt et al. (1987) states that females of this species have been reported from the Hawaiian Islands.

#### Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*)

RJC, C. Rice, and H. King saw a large raptor identified as this species near the Tinian airport on 19 Nov. 1990. Identification was based on the mostly dark coloration with light streaking on breast and wings, small white wing patches, large size (about size of Red-shouldered Hawk, *Buteo lineatus*) and long wings which flapped deeply during flight. They were not able to determine if the tail was forked. H. King stated that this was the same bird that he had seen and reported to DFW sporadically since 25 July 1989. There are tropical Pacific records for Black Kites from Midway and Pagan (Glass et al. 1990).

#### Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

JDR and DWS saw two Ospreys on 26 Apr. 1989 at Lagona Lake and the upper lake on Pagan where JDR photographed on (Fig. 3). One bird's coloration was typical while the other was quite dusky or dirty about the head and breast. We saw an Osprey on Pagan again on 28 Nov. 1989. The species has also been observed on Saipan and Guam (Wiles et al. 1987).

#### Amur Red-footed Falcon (*Falco amurensis*)

DWS saw this small falcon at Sarigan on 19 Sept. 1990. RJC observed it perched at 30 m on 20 Sept. Through binoculars, the bird showed a red cere and legs, iridescent greenish-black wings, brownish head and neck, a gray breast fading to white on belly. During deeply flapping flight, the wings showed large white wing patches ventrally. The dark breast, but lack of a rusty belly suggests that this bird was a young male. The only other tropical Pacific record is from Saipan (Glass et al. 1990).

#### Lesser Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*)

The first sight record from Sarigan was obtained by DWS and RJC on 19 Sept. 1990; a flock of 15 was observed on a short grass plateau on 21 Sept. This species is a common winter resident on the larger Mariana Islands.

#### Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)

DWS collected the first Marianas specimen at a flooded taro field near San Jose, Saipan on 12 Sept. 1990 (DFW #393). There are previous sight records of this species on Saipan (Glass et al. 1990).

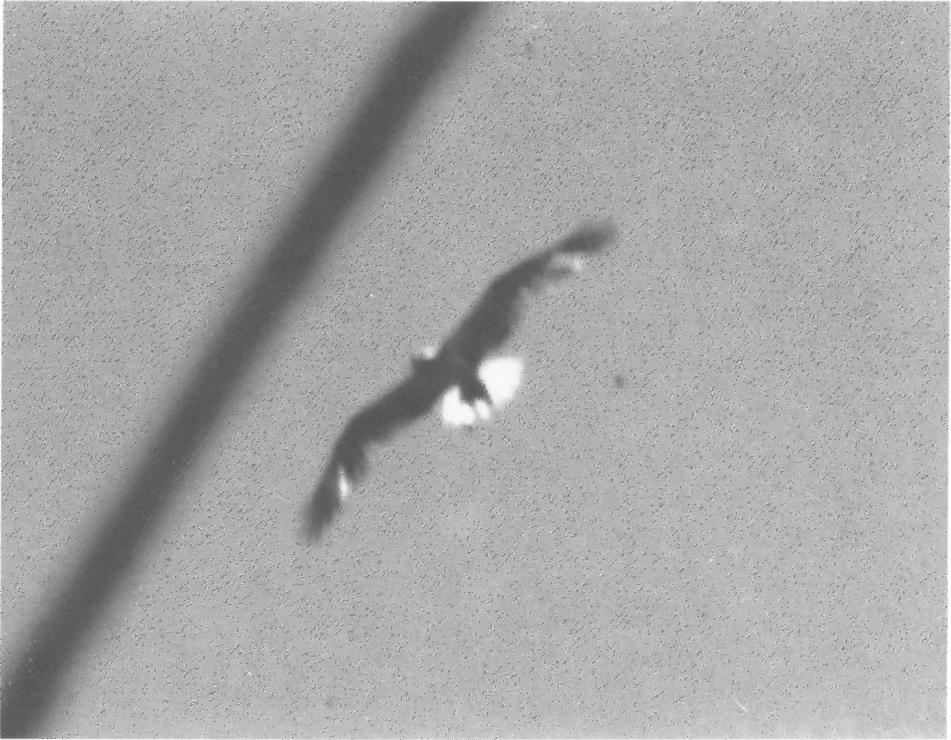


Figure 3. One of two Ospreys on Pagan, 26 Apr. 1989.

#### Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)

Fig. 4 documents the first confirmed record of this species in Micronesia. This individual was at a small pond on Saipan 6–8 Dec. 1989 and photographed by DWS on 8 Dec. The supercilium that is indistinct posterior to the eye and the few broad tail bands separate this species from the Wood Sandpiper (*T. glareola*). *T. ochropus* is also slightly darker than *T. glareola*, with darker yellow-green legs. The observation of dark wing linings and a white rump separate this bird from the much less likely Solitary (*T. solitaria*) of the Western Hemisphere. Owen (1977) reports an unconfirmed sighting of this species in Palau as hypothetical.

#### Gray-tailed Tattler (*Heteroscelus brevipes*)

The first sight record for Sarigan was obtained by DWS on 20 Sept. 1990. The bird had gray upperparts, short yellow legs, and exhibited the bobbing and teetering gait typical of tattlers as it foraged along a rocky shoreline. It was distinguished from the much less common Wandering Tattler (*H. incanus*) by its light upperparts and ‘too-weet’ call (Pratt et al. 1987). There is a single sight record of the Wandering Tattler for Sarigan (Glass et al. 1990).



Figure 4. Green Sandpiper on Saipan, 8 Dec. 1989.

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleuca*)

JDR and DWS saw three Common Sandpipers on 26 Apr. 1989 at Lagona Lake on Pagan, an island record. They were distinguished from Spotted Sandpipers (*A. macularia*) by the broad white wing stripe throughout the secondaries and inner primaries. A frequently seen migrant on Saipan and Guam, this species has also been recorded on Anatahan (Glass et al. 1990).

Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*)

On 26 Apr. 1989, DWS collected the first specimen record from Micronesia at Lagona Lake, Pagan, CNMI (DFW #272). This is the first record from the Marianas in the spring; fall sightings have occurred during Aug–Nov (Engbring & Owen 1981, Pratt 1984, Williams & Grout 1985).

Bristle-thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*)

JDR collected an adult male at the Saipan airport on 6 Oct. 1989 (DFW #263). The only previous Mariana specimen was collected on Guam in 1945 (MVZ #95095). Mariana sight records include Guguan (Glass et al. 1990) and Guam (King 1962).

Far Eastern Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*)

DWS saw this species 6 May 1989 at the Puerto Rico mudflats on Saipan and a hasty photograph was obtained of this bird on 9 May (Fig. 5). This bird was gray-brown and therefore was probably still in non-breeding plumage (Hayman et al. 1986). Field marks included the extremely long bill and large size relative to nearby Whimbrels (*N. phaeopus*). It lacked the white rump of the Eurasian Curlew (*N. arguata*). The underwing was darkly spotted and the underbelly was lightly streaked and slightly rufous. Another Far Eastern Curlew was present from 27 April to 1 May 1990. There are at least three records from Guam (Hartert 1898, Baker 1951).

Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arguata*)

This species was present on Saipan 4–6 December 1989 and DWS photographed it on 5 December (Fig. 6). This bird was readily identified by its large size, extremely long bill, lack of a crown stripe, indistinct supercilium, white lower back, rump, and wing linings. Other Mariana reports for this species include two sight records for Saipan and a recent one on Guam (Wiles et al., in prep., Engbring & Owen 1981, DFW files).



Figure 5. Far Eastern Curlew on Saipan, 9 May 1989. Photo by Cliff Rice.



Figure 6. Eurasian Curlew on Saipan, 5 Dec. 1989.

Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*)

On 2 Sept. 1990, D. A. Scott sighted two Great Knots on mudflats near the Puerto Rico Dump, Saipan, the first for the Marianas. One individual was observed by DWS and Scott at 40 m with a 40× spotting scope on 3 September. This very large calidrid had a long, stout black bill and dark gray legs. The streaked head and neck, boldly spotted breast, and lack of clear supercilium distinguished this bird from the similar sized Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*). The belly was clear white. The spotting and lack of brownish-buff on the breast is typical for non-breeding adults (Hayman et al. 1986). There are records of this species from Palau and Chuuk (Pratt et al. 1987).

Long-toed Stint (*Calidris subminuta*)

On 30 Nov. 1988, JDR saw what he believed to be this species on Saipan. Compared to a Temminck's Stint (*C. temminckii*) that was collected an hour previously (Glass et al. 1990), this stint had longer yellow legs, a longer neck, and a more upright posture. The shape was nearly identical to nearby Sharp-tailed Sandpipers (*C. acuminata*) which were about 40% larger but similar in coloration. It had a streaked rufous cap which reached from the rear crown to

the bill. A white superciliary line did not appear split, and the straight dark bill had a fine tip. The back was uniformly gray-brown with a faint white V shaped mark between the wings. These characters rule out the very similar but geographically less likely Least Sandpiper (*C. minutilla*) (Hayman et al. 1986, Veit & Jonsson 1987).

#### Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)

DWS collected a female at a muddy puddle on the Sabana on Rota, 14 Dec. 1989 (DFW #390). Baker (1951) states a specimen was collected on Saipan by Japanese collectors.

#### Japanese Snipe (*Gallinago hardwickii*)—hypothetical

DWS and JDR observed a snipe on 6 Dec. 1989 at close range with a 35× spotting scope consulting the snipe key in Hayman, Prater & Marchant (1986) during observation. At the base of the bill, the pale supercilium was much wider than the dark head and eye stripes. The tail extended well beyond the primaries at rest and the tertials completely overlapped the primaries. There were three very similar snipe present at the same small pond on 7 Dec. This sighting potentially represents the second tropical Pacific record; Japanese Snipe have been reported once on Kwajalein (Pratt et al. 1987). We list this record as hypothetical because the four snipes potentially found here, *G. hardwickii*, *G. gallinago*, *G. stenura*, *G. megalis*, are notoriously difficult to distinguish under field conditions.

#### Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*)

On 9 Apr. 1990, DTA collected a male on Saipan which had been sighted periodically since 19 Mar (DFW #391). It possessed the indistinct hood, gray saddle and lesser coverts, broad tail band, and black bill and legs of a sub-adult (“first-winter”) bird (Harrison 1985). This record is 2900 km west of any previous record. Pratt et al. (1987) list Pacific records of this species from the Hawaiian Islands, Johnston Atoll, Kiribati, and Samoa.

#### Gray-backed Tern (*Sterna lunata*)

The first record of this species from the southern Marianas was collected by JDR on 18 Oct. 1989 about 1 km west of Tinian (CRCM #B-1512). The only previous Marianas collections were made by R. B. Clapp off Guguan in 1979 (USNM #576463, #576464). This species nests on Guguan and perhaps Uracus (Clapp & Hatch 1986, Reichel, in press).

#### White-winged Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*)

On 6 Oct. 1989 DWS collected this species at the Saipan International Airport (CRCM #89-3042). There are previous sight records from Saipan and Tinian, and both sight and collection records from Guam.

#### Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)

A Hoopoe was photographed in August 1988 by Mike Adams (Fig. 7). This is the first record for the species in the tropical Pacific. The closest breeding area



Figure 7. Hoopoe on Saipan, Aug. 1988. Photo by Mike Adams.

of this African and Eurasian species is in southeast Asia; it has been recorded as a straggler in Japan (Wild Bird Society of Japan 1982).

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