

Your name

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Bird identification

One Upland Sandpiper both heard and seen at a distance in flight. Age and sex unknown.

Date(s)

August 26th, 2019

Time of Day

Approximately 7:30 am.

Location

Observed at Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area. We had walked out to the central section of Smith Lake that hosted the good shorebird habitat at the time.

Lighting and Weather Conditions

It was morning, and we were facing west, so the sun was behind us. The sunlight was prominent from a low angle, and if there were any clouds in the sky, they were minimal.

Details

Colby, Ken, and I were scoping various shorebirds when we heard a strange vocalization from behind us. It sounded like a quick, quivering "bee-be-doo", and was rather loud. I immediately looked at Colby and he at me. We both had puzzled looks on our faces, and neither knew what we were hearing, but knew it was something good. It at first sounded to be on the ground somewhere behind us (to the east). Every 10 -20 seconds it would vocalize. After the first two, I began to take a real interest in whatever it was, and Colby got out his phone and started recording. As the sound got closer, and after the third or fourth vocalization, I finally detected the bird in flight. I saw a bird about the same size as a Green Heron in flight, but flying differently and not as heavily bodied as a GRHE, steadily flying to the west. The dorsal side appeared to be a uniform light brownish coloration in the semi-extreme morning light. The wing beats were somewhat shallow and they did not extend all the way down toward the body. The wings seemed kind of narrow and pointy in flight, and were somewhat reminiscent of a large falcon, but the flight style was not as quick and powerful. I believe the long tailed aspect of Upland Sandpipers also gave off the semblance of a falcon, but I do not distinctly remember commenting on this feature in the field. The bill did not appear to be long at all, but was noticeably larger than on, say, a falcon. For some reason, what I was watching

in flight did not immediately scream out a large shorebird. I probably watched the bird in flight for 45 seconds, as it eventually flew far enough to the west to become out of view. After our detection, we began playing flight vocalizations of various rare, large shorebirds, as we were pretty certain that none of the common large shorebirds could produce such sounds. After a minute or two, I found some Upland Sandpiper vocalizations that were a dead ringer for what we heard on my iBird PRO app. Thankfully, Colby acquired some diagnostic audio of the UPSA in flight (<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/174189611>). We soon thereafter pieced together my visual observations and the details of the vocalizations we heard and recorded to safely arrive at a positive ID.

Link to our ebird checklist:

<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S59276708>

Links to flight calls of Upland Sandpipers:

<https://www.xeno-canto.org/438796>

<https://www.xeno-canto.org/48618>

Similar Species

Yellowlegs (Greater, Lesser, and any of the vagrant tringas) - different flight vocalizations, different dorsal colorations/patterns, different wing beats, and a shorter tail in flight.

Willet - different flight vocalizations, has a different wing pattern on the dorsum (black and white as opposed to uniform pale brownish), and different wing beats.

Plovers (Black-bellied, Pacific and American Golden-Plovers) - different flight vocalizations, flight style, and shorter bills.

Godwits (Marbled, Hudsonian, Bar-tailed & Black-tailed) - different flight vocalizations, flight style, and longer bills.

Curlews (Little, Bristle-thighed, Whimbrel, Long-billed) - different flight vocalizations, flight style, and longer downcurved bills.

UPSA-2019-01 (Upland Sandpiper)

1st Round Voting – December 20, 2019

Accepted: 9

Not Accepted: 0

ACCEPTED, VERIFIED

The call is spot-on for Upland Sandpiper. Thankfully, a sound recording was available, as the description alone would not have been sufficient for me to accept.

The audio and the sonagram are a match to Upland Sandpiper.

A somewhat marginal description of what was seen (I'm slightly puzzled by the size comparison to a Green Heron or large falcon, all of which should be larger than an UPSA) - a description of the upper wing pattern would have been helpful, among others. I would not accept this record based on the description, but the voice recording sounds spot-on for UPSA, and I accept it as verified on that basis.

Quick thinking to record the call!

Good description of this distinctive shorebird capped by a good recording of the unique flight call.

No comments

Nice description with identifiable recording to supplement.

The sound recordings are not of high quality, but they do seem to be a dead ringer for an Upland Sandpiper. When the recording of the flight call is combined with the description of the bird, I think that the evidence strongly suggests that the observers saw an Upland Sandpiper.

No comments

I'd been happy to accept this as an eBird reviewer some months ago! Thanks to Nick for his excellent description, and kudos to the amazing Colby for somehow managing to get a good, diagnostic recording of this bird as it flew overhead at a distance. The sound recording leaves no doubt -- this is the typical flight call of Upland Sandpiper, given in migration at night and into the early morning. Most birders would have (a) not even noticed the bird, (b) had little clue what it might be if they had noticed it, and (c) not come anywhere close to getting an identifiable audio recording of it. Great work by this team.