

First record of Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* for Cyprus

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On 2 December 2009 my wife Glynis and I were birding at Ladies Mile on the Akrotiri peninsula, the southernmost point of the island of Cyprus, when I picked up a wader that was obviously something different to the many Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus* and Little Stints *Calidris minuta* that were in the general area at the time. Ladies Mile is an area of highly saline and very sparsely vegetated marsh that lies approximately between a long sand beach and the large Akrotiri salt lake. The bird in question, seen at a distance through binoculars towards the afternoon sun (13.30 h), was obviously small with a pronounced long primary projection and a finely streaked breast sharply delineated below. My past experience of the species in the Americas and a couple of vagrant individuals in the UK led me instantly to identify the bird as a Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*. Glynis obtained some digiscoped images of the bird with our less than state of the art equipment that were good enough to put the identity of the bird beyond doubt.

However, on returning home to Paphos I was still concerned about the identification given the extreme rarity of the find. Fortunately, I was able to email Killian Mullarney of *Collins Bird Guide* fame a couple of the better images that evening. Much to his surprise Killian realised at once the images were of the real thing and not merely an aberrant Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*. This was the first Baird's Sandpiper for Cyprus and only the second record for the Middle East following an earlier record in Oman (Eriksen *et al* 2003, Porter & Aspinall 2010). This high Arctic breeding species of northeast Siberia and North America is a vagrant to Europe (annual Britain) including Greece (BWPi 2006, Chris Bradshaw *in litt*).

That same evening I contacted Stavros Christodoulides and other island birders with the news, and the next morning saw what, for Cyprus, was a major twitch with a half dozen birders lined up at Ladies Mile enjoying views of the bird. Stavros was able to take many photographs (*eg* Plates 1–3).

DESCRIPTION

Obviously larger than nearby Little Stints, but obviously smaller than accompanying Kentish Plovers. It appeared elongated with wings projecting beyond tail tip and had a straight black bill and black legs. Head and breast were buff with throat paler. Darker breast streaking formed a clearly defined pectoral band, sharply demarcated from the white underparts. The supercilium was paler buff but indistinct and the upperparts grey-buff with off-white fringes giving a scaly impression. Not heard to call. It was constantly feeding, picking at the dry mud surface.

With regard to the most important identification features, Killian Mullarney noted the following: "The very long projection of the folded primaries beyond the tips of the tertials is especially important: superficially similar Temminck's Stints have longer tertials that end closer to the wing-tip than in Baird's. Similarly, the projection of the wing-tips beyond the tail is important; in Temminck's Stint the tail actually projects slightly beyond the wing-tip. These structural features are very reliable, but the plumage too is spot-on for Baird's. Juvenile White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* is very similar in shape to Baird's and occasionally, especially from photographs where there is no view of the rump, telling the two apart can be tricky. One difference that is very clear from the photographs is that the bird lacks the usual distinct white tips to the third row of scapulars, that



Plates 1–3. Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*, Ladies Mile, Akrotiri peninsula, Cyprus, 3 December 2009. © Stavros Christodoulides

in White-rumped (as well as Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos* and others) produces a prominent white stripe (though first years usually commence moult of this row of feathers by October). This bird has commenced its post-juvenile moult with quite a few mantle and scapular feathers having been replaced, the new second generation feathers being intact (rather than extremely worn at the tips) with a more rufous-buff tip and a distinct dark shaft-streak."

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