

Sight Record of the Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis* in Central Thailand

At 1630 h on 10 November 1980 I observed a group of 6 curlews landing in a dry shrimp pond at Bangpoo, Changwat Samut Prakarn, Central Thailand. Five of the 6 birds showed the white rump and lower back which is characteristic of the Eurasian curlew *Numenius arquata*, but the rump and lower back of the 6th bird were dark. The birds landed about 150 m away and were subsequently stalked to within about 75 m and viewed with 10×40 binoculars and a 20x-40x telescope. Light conditions were excellent.

All of the birds were watched preening and I was able to confirm that 5 of the birds were Eurasian Curlews and that the 6th was an Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*, a species with which I was familiar in Hong Kong. Notes made at the time were :

...rump and lower back concolourous with upper back;

...appeared to be slightly larger than Eurasian Curlew, but there was considerable size variation in these birds;

... bill longer than Eurasian Curlew;

... underparts uniform brown, not becoming paler towards the vent, as in Eurasian Curlew—this was particularly noticeable when viewed from below in flight;

...overall plumage and soft part colours similar to Eurasian Curlew.

The Eastern Curlew was also observed by R. Dobias who confirmed that the rump and lower back were brown.

Several 'curlew' calls were heard, but in every case when it was possible to determine which bird had called it was a Eurasian Curlew. KING ET AL. (1975) note the call of the Eastern Curlew as being "similar" to that of the Eurasian Curlew.

Among the birds present at the same time in the pond and available for direct comparison were several Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*. At least one of the Whimbrel showed a dark rump typical of the race *variegatus*; however, the smaller size and proportionately much shorter bill made separation from the Eastern Curlew easy.

The birds were watched until 1715 h when they were flushed by a Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* and departed flying westwards. Ten Eurasian Curlews roosted in the same area during the afternoon high tide on 11 November, but the Eastern Curlew was not present.

The Eastern Curlew breeds in eastern Siberia and Manchuria, and migrates through East Asia to winter from Malaysia and the Greater Sundas, to Australia and New Zealand. In Japan it is recorded as a "transient, regular but solitary or in small numbers" (ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF JAPAN, 1974). Although LATOUCHE (1931-34) noted it as a "common migrant on the coast" (of Eastern China), it is only a "scarce passage

migrant, mainly in spring" in Hong Kong (WEBSTER, 1975). In Peninsular Malaysia it is recorded as a "passage migrant and winter visitor in small numbers, observed in recent years on the broad mudflats of the north Perak coast, from 5 November to April" (MEDWAY & WELLS, 1976). HOOGERWERF (1969) noted it as a "rare migrant" in Java.

The species was not represented in the extensive collection of shorebirds made by Aagaard in Thailand (JØRGENSEN, 1949), and there appear to be no previous published records of the species from the Kingdom, although KING ET AL. (1975) note it as occurring in "central Thailand", based on one sight record of a single bird at the same locality in May 1976 (KING IN LITT.). It is likely that the species has been overlooked in the past.

REFERENCES

- HOOGERWERF, A. 1969. On the ornithology of the Rhino Sanctuary Ujung Kulon in West Java (Indonesia). *Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.* 23 (1/2) : 9-65.
- JØRGENSEN, A. 1949. Siams Vadfugle. *Dansk Orn. For. Tidsskr.* 43 : 60-80, 150-162, 216-237, 261-279.
- KING, B., M. WOODCOCK and E.C. DICKINSON. 1975. *A field guide to the birds of South-East Asia*. Collins, London.
- LaTOUCHE, J.D.D. 1931-34. *A handbook of the birds of Eastern China*. Taylor and Francis, London.
- MEDWAY, LORD and D.R. WELLS. 1976. *The birds of the Malay Peninsula*. Vol. V. Witherby, London.
- ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF JAPAN. 1974. *Check-list of Japanese birds*. Fifth and Revised Edition. Gakken, Tokyo.
- WEBSTER, M.A. 1975. *An annotated checklist of the birds of Hong Kong*. Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, Hong Kong.

David S. Melville

Association for the Conservation
of Wildlife

4 Old Custom House Lane
Bangkok 10500, Thailand

(Present address : c/o 44 The Ridgeway
Tonbridge, Kent TN10 4NJ, England)