TATTLERS

AN IDENTIFICATION COMPARISON TABLE

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1/11/2004

plumage, both in nonbreeding and breeding. Flight shows darker grey underwings. A Tattler whose breeding plumage has any bars on the rear central belly or under-	ly plain mid grey		
A Tattler whose breeding plumage has any bars on the rear central belly or under-			
	A Tattler whose breeding plumage has any bars on the rear central belly or under-tail coverts is most likely		
a Wandering, but the Grey Tattler is the more common	a Wandering, but the Grey Tattler is the more common		
Breeds Northern Siberia Eastern Siberia + Central & S	Southern Alaska		
Size 24 / 27 cm 26 / 28	3 cm		
Bill Medium Length, Heavy			
Nasal Groove Difficult to see, but highlighted when wet			
½ length of bill ½ length	of bill		
Feeding Darts about mudflats, sandbars and beaches, Usually solitary when feeding			
bobbing and teetering between dashes Sneaks about rocks, probing			
Habitat Coastal: forages in intertidal pools, shallows, soft Almost entirely confined to re			
surfaces of mudflats and sand beaches as well as washed tidal platforms and e	exposed reets around		
rock ledges, reefs. headlands or high islands.	oooolonellii letti t-		
Often perches on branches, posts,or jetties: Roosts in groups, same or mixed species Likely to use these sites, or or loaf or roost.	occasionally jettles, to		
<u> </u>	pioreina notos lestina 1/		
Voice Flight call distinctive – fluid, musical, but slightly Sharp rippling trill of 5 – 10 p mournful.	blerding notes, lasting ½		
Drawn out ' too-weet' , initially falling in pitch, then rising sharply in the final ' eet ' Evenly pitched, accelerating	but fading cliabtly in		
Also as a rapid sequence, slightly sharper, rising in strength	but lauling Slightly III		
pitch and accelerating 'weit-weit-weet-			
weetweet' Also a flute like alarm call of	iust one or two notes		
	BREEDING		
Build Slightly larger, heavier			
build			
Bill Yellow tint Slightly heavier			
Head & Mid-grey Mid to Dark Grey			
Hindneck Wild grey			
Back & Wings Dark grey Mid to Dark Grey			
Primaries Usually level with or only Wings usually extend			
(at rest) slightly longer) than tail-			
tip As non-breeding beyond tail-tip			
Legs Medium length	As non-breeding		
Thick As Grey-tailed	Ŭ		
Bright yellow to yellow			
ochre			
Eyebrow Broad Narrow			
White White			
Extends just behind eye Does NOT extend behind			
eye			
	Covered with dark grey		
` \	chevrons on white		
even in colour) flanks			
Throat White As Grey-tailed			
	Always heavily barred		
,	from neck to belly		
, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	or further back		
·	White belly to under tail		
Flanks Usually has more grey on			
flanks than G-t T			
Coverts - Upper Paler rump when fresh Inform grey			
Coverts - Upper tail Uniform grey			
Coverts - Upper tail Coverts - Under Paler rump when fresh Coverts - Under	Barred		
Coverts - Upper tail Paler rump when fresh Coverts - Under tail Uniform grey	Barred		
Coverts - Upper tail Coverts - Under tail Back Plain light to mid grey Uniform grey Uniform grey Darker grey than G-t T	Barred		
Coverts - Upper tail Paler rump when fresh Coverts - Under tail Uniform grey	Barred		

The following comments are extracted from a letter by T. Lindsey, Australian Museum, Sydney. (Scanned from RAOU Atlas Newsletter, No.10 June 1979 by Bob Forsyth)

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Except in breeding plumage, I know of no morphological features by which the Grey-tailed and Wandering Tattlers can be distinguished other than the following.

Bill. The tip of the bill, distal to the end of the nasal groove is 15 mm or less in the Wandering Tattler compared with 17 mm or more in the Grey-tailed. If there exists any overlap or ambiguity with regard to this feature, then it is outside my experience. It is usually much more marked than these figures may suggest, and it is often obvious even in the field. It is almost the only good field character.

Rump colour. The rump of the Wandering is usually plain grey, lacking the whitish fringes characteristic of the Greytailed. Very occasionally this can be picked out in the field.

Size. The Wandering Tattler is slightly the larger of the two (wing usually more than 170 mm compared with usually less than 170 I mm for the Grey-tailed). This is of virtually no use in the field, although, of course, if the observer reports that the bird seemed bigger than most Grey-tailed to him, then this may I constitute valuable collaborative evidence.

Colour and behaviour. In my experience, the Wandering Tattler in the field in non-breeding plumage usually looks noticeably darker and duskier than the Grey-tailed. There are also, to the very experienced eye, subtle I differences in proportions and mannerisms almost impossible to evaluate objectively. The call is very distinct, but its value depends very much on the circumstances of the observation and the common sense of the observer. A long trill, for example, might be cut off at the start, so that only the first few I notes are uttered, thus appearing to the observer as a call of only a few notes. Similarly in the reverse: a bird under great stress, excitement or whatever might utter a longer series of notes than usual, making a standard call of 2 or 3 notes become a long trill. These considerations aside, for a call heard several times from a bird not unduly stressed, the differences are distinctive and reliable. The pattern, or length of the call is perhaps more distinctive than the "sound" on the whole.

Two other features are of potential value in establishing the identity of a bird in the field or evaluating the report of such an observation. The two are in a sense involved with each other, but I will mention them separately. The <u>first</u> is that, in my experience the Wandering Tattler is a much less sociable bird, even on the west coast of N. America where it is common. The application of this fact might be thought to be nullified in this country by its scarcity (the bird is so rare that it could hardly be expected to occur in flocks!) but there are some circumstances where it can be useful. I would for example, be highly dubious of a report of a Wanderer seen consorting with a flock of Grey-tails.

The <u>second feature is one of habitat</u>, although again it ought to be interpreted with care. Wandering Tattlers have a marked preference for rocky areas — reefs, rock ledges and similar areas where the surf is active; Grey-tailed on the other favour mudflats, clearings in mangrove swamps, even ocean beaches on occasion. This ecological feature is very distinct, but again requires careful evaluation. After spending low tide feeding on a rock ledge, for example, a Wandering *might* repair to a mudflat to rest during high tide — particularly if such an area were the only resting place available. On the other hand Grey-tailed Tattlers are rather more adaptable, and may be found on rocky situations as well as their more favoured mudflats. This distinction may seem useless, but my point is that *some* use may still be made of it. Thus a case for a Wandering Tattler identification is seriously weakened if the observation took place on a mudflat, but a solitary tattler seen on a surf-beaten reef is immediately suggestive.

In sum, I regard discrimination between the two tattlers as one of the most difficult problems among waders on the Australian list. It can be done, but reliable identification requires a lengthy period of careful-observation by all but the most experienced — and as a personal opinion, I would add only then if that experience includes *both* species. I think the crux of the matter is the length of the observation. Wanderers tend to be warier than Grey-tailed, but even so, using a 20X telescope, I have usually managed to stalk close enough to get a satisfactory look at the bill — and this attempt often has the additional effect of affording several opportunities to hear the call.

So a satisfactory report of a Wandering Tattler should include a detailed plumage description together with observer's comments on call, behaviour and habitat, and length of observation.

Prater, Marchant and Vourinen's (1977) *Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holarctic Waders* (Field Guide No. 17, British Trust for Ornithology, Beech Grove, Tring, Herts. England) is a fundamental reference which cannot be too highly recommended.

Birding-Aus 22/12/2003 Keith Brandwood

http://menura.cse.unsw.edu.au:64800/2003/12/msg00346.html

In regards to ID W/Tattlers the wing projection past the tail is not reliable. I still believe you need to hear the call or see the nasal groove to be 100%, but you need to be within 20/30 metres with a scope in good light to see the groove.

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