

Second Confirmation of Solitary Sandpipers Breeding in Montana

Progress Report for the 2019 Field Season
Montana Bird Advocacy, Missoula, Montana
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Most Solitary Sandpipers (*Tringa solitaria*) breed in boreal-forest wetlands in Alaska and Canada. They were confirmed to breed in the contiguous United States in northern Minnesota several times from 1973 to 2013 (Savolaja 1973, Hoffman and Hoffman 1982, Pfannmuller et al. 2017) and were strongly suspected to have nested in Oregon between 1981 and 1995 (Sawyer 1981, Lundsten 1996). They had never been documented nesting in Montana, however, prior to our work in 2018 (Marks et al. 2016). Recent observations from Glacier National Park suggested that they bred in the state. Single adults were observed at two wetlands during the summer of 2007 and at a third location in mid-May of 2016 as they vocalized and perched in trees, which are typical behaviors of breeding birds but not of migrants (Paulson 1993). These three sites were on the west side of the park. Also, territorial pairs were observed at two unnamed lakes near the eastern boundary of the park in June and July of 2013. Habitat at all of these sites is similar to that at typical breeding sites in Canada.

METHODS AND RESULTS

From late May through late July 2019, the Montana Bird Advocacy searched for breeding Solitary Sandpipers at several wetlands in and around Glacier National Park. Surveys were undertaken by volunteers who visited wetlands where Solitary Sandpipers had been reported in past years as well as potential breeding sites identified on the basis of former Glacier National Park biologist Steve Gniadek's extensive experience in the park and information provided by other observers directly, or deposited in the Glacier National Park database. In 2019 we visited four wetlands listed in Table 1 and received a report from Glacier NP biologist Lisa Bate of a vocalizing adult at a small wetland near Anaconda Creek that we had not known about previously (Table 1). During each visit we carefully scanned shoreline habitat with binoculars and also played recorded vocalizations of breeding birds to attempt to elicit responses by adults. As it turned out, broadcasting vocalizations was not an effective means of getting sandpipers to vocalize, even when we knew they were present during periods of broadcasting. We detected territorial sandpipers (e.g., Fig. 1) at each site where birds had been seen during the nesting season previously (Table 1) and confirmed nesting at the unnamed wetland near McGee Meadow when Steve Gniadek and Josh Covill found a juvenile on 16 July (Fig. 2). Along with the juvenile we observed in 2018, this constitutes the second-known nesting record in Montana, which, with Minnesota, are the only states south of Canada where nesting Solitary Sandpipers have been documented.

Table 1. Wetlands surveyed for nesting Solitary Sandpipers in 2019. Territorial sandpipers were detected at each site in 2019 except for Howe Lake.

Site	Approximate location	Previous sightings?	Sightings in 2019
Unnamed wetland near McGee	48.59768°N, 114.02524°W	Yes	Yes
McGee Meadow	48.59156°N, 114.03236°W	Yes	Yes
Sondreson Meadow ^a	48.83516°N, 114.34525°W	Yes	Yes
Howe Lake	48.60644°N, 113.98849°W	No	No
Unnamed wetland, Anaconda Creek	48.66446°N, 114.11403°W	No	Yes

^a Site adjacent to Glacier National Park on Flathead National Forest.



Fig. 1. Two adult Solitary Sandpipers at unnamed wetland, 2 July 2019 (Bruce Tannehill photo).



Fig. 2. Juvenile Solitary Sandpiper found at unnamed wetland on 16 July 2019 (Josh Covill photo).

PLANS FOR 2020

During the 2020 nesting season we will repeatedly visit each of the wetlands where we found birds last year (i.e., McGee Meadow, Sondreson Meadow, and the two unnamed wetlands listed in Table 1). If time permits, we will visit additional sites not listed in Table 1 that seem suitable for nesting sandpipers. Jeff Marks will spend at least two weeks beginning in mid-May to increase chances of finding a nest. To our knowledge, no Solitary Sandpiper nest has ever been found south of Canada. On the basis of our results from the 2018 and 2019 surveys, we will continue to visit suitable wetlands through late July to increase our chances to document nesting by observing partially grown juveniles.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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