

## **A Sight Record of Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) in British Columbia.**

**By Rick Toochin and Peter Hamel. Submitted: April 15, 2018.**

### **Introduction and Distribution**

The Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) is a medium sized shorebird that is found throughout the Old World (Paulson 2005). This species breeds in the boreal forest zone from Scotland, Scandinavia, across Russia west to Siberia, and as far west as the Kamchatka Peninsula (O'Brien *et al.* 2006). This species is highly migratory with birds throughout the various continents (Mlodinow 1999). Wintering areas span sub-Saharan Africa, southern Asia, and Australia with scattered birds remaining through the winter in Europe as far north as the British Isles (Hayman *et al.* 1986).

In Eastern North America, the Common Greenshank is a casual to accidental vagrant migrant along the East Coast with a handful of records coming from Atlantic Canada (Mlodinow 1999). There is one record that is likely correct from Onondaga Lake, Syracuse, New York, on August 30, 1962 (Bull 1974). There is also a record of a likely returning bird from Barbados that was found on March 12, 1980 and later that same year on October 3, 1980 (Mlodinow 1999).

The only region that the Common Greenshank is a regularly occurring species is in Alaska, where this species is a rare spring and casual fall migrant in the western and central Aleutian Islands. The Common Greenshank is also a casual spring and fall migrant on St. Paul Island and at Gambell (West 2008).

South of Alaska, this species is an accidental vagrant with only a handful of records for the entire west coast. There is one accepted record of a Common Greenshank for California by the Bird Records Committee of a likely returning bird found and photographed as a juvenile at Mad River, in Humboldt County, from August 27-September 17, 2001, and as an adult in nearby Arcata, Humboldt County, from October 18-25, 2002 (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). There are no records of this species for Washington State (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2016) or for Oregon (OFO 2016) by either state Bird Records Committee. The Common Greenshank is an accidental migrant vagrant species in British Columbia with a recent well described sight record of an adult in breeding plumage from Sandspit in Haida Gwaii on July 18, 2012 (Toochin *et al.* 2014).

### **Identification and Similar Species**

The identification of the Common Greenshank is covered in most standard North American field guides. This species is a medium sized shorebird measuring 34 cm in length, and weighing 180 grams (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). In British Columbia, the Greater Yellowlegs is the most similar sized shorebird measuring 36 cm in length, and weighing a

little less at 160 grams (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The differences between the two species are obvious when noted, but can be hard to see on sitting birds (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Common Greenshank is a medium sized shorebird with a heavy, upright build, with a long, broad-based bill with a slight or distinct upcurve (Brazil 2009, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The bill base and legs are greyish-green in contrast the Greater Yellowlegs has a dark bill and legs are bright yellow (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The white back of the Common Greenshank is very different from the white confined to the rump of the Greater Yellowlegs (Jonsson 1992, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). It is recommended that keen observers read Hayman *et al.* (1986), or Brazil (2009) for more details on separating the 2 species.

Adult Common Greenshanks in breeding plumage has a variable number of dark-centered scapulars that contrast with otherwise brownish-gray upperparts (Brazil 2009, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The head, breast, and flanks coarsely streaked and are barred (Hayman *et al.* 1986, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009).

Adults in winter plumage are rather pale gray above with a fine scaly pattern (Brazil 2009, Mullarney 2009). The foreneck and centre of the breast are white (Hayman *et al.* 1986).

Juvenile birds are fairly dark-brown-gray above, with neat pale fringes giving a rather striped pattern. The breast is neatly and uniformly streaked (Hayman *et al.* 1986, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009).

In flight, flies fast with powerful wingbeats with dark wings, with a white rump extending in a point up the back, and also has a very pale tail (Brazil 2009, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009).

Calls are similar to that of the Greater Yellowlegs. The Common Greenshank gives a powerful, trisyllabic whistling “*tyew-tyew-tyew*” given all in one pitch (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009).

### **Occurrence and Documentation**

The Common Greenshank is an accidental vagrant migrant species in British Columbia with a recent well described sight record found by Peter Hamel of an adult in breeding plumage at Little Spit, at Sandspit, on Haida Gwaii on July 18, 2012 (Toochin *et al.* 2014). During migration, Common Greenshanks use a variety of habitats from flooded fields, marshes, and settling ponds to reefs tidal flats, and sand bars (Mlodinow 1999). They are often found alone, or in small groups on migration (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). The Common Greenshank found at Sandspit was a single bird found in the company of many shorebird species and was feeding on a sandbar before it flew off (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). The bird was well observed and was heard

calling before it flew off (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). The timing of this record fits perfectly with when this species begins its fall migration in the Old World. Southbound passage through northern and temperate Europe occurs mostly from mid-July through late October, whereas north bound migrants are predominantly found in these regions during April and the first half of May (Snow and Perrins 1998). In Japan, fall migration occurs from mid-late July to early November, and spring migration occurs through April and May (Brazil 1991). It is most likely this bird overshot into Alaska from northeast Asia in the late spring and was detected at the beginning of its southbound migration (Howell *et al.* 2011). Haida Gwaii is perfectly situated to get birds such as this one and has a history of turning up Asian vagrants (Howell *et al.* 2011). The similarity of the Common Greenshank to the common Greater Yellowlegs could cause identification issues for inexperienced observers. Careful scrutiny of odd plumaged Greater Yellowlegs is highly recommended. Given that the Common Greenshank does occur in Alaska with some regularity, it is very likely that there will be another record at one of the many shorebird hotspots along the British Columbia coast in the future.

### **Acknowledgements**

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