

## Book Reviews

### Shorebirds of North America, Europe and Asia By Jean Iron

*Shorebirds of North America, Europe, and Asia: A Photographic Guide.* 2009. By Richard Chandler. Princeton University Press, New Jersey. Softcover, 15.5 x 23.4 cm, 448 pages, 850 colour photographs. \$45 Canadian. ISBN 978-0-691-14281-4.

When I was developing an interest in shorebirds, Ron Pittaway gave me Richard Chandler's classic *North Atlantic Shorebirds* guide published in 1989. It was a gem. Now Chandler's new photographic guide is my first choice for shorebird identification. Because the author is a world authority on shorebirds, I eagerly awaited this latest addition to my shorebird library. Upon hearing it had arrived, right away I purchased a copy at Open Air Books in Toronto. Having used it for several months, I highly recommend the guide for its easy-to-use format, authoritative text, large sharp photos with concise captions, and innovative ways of describing critical identification marks. It is invaluable for identifying shorebirds in North America and for birders travelling to Europe and Asia.

In North America, the publishers changed the book's title to *Shorebirds of North America, Europe, and Asia* from its Old World title *Shorebirds of the Northern Hemisphere*. However, they did not change the European names Grey Plover and Grey Phalarope to the official North American names Black-bellied Plover and Red Phalarope. North American names are listed as alternative names. Taxonomic order follows the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) and del Hoyo's *Handbook of the Birds of the World*.

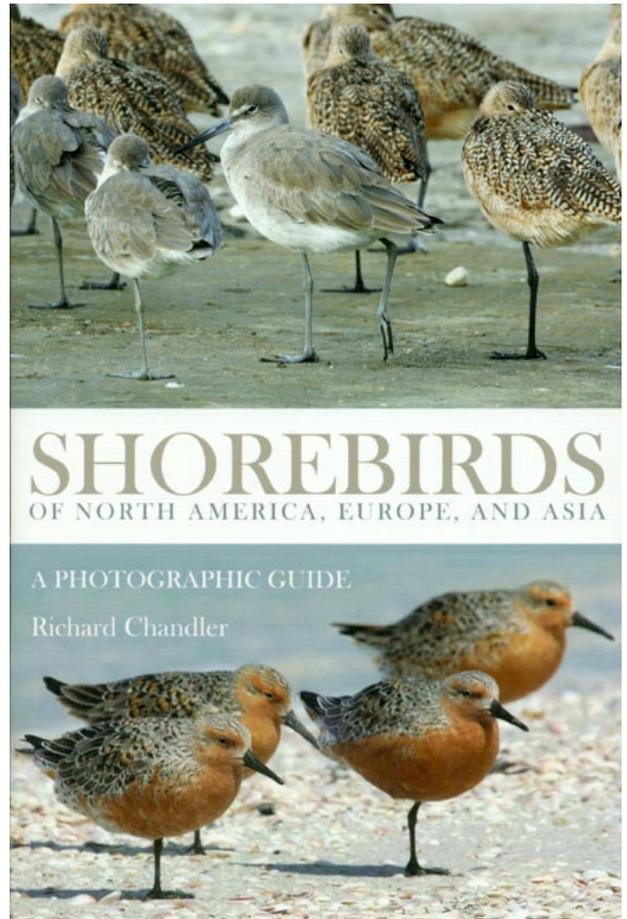
**Layout:** This shorebird guide treats 134 species found in the Northern Hemisphere. Each species account is laid out under these headings: Identification, Juvenile, First Non-breeding, Adult Non-breeding, First Breeding, Adult Breeding, Calls, Status, Habitat and Distribution, Racial Variation, Similar Species, and References.

*Eskimo Curlew* is the only species recorded in the Northern Hemisphere not treated in the book because it "has not been reliably documented since 1963 and is, sadly, presumed extinct." However, it is gratifying to know Ontario has a small cryptic curlew that is doing well. It is the Upland Sandpiper, which is a curlew with a straight bill. Listen for the Upland's curlew-like song and calls and watch for them on the Carden Alvar.

The species accounts are numbered 1, 2, 3 and so on, and make up the bulk of the book. The photos accompanying each species are also numbered according to the number of the species, 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, etc. and are placed within the species account, so there is no searching and flipping pages. This logical system guarantees quick finding and comparison. Maps are clear and uncluttered, and the colours depicting ranges contrast well.

Groupings of similar shorebirds, such as Ringed Plovers, Dowitchers and Godwits, receive about a page of introductory information, followed by concise species accounts. Each species has two or three pages of text accompanied by excellent photos. Subspecies are treated in detail. Dunlin has eight pages covering all nine subspecies. A very useful chart on page 210 compares all the stints, which are the seven smallest peeps in the genus *Calidris*.

**Photographs:** Chandler took most of the 850 photos. When he didn't have his own, he commissioned a local expert. Photos depict juvenile, non-breeding and breeding plumages, as well as birds in flight. Many photos cover the width of the page. Each photo shows a side view of the bird with sharp feather details, and the caption gives a succinct



description of the field marks with the month taken and location, which are essential to understanding and aging shorebirds. Photos are clear and there is none of the uncertainty often encountered in O'Brien, Crossley and Karlson's *The Shorebird Guide* (2006) where some photos show several species together and it isn't always obvious what bird is being described. Another treat is Chandler's 16 photos showing the variation in male Ruffs. He wisely avoids using the colloquial name reeve for female Ruff. Birds do not have separate official names for male and female.

**Plumage and Molt:** At the beginning of the book, the section on Plumages and Moults is essential reading about feather tracts and how a shorebird's plumage changes with age and molt. A helpful chart compares the different systems of describing moults and plumages including the Humphrey and Parkes system, which uses basic and alternate for plumages. Chandler uses the terms non-breeding and breeding since many shorebirds winter in the southern hemisphere so he feels it is confusing to use summer and winter for plumages. I prefer the Humphrey and Parkes system which can be used anywhere in the world because it is not linked to age, season or breeding cycle, but Europeans have not taken to it. Chandler uses the term race instead of subspecies, whereas I favour using subspecies as it is the official term for race, and race has a strong negative connotation. A short section covers hybrid and aberrant shorebirds.

**Aging:** Chandler's guide is excellent for aging shorebirds by focusing on the critical age distinctions. Recently at Cape May, New Jersey, Ron Pittaway and I easily distinguished between first non-breeding and adult non-breeding Dunlins and Sanderlings using this guide.

**Travel:** The guide has shorebirds unknown to me such as Ibisbills and Crab Plovers from parts of the world I have never visited, but may sometime. I never imagined I would go to Japan and see new shorebirds, yet in September 2009 I travelled to Japan. Chandler's guide was perfect for sorting out Red-necked Stints, Broad-billed Sandpipers, Lesser Sand-Plovers, Pacific Golden-Plovers and others. By coincidence, my birding pal's son, Nobuhiro Hashimoto, a shorebird enthusiast and digiscoper living in Osaka, has 21 of his excellent photos in this guide, and he advised Chandler on Japanese shorebirds.

**Why should you buy this book?** It treats all shorebirds across the Northern Hemisphere, it is easy to use, the photos are large and illustrate all plumages, the captions are concise with essential identification and age information, and the text focuses on key distinctions between similar species. *Shorebirds of North America, Europe and Asia* is now the shorebird guide I check first in Ontario and abroad.



Juvenile Broad-billed Sandpiper, Osaka, Japan, 25 September 2009. I identified it to the subspecies *Limicola falcinellus sibirica* based on photos in Chandler's guide showing both subspecies, and the caption stating that *sibirica* has chestnut upperpart fringes, which can be seen in my photo above, whereas the nominate subspecies has whitish fringes. Photo by Jean Iron.