

Finders report - Spotted Sandpiper 16/10/20

The story of my discovery of the juvenile Spotted Sandpiper at Rancleugh Burn, Croy Shore on the morning of October 16th 2020 really had its genesis ten days previously at Doonfoot Shore. That morning I had combined a dog walk and quick scan of the birds there before a round of golf. The text I sent out read-

“Doonfoot 1st light, a Common Sandpiper, Drake Gadwall, Little Egret, Wheatear, Grey Wagtail”.....nothing unusual there I thought.

Later that day I received a couple of texts from far more experienced birder pals commenting on the lateness of the Common and had I considered the possibility that it could have been a Spotted? I spent the next few days with that uncomfortable gnawing feeling that I may have potentially mis-identified a North American rarity due to my haste and birding inexperience. The next few days were spent with my head in the Sandpiper plates in all my guides in the highly unlikely chance of seeing another one.

Fast forward to 7.50am ten days later when I was at a mild, bright Croy Shore with the wildly optimistic aim of finding a Yellow-browed Warbler, as good a place as any in Ayrshire somebody had told me. Starting from the Croyburnfoot end I walked south, checking the scrub and trees as I went until approaching Rancleugh Burn. Here seaweed had gathered into several strand lines which had attracted a large number of feeding passerines, mostly Pied Wagtails and Pipits. I had found a Water Pipit in the same spot two years previous so stopped and started to work through the birds with more diligence. After 5 minutes or so a small skulking bird between the seaweed lines caught my eye, a small Starling sized wader, greyish brown above and clean white below with medium length bill. I immediately recognised it as a Sandpiper and knew that this time it needed closer attention.

Thanks to the previous weeks potential identification faux pas I had committed to memory four Spotted Sandpiper pointers; shorter tail projection...tick, yellowish legs...tick, greyer less patterned mantle...tick, more distinct eye stripe...tick.

Cue panic stations as a fumble of camera straps, lens caps and picture settings ensued in my rush to get some identification shots taken and sent out.



This was one of the four images I sent initially to Dave Grant and Fran McCrossan who forwarded them to Angus Murray. All were in agreement, I had found or refound a Spotted Sandpiper, a first for Ayrshire I was later informed and a bird that has remained in Ayrshire until late April 2021.

Hayden Fripp 4th May 2021