

Barbara C. Smith

Report on Observations of the Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*)
from July 9-24 at Douglas Lake, Michigan.

A life cycle of a bird as I understand it, should pertain to the life of that bird from the building of the nest through the hatching of the eggs and rearing of the young to the nest building of the second generation now matured. Since my luck, skill, or knowledge (or all three) proved very scanty, indeed, I find myself very entirely unprepared to give the life history of the Spotted Sandpiper, and must, therefore, confine myself to a report on my observations of the adult bird only. To supplement this sketchy account, I will include a few excerpts from Bent's Life History of Shore Birds.

On July ninth while walking along Pine Point, I flushed a small bird with arched wings, a jerky flight, and a peenting call note. "flushing" isn't very accurate, for the bird, as I approached, walked ahead of me several yards before beginning its flight. The white breast speckled with brown, the brownish back, the wings bordered posteriorly with white visible during flight, and the call note and peculiar manner of flying identified the bird as a Spotted Sandpiper.

From its agitated movements and short, hesitant flights, I presumed that a nest was in the vicinity. Upon closer investigation of the vegetation, I found this small, cup-like nest which was merely a depression in the sand and very well hidden by the surrounding grass as well as by its own obliterative pattern. The nest was lined with these weeds and grasses which formed the environment around the nest. When measured, the nest was found to be approximately four inches in diameter and one and a half inches deep. Four eggs filled the small cavity and were so placed that the smaller ends were toward the center forming a more or less daisy pattern. These eggs were whitish-buff, darkly speckled with brown spots more concentrated at the large end. Their obliterative pattern proved so effective in concealing the nest's presence, that I had to practise finding it again even though I had marked the vicinity of its nest.

While I was searching for the nest and investigating it as to its size and lining, the adult bird had alighted on the beach a short distance away and was nervously walking to and fro always tipping the tail up and down like a miniature teeter-totter, accompanying this always with the sharp piping note.

Leaving this bird to resume her incubation, I continued down the beach and, in the course of my walk back to the station, startled two more adult Sandpipers from two more nests each containing four eggs.

On July eleventh, I returned to Pier Point with a blind intending to study the first nest which I had found; however, one egg was gone and no adults flew from the nest in resentment at my intrusion. Therefore, I went on to the next. Since no adult was near this nest either, I decided to investigate the third. Approaching as quietly as possible, I succeeded in reaching within ten feet before the sitting bird stealthily rose and quietly stole off through the grass.

After placing the blind on a small rise about ten feet from the nest, I sat down inside to await the return of the bird. It wasn't long before the bird came back, cautiously making its way forward -- bobbing along like a mechanical toy. Waiting until it had resumed its place, I soon left the blind.

Two days later, I returned to sit for a longer time, now that the bird was accustomed to the blind. Often, to break the monotony of sitting, I would quietly leave the blind and approach the nest as closely as possible. If I were too careless and attracted the bird's attention before I had come very near, it merely moved off quietly and if I still continued forward, soon took flight to a point farther down the beach. However, if I succeeded in attaining a position near enough to startle the bird, the sandpiper would walk off the nest and commence to droop ^{its} plumage, waver the wings until the tips touched the ground, spread the tail, and stagger away uttering a whimpering cry all the while. The bird

presented a pitiful sight as it tried its best to entice me away from the nest. If I did follow it, the bird would continue in this limping gait until it considered the distance between us and the nest sufficient, and then it would fly off usually curving to come back to the nest. However, if instead I returned to the blind, the bird would merely walk off a distance and soon return stealthily to the nest.

For ten days similar hours were spent, and after the tenth day I decided to move the blind closer to better observe the hatching of the eggs and the actions of the young birds. However, after I had placed the blind, I did not return for several days, and when I did arrive back at the spot, all four eggs were gone. I observed no shells nor young birds around the nest although the adults were still there. When I investigated the other two nests, similar results were obtained. However, in the third nest, the three eggs still remained, cold and with no indication of an adult around to incubate them. Therefore, I took the eggs and upon opening them discovered one to be rotten, one not progressed past the primitive streak, and the last to contain a well-developed embryo with definite wing buds.

A few excerpts from Bent: -

- 1) One of the most successful species.
- 2) It migrates northward earlier than other Sandpipers, entering the transitional zone in late April or early May. It never flocks conspicuously and seems to be alone or in pairs.
- 3) The courtship is not well known since it is very difficult to distinguish the sexes.
- 4) The young are precocial and even when no larger than the egg they can run over the sand kicking their tail. They also have the ability to swim, above & below the water.
- 5) The food consists primarily of insects & occasionally fish.
- 6) The peculiar flight is the most characteristic feature of the bird. The ability to dive so evident in immatures is much more pronounced in the adults. In addition, the Sooty has the ability to grasp a perch and sometimes acts in a distinct sandpiper-like manner.