

Wader Quest Articles



SUPPORTING SHOREBIRD CONSERVATION

Registered Charity (England and Wales)
1183748

Wader Quest Objectives:

To raise public awareness about, and to promote an understanding and appreciation of, waders or shorebirds (birds of the sub order Charadrii and to include the family Turnicidae, as defined by the Handbook of Birds of the World Volume 3 del Hoyo, Elliott and Sargatal eds 1996).

To raise funds, which, at the discretion of the Board of Trustees, is to be used to make small grants or carry out appeals for wader conservation projects worldwide.

To promote for the benefit of the public the conservation and protection of waders or shorebirds and improvements of their physical and natural habitats.

To advance the education of the public regarding the conservation and protection of waders or shorebirds and their natural habitats.

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A trio of remarkable wader observations for Kevin Zimmer in California - Rick Simpson

Morro Bay Sandspit in San Luis Obispo county, California, USA, involves a 4 or 5-mile, one way hike to its northern tip. It is there that the majority of waders, or shorebirds, seem to concentrate, so, if you are going to go to the trouble of hiking the spit, then you really need to hike the whole 8+ mile round trip, or else you end up missing the best area. This makes it an under watched spot as you have to be pretty dedicated to make the effort to bird there. However, Kevin Zimmer, who has made the trip before with interesting results, proved that it often pays off if you make that effort.

On the 1st of October 2020 Kevin Zimmer took that hike and had a bit of a red letter day. In that one visit he recorded a first record for the county, a melanistic sandpiper and a bird that although is reasonably to be expected in the county, is unusual along the beach. Kevin's 8-mile roundtrip trek along the Morro Bay sandspit, began with an unusual plover sighting, in the form of a Mountain Plover *Charadrius montanus*.



Mountain Plover on the beach - Kevin Zimmer

Mountain Plovers are regular wintering birds in the eastern interior of San Luis Obispo county, in the Carrizo Plains where Elis and I caught up with them during our Wader Quest travels. They have though, like so many wader species, been declining in the last 30 odd years. In the mid-1980s it was not unusual to see up to 300 or more in a day there, when Elis and I visited in 2013 we saw just 29. Along the coast however they have always been very rare migrants (typically only in autumn) and this is born out by the fact that this was only the second or third time Kevin had ever seen one on a beach in 35 years of birding the area, although there have been other occasional beach sightings by other observers.

A week prior to this visit Kevin had made the same trek along the sandspit and on that occasion he came across a melanistic Western Sandpiper



Melanistic Western Sandpiper - Kevin Zimmer

A trio of remarkable wader observations for Kevin Zimmer in California - cont'd



Common Ringed Plover- Kevin Zimmer

Calidris maura, something he had never before encountered in any Calidrid wader. On that particular part of the beach where he saw it there were 7000+ small sandpipers so he was slightly taken aback when he came across what he assumed was the same individual again on this visit.

Finally, an already interesting and fulfilling day got even better when Kevin found and photographed a male Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* near Marker #6 on the west side of the sandspit. The bird was frequenting the wrack line and loosely associating with some 50+ Semipalmated Plovers *Charadrius semipalmatus* and 20+ Snowy Plovers *Charadrius nivosus*. The Common Ringed Plover was not hard to separate from the other plovers around it as it was the only bird in breeding plumage making it stand out somewhat.

A passing Merlin *Falco columbarius* spooked all the assembled waders, which comprised the plovers and some Sanderlings *Calidris alba*, and they flew further along the spit. At that point Kevin was unable to relocate the Common Ringed Plover and he didn't see it again.

However, that was not the end of the story for the Common Ringed Plover as the following day it was seen by some 20 other intrepid birders who had trekked out to the sandspit and were justly rewarded for their efforts.

This bird represents the first record of the species in San Obispo County, the fifth record for California and the twelfth record for the continental USA.

These were not the first rare waders that Kevin has found at this site either. On September 7th 2012 he and his wife found and photographed the county's second, and most recent, record of Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, a juvenile. The couple were the only observers to see this individual. The first, and only other record of Bar-tailed Godwit from the county, was another juvenile, also from the Sandspit, in September 2010.

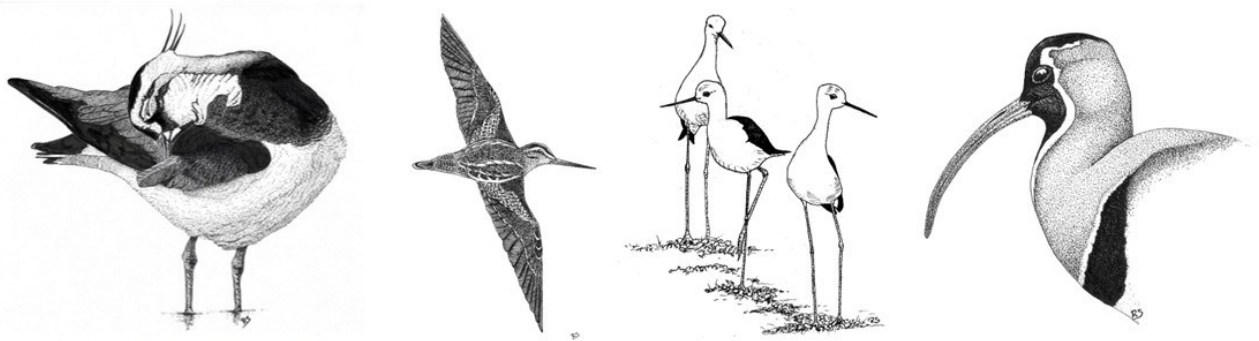
The photograph on the right shows the juvenile Bar-tailed Godwit, on the left, together with a Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa*, neatly illustrating the differences between them.



Juvenile Bar-tailed Godwit (L) and Marbled Godwit - Kevin Zimmer

New Wader Quest book - *A Quest for Waders* by Rick and Elis Simpson

A new book from Wader Quest Publishing by Rick and Elis Simpson.
This book chronicles the journeys they made to see waders around the world,
and the parallel journey of Wader Quest from fundraiser to Registered
Charity - all proceeds go to Wader Quest.



Foreword by Dominic Couzens

'This is a cracking read whether you're a waderphile or not. Ticking, dipping, ducking, diving, it's all here as Rick and Elis go through their version of a mid-life crisis to set up Wader Quest. A must-read for all birders.'

- **Iolo Williams:** Naturalist and T. V. presenter.

'Rick and Elis' enthusiasm ripples through this book. what they have achieved, bringing waders to the forefront of peoples minds alongside their conservation is second to none. A brilliant read which, like their beloved waders, will have you probing deeper into this amazing family.'

- **Tim Appleton MBE:** Founder of Birdfair Rutland Water
and Creator of Rutland Water Nature Reserve.

'I was hooked by the prologue. The tragedy of extinction was brought home to me on seeing, in Morocco in 1990, three of the last few slender-billed curlews to exist. Thanks to the commitment of conservation organisations from around the world and support of people like Rick and Elis the spoon-billed sandpiper has a fighting chance of making it.'

- **Debbie Pain:** Conservationist and scientist.

'Waders are one of the most threatened groups of birds, with several species on the brink of extinction and many more suffering serious declines. This makes Rick and Elis Simpson's Wader Quest - a charity dedicated to protecting waders and highlighting their plight - important and necessary. This fascinating book tells the story of how the organisation grew from their quest to see all the world's waders, before it was too late.'

- **Rebecca Armstrong:** Editor of Birdwatch magazine.

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