



Marsh Sandpiper

Moerasruiter

Tringa stagnatilis

The Marsh Sandpiper breeds mainly in marshes on the Eurasian steppes, extending into the southern parts of the boreal zone, from the River Volga to Lake Baikal (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Rogacheva 1992). Most migrate to Africa south of the Sahara or to India, with relatively few migrating to south-eastern Asia or to Australia. The main concentration in southern Africa was in the section of the highveld plateau with many pans (26–28°S, 25–31°E). Other areas with high reporting rates were the Okavango Delta, the lowveld of the eastern Transvaal, eastern Swaziland and adjacent KwaZulu-Natal, and the coastal region of the southern and southwestern Cape Province.

Population sizes, both on the breeding and nonbreeding grounds, are poorly known (Rose & Scott 1994). Summers *et al.* (1987a) estimated 1000 birds in coastal southern Africa, but a larger number occurs at wetlands in the interior.

The Marsh Sandpiper and Greenshank *T. nebularia* are easily confused, but the former has proportionately longer legs, a slimmer and straighter bill, and a more slender neck and head, giving a more delicate ‘jizz’ (Hayman *et al.* 1986). When flushed it gives either a solitary ‘tewk’ or a ‘tew-tew-tew’ call which is twice as fast as, and softer than, the similar ‘tjuu-tjuu-tjuu’ call of the Greenshank.

Habitat: Although mainly a species occurring at a wide variety of freshwater wetlands, it also occurs at saltworks, coastal lagoons and tidal estuaries. It often feeds by wading in shallow water over a muddy substrate, and less often on exposed mud. It rarely occurs on coastal shorelines; the high reporting rates in some sections of the coast are of birds at wetlands along the coastal plain.

Movements: The models show that departure starts earlier (February–March) than for most wader species, that there were rather few overwintering records April–August, and that arrival commences in September. This pattern is consistent with breeding in the Russian steppes beginning in April (Hayman *et al.* 1986).

There have been no recoveries of the 592 individuals ringed in southern Africa (SAFRING). However, there was one recovery at Rooiwal Pans (2727BC) on 13 January 1975,

of a bird ringed at Lake Nakuru (0°S 36°E), Kenya, on 15 April 1972, probably on migration northwards when ringed.

Interspecific relationships: It occurs widely alongside the two other ‘inland’ congeneric species, Greenshank and Wood Sandpiper *T. glareola* as well as the Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*.

Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence of a change in distribution in southern Africa. However, the breeding distribution of the Marsh Sandpiper in Europe has contracted eastwards owing to the intensification of agriculture and associated wetland drainage.

L.G. Underhill

Recorded in 1048 grid cells, 23.1%
Total number of records: 7178
Mean reporting rate for range: 7.6%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



