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DISTINGUISHING SEX AND AGE IN THE ESKIMO CURLEW



A fall female (upper) compared with a fall male (lower) Eskimo Curlew (both from the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard).

With 67 Eskimo Curlews measured to date (by far the largest sample ever taken), the first clear view of sex, age and seasonal differences in the appearance and size of the species is beginning to emerge.

Fall birds, such as those above, show that at this season individuals tend

toward being pale, with only hints of buffy color present on feathers of the underparts. However, the age of the bird also influences color patterns. In species like the Eskimo Curlew, individuals are classified as being either adults (more than one year old) or juveniles (young of the year).

Sex also influences color

pattern, with fall females appearing more richly marked than males. Further analysis still needs to be done to untangle the relationship of plumage to sex and age. There is a good deal of variation among birds that makes seeking generalizations difficult.

“males average smaller than females in length of their bills and tails.”



Two spring females (upper) and a spring male (lower) are more richly colored than fall birds, although females again tend toward being more heavily marked than males.

In addition to examining plumages with respect to age, sex and season, we have also made a series of measurements on birds. Initial analyses (see top of page 3) suggest that males average

smaller than females in length of bills and tails (table below). Other measures show little, difference, however.

more sophisticated statistical techniques and careful separation of birds into adult and juvenile age classes.

These analyses are still preliminary ones that await larger samples,

	bill to proximal nare	bill depth @ distal nare	L ventral Tarsometatarsus to middle toe	middle toe w/o claw	tail to proximal undertail coverts	L wing chord	
Male (16)		47.3	5.4	45.6	27.1	86.7	209.6
Female (21)		52.2	5.4	44.9	26.9	90.2	210.3

The table below shows preliminary tests for differences in sizes of Eskimo Curlews. Significance values indicate that the sexes differ in bill and tail length.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance
Bill length	Between Groups	187.797	1	187.797	10.686	.002**
	Within Groups	597.493	34	17.573		
	Total	785.289	35			
Bill depth	Between Groups	.006	1	.006	.032	.860
	Within Groups	6.696	34	.197		
	Total	6.702	35			
Tarsometatarsus	Between Groups	4.554	1	4.554	1.321	.258
	Within Groups	117.194	34	3.447		
	Total	121.748	35			
Tail length	Between Groups	135.654	1	135.654	5.262	.028*
	Within Groups	876.526	34	25.780		
	Total	1012.180	35			
Wing chord	Between Groups	4.706	1	4.706	.131	.719
	Within Groups	1218.267	34	35.831		
	Total	1222.972	35			

“Significance values indicate that the sexes differ in bill and tail length.”

FIELD TRIPS



A mid-March trip to Thompson Lake, Thompson, CT was well attended despite the cold morning. A portion of the group (including birdwatching dogs) is shown above (R. Gilbane photo).



**Training spotting scopes on Black
Guillimots in the ocean off Cape Ann, Mass.
(K .Sheldon photo).**

Our first spring field trips were held in March, beginning with a special trip for trustees organized to Cape Ann, Mass. Most of the trustees made it to the Cape on a spring-like day which made exploring the shoreline surprisingly pleasant. More typically, an early spring outing to the Cape is a painful undertaking, with icy wet winds blowing off the ocean and making the season more like the dead of winter.

Cape Ann, which extends well out into the north Atlantic, is a well-known spot for finding arctic-associated seabirds. Our explorations produced a good number of finds, including Glaucous Gull, Iceland Gull, Common Eider, King Eider, Black Guillemot (including several already molted into spring plumage), Razorbill, Purple Sandpiper, Red-throated Loon, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, and a number of other species of overwintering ducks.

Our second March trip, to Thompson Lake and nearby Killingly Reservoir, was open to all. In this instance, winter made one last stand, with morning temperatures hovering at 15°. Despite the cold, a good group gathered for the 8:00 AM starting time, and we had a modestly successful morning of finding notable species. The first Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles and Eastern Phoebes were in, as were Ring-necked Ducks. Other species located were Carolina Wrens, which managed to survive winter at this inland location, as well as a small flock of Common Ravens that obligingly walked about on the lawn below the Thompson Dam.



**A Purple Sandpiper explores among the algae on the rocks of
the Cape Ann coast (K. Sheldon photo).**

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