

# First documented record of the Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* (Scolopacidae) in Brazil

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**ABSTRACT:** On 24 February 2013 a single Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) was photographed at Lagoa da Pampulha, a reservoir in Belo Horizonte, state of Minas Gerais in central Brazil. Subsequently the site was revisited, and on 2 March 2013 two juvenile individuals were found to be present with at least one remaining until 10 March 2013. This is the first documented record of the Ruff for Brazil after two sight records from Rio Grande do Sul in 1985 and 1998.

**KEY-WORDS:** Palearctic, vagrant, rarity, shorebird, Neotropics.

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The Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* (Linnaeus, 1758) is a charismatic shorebird in the family Scolopacidae remarkable for its lekking strategies (Lank *et al.* 1995). This species has a wide Palearctic distribution, breeding across Eurasia and wintering widely across Europe, Africa and Asia (Piersma *et al.* 1996). Ruffs are generally regarded as annual vagrants to North America, although breeding behaviour has been observed in Canada and Alaska (Reynolds 1984, Rockwell *et al.* 2009). Further south the species is a fairly regular vagrant to the Caribbean (e.g., Ebels 2002, Kenefick & Hayes 2006) and has occurred in Central America in Mexico, Costa Rica, Panamá and Puerto Rico (Ridgely & Gwynne Jr. 1989, Mackinnon *et al.* 2011). South American vagrants are restricted to two sight records from Brazil (Mauricio & Dias 2000, Pacheco 2000), a “Bogotá” trade specimen of unknown origin (Hellmayr & Conover 1948), sight records from Peru (Oatman *et al.* 1980) and Venezuela (Altman & Parrish 1978) and photo-documented records from French Guiana (Renaudier *et al.* 2010). Here we present the first documented record of Ruff from Brazil and discuss the species’ vagrancy in a South American context.

On the 24 February 2013 D. F. D. and R. P. R. were birding at the Lagoa da Pampulha (19°50’47” S; 43°59’15” W), a 260 ha urban reservoir in the municipality of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais (*cf.*, Beato *et al.* 2003) when they encountered an unusual shorebird with which they were not familiar. D. F. D. posted an image of the bird onto the

Brazilian avian photoarchive Wikiaves (Dias 2013, Figure 1), where A. C. L. noticed the photo and recognized the bird as a Ruff, a species with which he has extensive experience in the Old World. The bird was seen foraging in shallow water with muddy banks colonised by Common Water Hyacinth *Eichhornia crassipes* and Water Lettuce *Pistia stratiotes*. At the same location, other shorebirds present included Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*), Greater Yellowlegs (*T. melanoleuca*), Lesser Yellowlegs (*T. flavipes*) and White-backed Stilt (*Himantopus melanurus*). Following release of the news online, the reservoir was revisited by many birders who discovered that two individuals were in fact present (Figure 2), with at least one remaining until 10 March 2013. Pictures and videos were posted online facilitating size comparisons of the two Ruffs alongside the comparably sized Lesser Yellowlegs (e.g., Figure 1). Hayman *et al.* (1991) lists the lengths of Lesser Yellowlegs as 230-250 mm and male and female Ruff as 260-320 mm and 200-250 mm respectively, which suggests that both birds are probably females. However we cannot rule out the possibility that that individuals may be rare faeder males (those that try and obtain sneak copulations) although this seems highly unlikely given the frequency of these individuals in the population (e.g., Karlionova *et al.* 2007). Ageing the two individuals is simpler, both individuals being juveniles on account of the buffish edges to the dark scapulars and wing coverts (Figure 2, Hayman *et al.* 1991).



FIGURE 1. Juvenile Ruff at the Lagoa da Pampulha, 23 February 2013 (D. F. D.).



FIGURE 2. Two juvenile Ruffs *Philomachus pugnax* with Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* at the Lagoa da Pampulha, 2 March 2013 (M. Rocha).

There are two previous sight records of Ruff for Brazil, the first concerned a juvenile (probably a male) seen by T. A. Parker, T. S. Schulenberg and a bird tour group on 30 October 1985 at the headquarters of Estação Ecológica do Taim in Rio Grande do Sul (Sick 1993, Pacheco 2000, T. S. Schulenberg *in litt.* 2013). Subsequently R. A. Dias observed a single first summer male with four Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) at Capão Seco, Rio Grande do Sul on 29 June 1998 (Maurício & Dias 2000). Speculation on the origin of these individuals is difficult but they must either represent: a) vagrants to North America from Europe that have subsequently migrated south to winter in South America; b) direct Transatlantic vagrants to Brazil from Europe or Africa or; c) members of a tiny Arctic North American 'pseudovagrant' population that are trying to winter in South America (*cf.*, Lees & Gilroy 2004). Resolving this question without recourse to ringing recoveries or satellite tags would be impossible and we strongly advocate the use of such technologies to reveal the migratory behavior of vagrants.

Given the lack of physical evidence (photographies, recordings and specimens) the Ruff currently sits on the secondary list of the CBRO (2011) as a "probable occurrence", as outlined in the journal "Nattereria" (CBRO 2000). As such, this record, extensively documented by many observers and photographers, should allow the species to be returned to the primary list of the CBRO.

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