

Status of Slender-billed Curlew in Central Asia

A recent study of the identification criteria of Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* (Corso et al 2014) showed that there is overlap in many of the characters with Eurasian Curlew *N arquata*. The authors advised a re-evaluation of all records from countries outside the traditionally accepted range, together with recent (post-1990) claims from countries within the recognised breeding and wintering range. The latest report from the alleged breeding range in western Siberia, Russia, in 1996 (Boyko & Nowak 1996), does in my opinion not meet the current standards for record documentation. Records in the Middle East were reviewed by Kirwan et al (2015), leading to the con-

clusion that most of the sight-only records should be considered doubtful. The only documented post-1980 record from this region is from Yemen, where a bird was photographed at Hodeidah in January 1984 (Porter 1984, 2004). The last documented record in North Africa is from winter 1994/95, when one bird was found at Merja Zerga, Morocco (van den Berg 1995). Also, all post-1990 European records are doubtful, including the only British one in 1998 (Steele & Vangeluwe 2002), which has recently been removed from the British list (British Ornithologists' Union 2014, Collinson et al 2014) and a report of a flock of up to 19 birds in March 1995 in southern Italy (Serra et al 1995; Dutch Birding 17: 80, plate 64, 1995).

The situation in Central Asia is not different, with many of the records not or inadequately docu-



352 Slender-billed Curlew / Dunbekwulp *Numenius tenuirostris*, first calendar-year (collected at Naurzum Nature Reserve, Qostanay province, Kazakhstan, on 31 July 1921), Zoological Museum, Moscow State University, Russia, 17 February 2015 (*Pavel S Tomkovich*) **353** Slender-billed Curlew / Dunbekwulp *Numenius tenuirostris*, adult (collected at Naurzum Nature Reserve, Qostanay province, Kazakhstan, on 27 June 1938), Zoological Museum, Moscow State University, Russia, 17 February 2015 (*Pavel S Tomkovich*)



mented. For instance, after a revision of records in Kazakhstan, only a few records (all confirmed by skins) remain acceptable, all from (well) before 1980 (Wassink 2015; plate 352-352). Note that a skin of a bird collected at Atyrau and allegedly remaining in the collection of the Zoological Museum, Moscow (Wassink 2015) cannot be traced (anymore) (Pavel Tomkovich in litt). A skin of a bird collected on 3 September at Taldykol lake, Atyrau province, remains in the collection of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. Since the record is without year, it is not included in Wassink (2015). The only post-1980 reports in Central Asia come from Uzbekistan, where no less than 171 migrating birds were counted in the southern Kyzylkum desert between 1 and 4 May 2006, following the report of migrating birds at this location in spring 2005 (Mitropolsky et al 2012, 2015). These reports are without any documentation and should, therefore, be considered highly doubtful.

Taking the above into account, there are no sufficiently documented records of Slender-billed Curlew after 1995 anywhere in the world. The reluctance to designate this species as 'Extinct' in order to avoid the 'Romeo Error' (Collar 1998), where we might give up on a species while it still exists, is understandable. However, Slender-billed Curlew seems to meet the requirements for the status 'Extinct' – exhaustive surveys undertaken in all known or likely habitat throughout its historic range, 'at appropriate times and a timeframe appropriate to its life cycle and life form' (IUCN 2001).

Many thanks go to Pavel Tomkovich (Department of Ornithology, Zoological Museum, Moscow State University, Russia) for his permission to publish the photographs, and to Justin Jansen for his comments on an earlier version of the manuscript.

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*Arend Wassink, Joan Hodshonstraat 6, 1795 AK De Cocksdorp, Texel, Netherlands
(arendwassink@kpnmail.nl)*