



## Long-billed Curlew Records for Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands), British Columbia

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Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*), considered endemic to the grasslands of the Great Plains, is currently a common and widespread shorebird in west-central North America (Jones et al. 2008). Since the 1940s, the species has expanded its breeding range throughout the southern interior of British Columbia from the international border at Creston north to the vicinity of Vanderhoof in the central interior of the province (Munro and Cowan 1947, Campbell et al. 1990, Cannings 1999, Campbell et al. 2011). Away from its breeding grounds in the province, Long-billed Curlew is still seldom located.

Since first reported on the British Columbia coast in 1958 (Erskine 1960), Long-billed Curlew has now been reported with some regularity on the southwest mainland from the Fraser river delta (Campbell 1972) east to Chilliwack and around the southern and eastern shores of Vancouver Island (e.g., Campbell et al. 1974, Campbell et al. 1990, Cannings 1999). There are two extralimital records for the mainland coast north of Vancouver Island: Burnett Bay north of Queen Charlotte Strait and Butze Point east of Prince Rupert (Campbell et al. 1990).

Recently, two noteworthy records of Long-billed Curlew were documented for Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands), British Columbia.

On 22 July 1968, RWN was watching a recently fledged family of Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) from the upper intertidal rocks about one kilometer southwest of the Langara Point light station, several hundred metres east of Thrumb Islet. The islet is

located near the northwest corner of Langara Island at the northwest corner of Haida Gwaii, BC (8U E625379 N6013092). At 0957 hr, a Long-billed Curlew flew west over the outer kelp bed. Field notes described it as having “a long, down-curving bill and a pale belly. It gave a high-pitched, quick *hoo-hoo-hoo* call.” The bird continued flying west and disappeared. It was almost certainly a Long-billed Curlew and lacked the pronounced head stripes and much shorter bill of a Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*), which is an uncommon mid-summer migrant on Haida Gwaii (Hamel and Hearne 2002).

The rocky, littoral marine habitat is uncharacteristic for this species but tidal mud flats and beaches are used by Long-billed Curlew during migration and winter (Campbell et al. 1990, Dugger and Dugger 2002). The small lawn at the nearby Langara Point lighthouse, however, may have provided a temporary rest, and perhaps a foraging site (Figure 1).

Twenty-three years later, on 30 May 1990, while waiting at the airport at Sandspit on the northeast tip of Moresby Island, Haida Gwaii, (9U E312190 N5904022), RWC noticed a large, buff-coloured shorebird foraging in short grass adjacent to a paved runway and airplane holding area. The bird was larger than a Whimbrel and lacked a conspicuous head pattern. The bill was very long and decurved over its length. At one point, a passing baggage vehicle momentarily startled the curlew at which time it flew up showing the orange-brown under wings. The bird quickly landed and resumed feeding, both by probing



**Figure 1.** Aerial view of Langara Point, BC, with light station and manicured lawn, near where a Long-billed Curlew was sighted flying offshore on 22 July 1968. *Photo courtesy North Pacific Seaplanes.*

and pecking, and was still present when the plane departed 90 minutes later. A Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferous*) and a small flock of European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) also foraged nearby.

Other outer coastal records of Long-billed Curlew for British Columbia are from Solander Island (5 May 1976; Campbell and Summers 1974) and Burnett Bay (29 July 1987; Campbell et al. 1990), both in the same months reported for Long-billed Curlews observed on Haida Gwaii. Our records are apparently the first reported for Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands), at least through 2001 (see Hamel and Hearne 2002).

Dugger and Dugger (2002) mentioned that there

are sight records for southeastern Alaska but did not give details. Two recent coastal records, however, both in late spring, are of single birds seen at the mouth of the Stikine River in May 1992 (West 2008) and at the mouth of the Situk River on 30 May 2008 (see [www.surfbirds.com/birding/AlaskaBirds](http://www.surfbirds.com/birding/AlaskaBirds)). †

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### *About the Authors*

RWN received his Ph.D. at the University of Calgary, Alberta, in 1977 on the behavioural ecology of Peregrine Falcons nesting at Langara Island, Haida Gwaii, BC. Since 1980, he has annually monitored the falcon population and banded nestlings on Langara Island. Wayne retired in 2006 after working as a wildlife, habitat, and fisheries biologist for the provincial government for 25 years based in Edmonton and St. Paul, AB.

