

How do Ruddy Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* prepare to cross the Pacific? – a “pre-script” . . .

N.C. DAVIDSON¹ & R.E. GILL²

¹18 Chemin des Jordils, 1261 Le Vaud, Switzerland. davidson@ramsar.org

²USGS, Alaska Science Center, 4210 University Drive, Anchorage, Alaska 99508, USA

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. . . rather than a “postscript”. In Davidson & Gill (2008) we reviewed evidence for long-distance trans-Pacific flights by Ruddy Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* in their autumn migration from Alaska, based particularly on the fascinating story reported by Max Thompson (1974) of Ruddy Turnstones banded on the Pribilof Islands south of the Alaskan mainland.

But there really is nothing new in this world, and shortly after going to press with our review paper we came across a much (70 years) earlier account of a Ruddy Turnstone trying to cross the Pacific in autumn (Alanson Bryan 1903). The account is in keeping with the wide variety of curious Ruddy Turnstone stories – and indeed, given its early publication date, may have been the very first to set the agenda!

On 28 August 1902, William Alanson Bryan of the Bishop Museum, Honolulu, was part-way through a 7,000 mile crossing of the mid-Pacific on board a schooner. Returning from Marcus Island and at 174°W 33°N he saw an adult male Ruddy Turnstone fly in from the north and land on the boat’s deck, in “a dazed and somewhat exhausted condition”. He caught the bird by hand and found it to be “literally nothing but skin and bones”.

Alanson Bryan made attempts to feed the bird with a variety of potentially suitable foods to hand on board, including lobster, oyster, tinned clam, roast meat, fresh fish, boiled rice and other cereals – all of which were rejected (rather unusually for a turnstone, given the many reports of its highly cosmopolitan feeding habits). As a last resort, Bryan tried the bird on live cockroaches (“the only insect pest on board”), which it attacked and ate with enthusiasm. But unfortunately the bird died on the second morning after its capture. Alanson Bryan prepared a skin, and reports the following measurements: length 9.30 in. (236 mm), wing 6.05 in. (153.7 mm),

culmen 0.85 in. (21.6 mm) and tarsus 0.95 in. (24.1 mm). Unfortunately no weight was reported.

Alanson Bryan could well be the first observer to report that such Ruddy Turnstones seemed to be undertaking long-distance trans-Pacific migrations (unless someone knows of an even earlier account!). He notes that at the time of its capture the boat was *c.* 500 miles (800 km) north-east of Midway Island, which he presumed was its probable destination. He also presumed the likely starting point from the bird’s flight was Alaska, that it was 1,800 miles (2,900 km) out from the nearest land, and that it must have been in continuous flight for more than 40 hours. He also notes that it was unusual to see such a single bird, since other Ruddy Turnstones seen during his Pacific boat crossing were all migrating in small flocks.

The location when the bird landed on Alanson Bryan’s boat can be placed as approximately 2,500 km from the Pribilof Islands and 3,000 km from mainland Alaska. These are similar distances to the maximum flight ranges we estimated for birds flying from the Pribilof Islands in autumn (Davidson & Gill 2008), and lends some further weight to the view that such birds are very likely to have to make at least one refueling stop on Pacific islands before reaching their ultimate wintering grounds further south and west in the Pacific.

Alanson Bryan, W. 1903. A Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) taken in the mid-Pacific. *Auk* 20: 210–211.

Davidson, N.C. & Gill, R.E. 2008. How do Ruddy Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* prepare to cross the Pacific? *Wader Study Group Bull.* 115(1): 33–35.

Thompson, M.C. 1974. Migratory patterns of Ruddy Turnstones in the Central Pacific Region. *Living Bird* 12: 5–23.