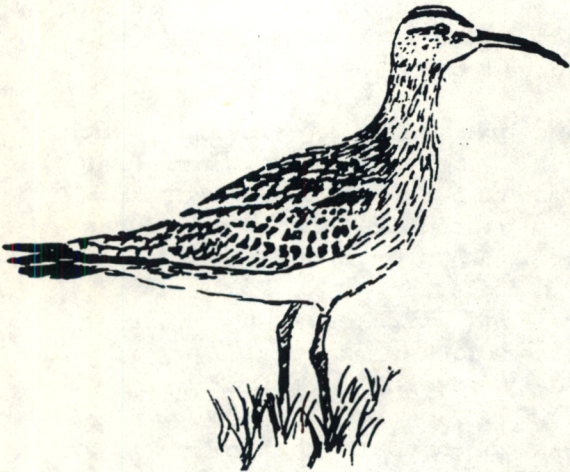


The salt marshes near Brackley Beach and Covehead Harbour in P.E.I. National Park generally host a good variety and number of shorebirds during summer and early fall and are regularly visited when we are birding in the area. On September 12, 1992 we were scanning for shorebirds on these marshes and noted fair numbers of the usual Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*), Lesser Yellowlegs (*T. flavipes*), and Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*), along with a few Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*), Semipalmated Sandpiper (*C. pusilla*), Least Sandpiper (*C. minutilla*), Short-billed Dowitchers (*Limnodromus griseus*), and Whimbrels (*Numenius phaeopus*).



At approximately 1130 hours, Dan McAskill found a small buff- or sandy-coloured curlew on a small clump of grass in a small pond about 80 meters away surrounded by seven Lesser Yellowlegs. This curlew was only slightly larger than the adjacent Lesser Yellowlegs, with a short, slender, decurved bill about 1 1/2 times as long as the length of the head. Both the small size of this bird and its short bill suggested the bird was not a Whimbrel, the curlew commonly occurring on P.E.I. Our next thought was that it might be an Eskimo Curlew (*N. borealis*), a species which once migrated though P.E.I. in large numbers during the late summer and autumn, but which has not been recorded here since 1904 (Godfrey, 1954) and is now almost extinct.

For the next 1/2 hour, the curlew stood quietly on its tuft of grass, as the yellowlegs fed and loafed around it. We had ample opportunity to compare its size with that of the Lesser Yellowlegs, as they moved behind, in front of, and beside it. At all times, the curlew appeared only slightly larger than the Lesser Yellowlegs.

After consulting Hayman et al. (1986), we decided that the bird did not seem to fit the descriptions of Eskimo Curlews. The most obvious discrepancy was the head pattern. It was very boldly marked, much like that of the Whimbrel, but not as diffuse as that of the Eskimo Curlew.

Finally, McAskill and Bowerbank decided to approach the bird more closely to better view fieldmarks with a 20X Bushnell telescope while Sabine watched with a zoom scope for the underwing covert colour and other field marks. They approached to approximately 30 meters before the curlew flushed with the yellowlegs, and its unbarred primaries were noted, ruling out the possibility that the bird might have been a very small Whimbrel. Pale, buff coloured underwing coverts were also noted thus suggesting Little Curlew (*N. minutus*) as Eskimo Curlews display cinnamon underwings. The bird landed approximately 150 meters away. Shortly afterwards, most birds in the marsh became rather "flightly" and milled about, with some departing towards Brackley. Despite a search of the area where the curlew moved to by Dwayne Sabine and Ray Cooke, who had arrived with a camera and scope after the bird moved, the curlew could not subsequently be relocated. An intense search of the entire marsh the following day turned up only 1 Greater Yellowlegs, 2 Whimbrels, a few Least Sandpipers, and one Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*).

Having consulted Hayman et al. (1986), we decided the bird seemed most likely to be a Little Curlew, which is quite similar in appearance to the