

# Airborne foraging by Little Stints in Siberia

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During Jul/Aug 1999 geological fieldwork related to glaciation history was carried out by joint Swedish and Russian teams in the NW Taymyr Peninsula, Siberia. One of our camps was at the junction between the Mammoth River and the Yellow River (slightly gold-bearing, therefore its name), at 75°17'N, 96°19'E, near the so-called "Astronomy Lakes".

On the evening of 7 Aug, which was a fine day, I walked along the Mammoth River and observed bird behaviour I had never seen before. The surface of the river was like a mirror and the air was full of insects and I saw 5–10 Little Stints *Calidris minuta* foraging in flight over the river, like Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica*. They were flying low over the water, snatching insects from its surface, and also making rapid mid-air changes of direction to, so it appeared, snatch flying insects. Although the nearest stints passed only 10 m from where I stood and I used 8×30 binoculars, it was difficult to see exactly what they were catching. But it looked like both flies and mosquitoes, and this conclusion was supported by what could be seen floating past on the river surface close to the river bank.

Some Little Stints also settled briefly on stones protrud-

ing above the river surface. There they pecked at the water in a more typical wader like manner; most probably foraging on the same water-borne prey that I could see on the river surface.

I did not see airborne feeding by the Little Stints again in 1999, most probably due to poor weather conditions during the rest of our stay. Moreover I have not seen anything like it before or since, despite the fact that I have worked in the Arctic for more than 40 years, including four field seasons in those parts of the Russian Arctic where Little Stints breed. However, a very similar behaviour, termed "flutter-feeding", has recently been described for wintering Western Sandpipers *Calidris mauri* at Guerrero Negro saltworks in Mexico (Morales-Gopar & Carmona 2006).

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**Morales-Gopar, L. & Carmona, R.** 2006. "Flutter-feeding" by Western Sandpipers: a novel over-water foraging technique. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 111: 103–104.