

Purple Sandpipers feeding above the littoral zone

Sirs,—In his interesting paper on the winter feeding of the Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima* (*Brit. Birds*, 59: 165-179), C. J. Feare referred to the statement in *The Handbook* that this species is strictly coastal outside the breeding season. He added that the diet consists 'entirely of organisms found within the littoral zone'. While this was so in the areas studied in Yorkshire, Purple Sandpipers do occur away from the shore on several islands where they are sometimes associated with colonies of Grey Seals *Halichoerus grypus*.

Purple Sandpipers are a regular autumn migrant in numbers of up to two hundred at North Rona (Outer Hebrides) and a few frequently join the larger parties of Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* that feed among the Grey Seals on Fianuis. This rocky peninsular is about a quarter of a mile across and is covered with tracts of *Stellaria* sward interspersed with muddy pools much churned up by wallowing seals. On several occasions in October 1962, while with a Nature Conservancy expedition, I observed Purple Sandpipers feeding with Turnstones among the seals right in the middle of this area and well above the high water mark. Dr. F. Fraser Darling (1939, *A Naturalist on Rona*) also noticed Purple Sandpipers on these seal grounds and recorded that they joined the Turnstones in the winter-time in working over the morass which the seals had made. I have observed the association of Purple Sandpipers and Grey Seals in winter on St. Kilda (*Scot. Birds*, 2: 231) where these species occur together on rocks only just above the high water mark. On Foula (Shetland) Purple Sandpipers have sometimes been recorded feeding inland around the crofts (*Scot. Birds*, 4, supplement: 37).

These observations indicate that the Purple Sandpiper is not entirely a 'littoral organism', but, at least in some areas, does also feed above the littoral zone. Here its feeding activities need not have the tidal rhythm observed in the strictly coastal individuals studied by C. J. Feare.

ESTLIN WATERS

Sirs,—I am grateful to you for allowing me to comment on the preceding letter from Dr. Estlin Waters on Purple Sandpipers *Calidris maritima* feeding above the littoral zone in the Outer Hebrides, including St. Kilda, and Shetland. Peter Davis (*in litt.*) has reported to me similar behaviour on Fair Isle (Shetland), where he found Purple Sandpipers feeding in the turf along the cliff tops in very rough weather. (Peter Davis also encountered Purple Sandpipers relatively scarcely on their feeding grounds at night, but could not say that they were feeding; I find it difficult to understand how a bird feeding in the manner described in my paper in *Brit. Birds*, 59: 165-179 could do so without seeing what it was eating.)