

Semipalmated Semipalmated Sandpiper

Calidris pusilla

Class: Aves
Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Scolopacidae
Genus: Calidris.

Distribution

Calidris pusilla breeds in the Arctic and subarctic from far-eastern Siberia, east across Alaska and northern Canada to Baffin Island and Labrador. They spend the Canadian winter in northern South America. Some western birds are found along the Pacific coast of Central America. Smaller numbers spend this season in the Caribbean.

Habitat

While in the north during the early summer months they occupy areas of wet sedge or sedge- tundra. They select open habitats well-suited for breeding displays and scrape nests. They generally are found running along sandy shorelines, probing the loose sand for food.

Food

Small invertebrates

Reproduction

Early arriving males establish territories from which to display to incoming females. Pairs often reunite.



A highly migratory species, after breeding in the Arctic regions of North America these sandpipers begin to travel southwards in July. Birds that did not breed start out first followed quickly by adult females and then males that did breed and are leaving their young. These juveniles remain a little longer. Some travel with late adult migrants. There is a long and arduous journey ahead especially for these young birds. Peak migration of adults is late July and early August. Most western birds migrate south through the interior of North America. Those having nested in the central and eastern Arctic migrate south non-stop until they reach southern James Bay, the St. Lawrence estuary, and the Bay of Fundy in Canada. This is a stop over stage for rest and recuperation before continuing south. The spring return migration is towards the Atlantic then continues northward.

While breeding, the semipalmated sandpiper builds its nest amongst dry shrubby areas in upland tundra near small ponds, lakes and streams. Ideal foraging habitat includes pools close to lakes and rivers, shrubby river deltas, and sandy areas along the shore. Before migrating, it gathers in areas of shallow fresh or saltwater, along the edges of lakes, on muddy intertidal zones, or on soft silt or clay mudflats. Migration stopover habitats may include wetlands, grassy fields, marshes, or edges of lakes and rivers. At its wintering sites, the semipalmated sandpiper resides on shorelines with mudflats bordered by shallow lagoons and dead mangroves.

Prey includes a variety of arthropods, molluscs and worms.

It may wade belly-deep into water where it moves slowly and rapidly probing at underwater burrows in search of prey.

The male excavates scrapes among sparse vegetation within his territory for females to choose from. The female makes her selection. Mating takes place and she begins lining the scrape with nesting material. From June through to early July, four to six days after pair formation, a clutch of usually four eggs is laid, and then incubated by both parent birds for 20 to 22 days.



Development

Young hatch within 24 hours of one another. Chicks are extremely independent from birth. They are born with open eyes and almost adult-sized legs. As soon as they are dry, they begin to move about, pecking for insects.

Characteristics

During the breeding season, the adult has rich reddish-brown upperparts marbled with dark brown and black, a white throat and dark brown streaks along the sides. At other times the plumage is more subdued, a brownish-grey, with dark centres on the shoulder feathers, a thin, white wing-stripe, white underparts with dark barring on the breast, and a white eye streak.

Adaptations

These birds boost the aerobic capacity of their flight muscles by eating large amounts of food prior to departure. On their long journey south they drop down into staging areas to replenish these fat reserves.

Status/Threats

Natural predators include falcons, gulls, owls and foxes. These birds are now on the IUCN Red List.

Sightings in Nova Scotia

Readily seen during fall migration.

These are amazing young birds. The chicks, being precocial are not fed by their parents, they fend for themselves. They are periodically brooded or kept warm by a parent, during their first week. They begin to fly weakly at about 14 days of age and can fly fairly well at about 18 days. Females leave their broods within 10 days after they hatch in the care of the male. She needs a period of recovery. Males usually leave the chicks at about the time the chicks fledge, or take their first flight. These young birds are soon to begin their first long migration southwards.



This small wading bird has long, stilt-like legs. It gets the name semipalmated from the webbing present between its toes. The female is typically larger than the male. The juvenile is distinguished by varying amounts of reddish-brown on the shoulders. Like other sandpipers, it has relatively long wings, a long neck and a short tail. Male bills are short and blunt, the longer bills of females have a tapered and slightly drooped form. Adult wing span 27-30 cm, body length 15-18 cm, weight 22-48 g, egg weight 8 g. Life span is up to 12 years. They form monogamous pairs for the season. Although breeding pairs migrate separately and probably spend the winter apart, many pairs re-establish each year at the breeding area until a partner fails to return. If the previous year's nest was successful, a male will re-establish in the same area.

Semipalmated Sandpiper chick: note the partial webs between its toes



Males perform aerial displays at 5 to 9 m where they hover and produce "motorboat" calls. These aerial displays are well suited to their relatively open habitat where visibility is high. They use a variety of other communication calls. The front toes are long and adapted to walking rather than perching, making this bird adept at running on land, as well as wading and swimming if necessary. Their cryptic plumage provides excellent camouflage.

IUCN Red List - Near Threatened. They have undergone a moderately rapid decline over the past three generations (22 years). Over-exploitation in the non-breeding range may be the principal driver of decline.

The Bay of Fundy is the most important staging site in eastern North America in providing food that enables the birds to accumulate fat to fuel their long flights. Birds may double their weight in less than two weeks by eating small shrimp-like invertebrates which are abundant on the mud flats.

