

Arkansas Shorebird Identification

	Bill	Legs	Body Structure	Distinguishing Features	Juvenile plumage	Breeding plumage	Nonbreeding plumage	Behavior, Habitat
Black-bellied Plover	black; heavier than golden-plovers	gray to black	larger, chunkier than golden-plovers	pale; undertail white; underwings white; armpits black	upperparts pale-spotted; breast heavily streaked	underparts black except tail; female browner	plain gray-brown above; face bland	runs & stops on plowed & flooded fields
American Golden-Plover	black; thinner than Black-bellied Plover	gray to black; longer than Black-bellied Plover	slimmer, more attenuated; smaller head & neck	back golden; eyebrow bold white; underwings & armpits gray	like nonbreeding but underparts heavily barred	upperparts gold-spangled; underparts black; female browner	plain, dull golden-brown; eyebrow white	runs & stops on pastures, plowed fields, mudflats
Semipalmated Plover	black w/ orange base; blacker in nonbreeding	orange	stubby but attenuated; round head; thick neck	single breast band; back dark brown; stubby bill	like nonbreeding	forehead white surrounded by black; single breast band	eyebrow white; no black on head; single breast band	run-stop-pluck feeding; forage in scattered flocks
Piping Plover	stubby; orange w/ black tip (breeding) or black (nonbreeding)	orange-yellow	chunky; stubby; rounded head; thick neck	paler than Semipalm.; collar complete unlike Snowy	like nonbreeding	forehead black; black breast-band complete or broken; upperparts pale brown; face pale	like breeding but duller, no black	run-stop-pluck feeding; forages away from waterline
(Western) Willet	black w/ gray base; straight; evenly tapered, fine-tipped	long; grayish; tinged blue or green	rounded; larger and stockier than yellowlegs	black-and-white wing pattern; grayer than other large shorebirds	upperparts brown, variably marked	upperparts gray-brown w/ dark barring; underparts barred	upperparts plain gray	stiff-legged gait; feeds alone
Upland Sandpiper	short; yellow-based	long; yellow	long neck; small dovelike head; long tail	upland habitat; long appendages	buff brown overall w/ extensive barring	buff brown overall w/ extensive barring	buff brown overall w/ extensive barring	upland habitats; bobs head; upright stance

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Greater Yellowlegs	pale-based; slightly upturned; 1.5X length of head (subtle)	bright yellow to orange-yellow	2X weight of Lesser; neck often w/ prominent "Adam's apple"	bolder eye ring; more streaked head & breast; more barring on flanks; primaries molt during fall migration	upperparts brown, white-spotted	upperparts w/ variable black markings; breast and flanks barred	upperparts gray w/ black-and-white fringed feathers	feeds by sweeping bill side-to-side; bobs foreparts
Lesser Yellowlegs	all-dark; straight; length of head	bright yellow to orange-yellow	2/3 height of Greater; slimmer neck and chest	more capped appearance; finer spotting above; longer leg projection in flight; no primary molt during fall migration	upperparts brown, white-spotted	upperparts w/ variable black markings; breast and flanks barred	upperparts gray w/ black-and-white fringed feathers	feeds by sweeping bill side-to-side; bobs foreparts
Solitary Sandpiper	dark tip; greenish base	greenish	smaller, shorter, more compact than Lesser Yellowlegs	all plumages, upperparts dark w/ small white spots; bold white eye ring	breast & head dark, obscurely streaked	breast & head w/ dark streaks	like breeding but sparsely dotted; not seen in AR	often feeds alone at edge of ponds, lakes, creeks; frequently bobs
Spotted Sandpiper	pinkish to yellow-orange	yellowish to orange	short legs & bill like peep but longer neck and tail	teetering behavior; white area in front of shoulder	upperparts boldly barred; no spots	breast w/ heavy black spots; upperparts streaked & barred	upperparts plain brown; underparts no to few spots	constantly teeters rear end; solitary; inhabits edge of any water body
Sanderling	black; stout; medium length	black; lacks hind toe	larger than peeps; chunky; rounded; thick neck	paler than all other sandpipers; pure white below	back spangled in black; dark tertials; contrasting white eyebrow	head, breast, upperparts orange-rufous & peppered	upperparts pale gray; underparts pure white	runs like wind-up toy

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Semipalmated Sandpiper	black; straight; blunt-tipped	black to dark olive; partial webbing b/w middle & outer toes	less front-heavy than Western; short primary projection	molt to nonbreeding through Nov.	upperparts dull, scaly; breast pale	relatively dull browns & grays; crow & scapulars rufous	upperparts dull, gray, no rufous, scalloped; breast-sides smudgy	picks at surface; mostly on mudflats; most abundant peep in East
Western Sandpiper	black; averages longer; fine-tipped; droopy	black; partial webbing b/w middle & outer toes	larger head, heavier chest than Semipalm; short primary projection	molt to nonbreeding complete by Sept.	head pale; scapulars rufous-edged	crown, scapulars & cheeks bright rufous; breast-streaking extends to legs	paler; cap less contrasting than Semipalm	picks at surface; mostly on mudflats; most abundant peep in West
Least Sandpiper	black; slightly droopy; shorter than Western; finer than Semipalm	yellowish	short winged and tailed; small head; no primary projection; world's smallest sandpiper	browner in all plumages; breast same color as upperparts	like breeding but brighter rufous	upperparts w/ black centers & rufous edges; wears to dark; breast heavily streaked brown	back & breast plain light brown	feeding stance w/ foot planted forward so toes near bill; often crouches low; most abundant peep in Interior
White-rumped Sandpiper	black; lower mandible base reddish; heavier than Baird's	black	bulky chest; sleek body; long primary projection well past tail	prominent white eyebrow on dark head	like breeding but brighter rufous	upperparts gray-brown w/ rufous tinges (wears off in fall); breast & flanks streaked	upperparts gray-brown; breast lightly streaked	tilts far forward to feed; probes deep; more likely to feed in open water than other peeps
Baird's Sandpiper	black; straighter than White-rumped, finer-tipped	black; relatively short	laterally flattened; steeper forehead; long primary projection past tail	paler; complete breast-band; flanks clean; face plain; dark lores w/ pale spot above	upperpart feathers fringed with brown-buff giving more scaly look	upperparts blotched with silver-tipped black spots	like White-rumped but browner	slow shuffling gait; picks from surface; prefers dry edges of mudflats, short-grass pastures

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Pectoral Sandpiper	dark towards tip; pale towards base	yellow	like a large Least Sandpiper; males 25% > females	sharp contrast b/w densely streaked breast & white belly, comes to point on lower edge	upperparts rufous-fringed; two white lines on back	upperparts rich brown	upperparts light brown; rarely seen in US	feeds in marsh vegetation; hunched over, head down, picking and probing
Dunlin	black; drooping; longer than peeps	black; short	chunky; short, thick neck	black belly in breeding; plain in nonbreeding but darker than Sanderling	molted before arriving in AR	cap and upperparts bright rufous; black belly patch	upperparts dull brown; breast brown-streaked	walks steadily, picking and probing in mudflat
Stilt Sandpiper	dark; slightly drooped; < dowitcher, > Lesser Yellowlegs	yellow-green; > dowitcher; < Lesser Yellowlegs	sloped forehead; rounded rear crown	combo of bill size, leg color, broad white eyebrow and feeding style	back scaly w/ pale-fringed feathers; breast pinkish buff	underparts densely barred; cap & cheeks rufous	back & breast plain brownish gray	feeds in water (not mud), probes like dowitcher but tail tilted up, leaning forward
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	short; black	yellow	sleek; attenuated; thin neck; upright stance	buffy overall; plain face w/ prominent eye; plain breast w/ spots on sides of breast	scapulars, coverts & tertials dark w/ pale-fringed	similar to juvenile but buffier	similar to breeding	upland habitats; flashes white wing linings in courtship
Wilson's Phalarope	black; medium length; needle-thin	black or yellow; relatively short; toes lobed	round body; small head; long thin neck	bill; behavior; bright white below	upperparts dark, quickly wears & molts to gray; legs yellow	female w/ broad dark stripe through face and neck, breast salmon; male drab w/ pinkish neck	upperparts pale gray; face white; legs yellow	often swims, spinning to stir up food

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Short-billed Dowitcher (subspecies <i>hendersoni</i>)	black; gray or greenish base; subtle kink at lower tip	light green	slimmer; flatter back; forehead steeper	vs. Long-billed: best by flight call; some primary projection; feeding flock quiet; does not molt primaries in AR; black & white tail bars even	contrast b/w buff breast and white belly; upperparts with internal rufous marks	underparts orange, fading towards belly; breast sides spotted; flanks barred; upperparts w/ broad orange marks	upperparts paler gray; side bars narrow, defined, contrasting, darker than neck; throat contrastingly pale	sewing machine feeding style; less common in AR
Long-billed Dowitcher	black; gray or greenish base; gently arched through outer half	light green	more rounded back & belly ("swallowed a grapefruit"); more indented lower back; loral angle more acute	vs. Short-billed: best by flight call; no primary projection; feeding flock chatters; molts wing feathers during fall migration; black tail bars wider than white	duller than Short-billed; upperparts lack internal marks	underparts entirely orange; sides extensively barred; upperparts darker w/ thinner, darker rufous marks	upperparts darker gray, blotchy; side bars broad, even, same color as neck	sewing machine feeding style; greater preference for freshwater

Sources:

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