

Birds of Coastal Georgia



Created by Lindsay Bertch (2009)



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Shore Birds

UGA Marine Education Center & Aquarium
www.marex.uga.edu/aquarium

American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*)



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 17-21" from beak to tail tip

Description: A small, thickset shorebird with a black head and a large red bill. Black back, white belly, and pale legs.

Similar Species: The **black skimmer** has a black-capped head and a thick, knife-like bill tipped in black.

Behavior: May be seen near oyster beds or at the edges of the salt marsh. Nests on beaches or oyster rakes.

Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*)



Photos courtesy of
Lindsay Bertch



Size: 16-20" from beak to tail tip

Description: A large sandpiper with a mottled brown back and dark legs. Note very long, slightly upturned bill tipped in black.

Similar Species: The **willet** has a shorter bill and black and white wings bands.

Behavior: Often seen wandering up and down the surf zone or at the edge of the salt marsh probing the ground with its bill in search of invertebrates.

Willet (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*)



Photos courtesy of
Lindsay Bertch



Photo courtesy of Susan Bertch



Size: 14-17" from beak to tail tip

Description: A large sandpiper with a gray/brown back and blue/gray legs. During breeding season the breast is barred. Note long heavy bill and distinct black and white wing bands seen in flight.

Similar Species: The **marbled godwit** lacks the black and white wing bars and has a longer bill.

Behavior: Often seen wandering up and down the surf zone or at the edge of the salt marsh probing the ground with its bill in search of invertebrates. Distinctive call. Nests in the high salt marsh.

Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*)

Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch



Size: 10-11" from beak to tail tip

Description: A medium-sized sandpiper with a medium-length bill and greenish legs. During the breeding season, head and breast are a pale red and back is mottled black, gray, and red. Back and head a light gray in winter.

Similar Species: The **marbled godwit** and **short-billed dowitcher** have longer bills. The **willet** is grayer and has distinct wing bands seen in flight.

Behavior: Wanders up and down the surf zone or along the edge of the salt marsh probing the ground with its bill in search of invertebrates. During its circumpolar migration will also eat horseshoe crab eggs laid on the beach. Nests in the Arctic.

Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus*)



Size: 10½ -12" from beak to tail tip

Description: A medium-sized sandpiper with a very long, thick bill, light colored band through eye, and light yellow/green legs. During the breeding season the breast and neck are reddish and the flanks are barred. During the winter the body is gray with speckling on the face, neck, and belly.

Similar Species: The larger **willet** has a shorter bill and distinct wing bands. The larger **marbled godwit** has a longer bill and darker legs.

Behavior: Wanders up and down the surf zone or along the edge of the salt marsh probing the ground with its bill in search of invertebrates. Nests in the Arctic.

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 8-10" from beak to tail tip

Description: A small sandpiper with orange legs and a distinct black breast pattern. During the breeding season, the back will be a rusty red color. The winter plumage is duller than the breeding plumage but retains the same basic pattern.

Similar Species: None. Bright orange legs and distinct black pattern distinguish the ruddy turnstone from other shore birds.

Behavior: Seen wandering up and down the surf zone or at the edge of the salt marsh probing the ground with its bill in search of invertebrates. Also may use beak to turn shells over to look for food. Nests in the Arctic.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 7-8" from beak to tail tip

Description: A small sandpiper with a medium length heavy bill. During breeding season, back, head, and breast are a rusty brown color. In winter, white belly, black shoulders, and gray head and back. White wing stripe visible during flight.

Similar Species: The sanderling's bill size and shape distinguish it from the **dunlin**, **piping plover**, and **semipalmated plover**. The **least sandpiper** has yellow legs.

Behavior: Seen wandering up and down the surf zone or at the edge of the salt marsh probing the ground with its bill in search of invertebrates. Nests in the Arctic.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)



Winter



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 8-9" from beak to tail tip

Description: A small sandpiper with a large, dark bill that droops toward the tip. During breeding season, has a large black patch on belly and is a rusty brown color above. Winter plumage is gray/brown above and some mottling on belly.

Similar Species: The dunlin's long, curved beak separates it from the **sanderling**, the **piping plover**, the **semipalmated plover**, and the **least sandpiper**.

Behavior: Seen wandering up and down the surf zone or at the edge of the salt marsh probing the ground with its bill in search of invertebrates. Nests in the Arctic.

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*)



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 5-6 ½" from beak to tail tip

Description: A very small sandpiper with a brown back and white belly. Medium length bill is black with a small droop to the tip and legs are yellow/green.

Similar Species: The yellow legs and small size of the least sandpiper differentiate it from the **sanderling**, the **piping plover**, the **semipalmated plover**, and the **dunlin**.

Behavior: Seen wandering up and down the surf zone or at the edge of the salt marsh probing the ground with its bill in search of invertebrates. Nests in the Arctic.

Western Sandpiper (*Calidris mauri*)



Breeding



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 6-7" from beak to tail tip

Description: A small sandpiper with rusty brown back, shoulders, and crown during the breeding season. Back and head are gray in winter and shoulders may show a trace of rusty brown. Bill is thick at base and droops toward tip. Legs are dark.

Similar Species: The **least sandpiper** has yellow legs, a browner back, and a slightly smaller bill. The **dunlin** is larger with a longer, thicker bill. The **sanderling** is larger with a thicker bill and clean white breast. **Plovers** have a dark neck band and shorter bill.

Behavior: Wanders up and down the surf zone or along the edge of the salt marsh probing the ground with its bill in search of invertebrates. Nests in Alaska.

Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*)



Winter



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 6-7 ½" from beak to tail tip

Description: A small plover with a short bill. Back is a very light tan, the belly is a clean white, and the legs are orange/yellow. May have a complete or partial dark ring around the neck and the bill will be yellow with a black tip during breeding season. The bill is black and the ring is absent during the winter.

Similar Species: The size and shape of the piping plover's bill distinguish it from the **sanderling**, **dunlin**, and **least sandpiper**. The pale color separates it from the **semipalmated plover**.

Behavior: Endangered species. Seen wandering up and down the surf zone or at the edge of the salt marsh probing the ground. Nests on beaches.

Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*)



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 7-8" from beak to tail tip

Description: A medium-sized plover with a wide black breast band, a thick black bill, and light colored legs. Distinct white eye stripe on brown head; back is brown.

Similar Species: The **piping plover** and **semipalmated plover** have shorter bills and narrower and lighter breast bands.

Behavior: Wanders up and down the surf zone or along the edge of the salt marsh probing the ground with its bill in search of invertebrates. Nests on Georgia beaches.

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)



Winter



Photos courtesy of Lindsay Bertch

Size: 6 ½ -7 ½” from beak to tail tip

Description: A dark-backed plover with a short bill. Has a dark ring around the neck and the bill is yellow with a black tip during the breeding season. The bill is black and the ring is paler during the winter.

Similar Species: The size and shape of the semipalmated plover’s bill distinguish it from the **sanderling**, **dunlin**, and **least sandpiper**. The dark back color separates it from the **pipng plover**.

Behavior: Seen wandering up and down the surf zone or at the edge of the salt marsh probing the ground with its bill in search of invertebrates. Nests in the Arctic.

References

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