

Shorebirds

Many species of birds wade into shallow water to find their prey, but do not swim. At first glance these birds may look similar, especially the sandpipers. Even at second glance, some shorebirds are hard to tell apart. Shorebirds are usually countershaded—dark above, where they receive the most light, and whitish below, where they receive the most shadow. This coloration makes them hard to see on the beach and hard to tell apart by color alone. Upon closer observation, however, each species can be identified by its distinctive bill, legs, and behavior. The species on this page are only a few of the hundred or so birds seen on beaches, tidal flats, rocky shores, jetties, and marshes.

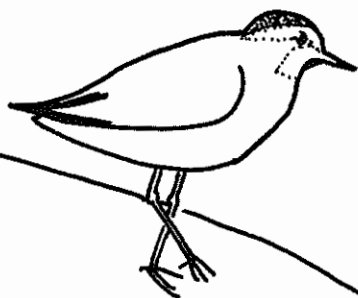
The Least sandpiper, *Calidris minutilla*, is the smallest of the seemingly billions of species of sparrow-sized shorebirds. (For those who have neither the patience nor the inclination to differentiate between the plethora of small shorebirds, they are all referred to as "peeps.") It winters all along the Atlantic coast and breeds in Alaska and Canada. All sandpipers

are wading birds with slender bills used to probe into shallow water (or mud) for crustaceans, worms and mollusks.

A noisy but wary bird that may wade out past its waist is the Greater yellowlegs, *Tringa melanoleuca*. The yellowlegs runs around preying on fish and crustaceans, seldom probing into the mud. It winters all along the coast and breeds in Alaska and Canada.

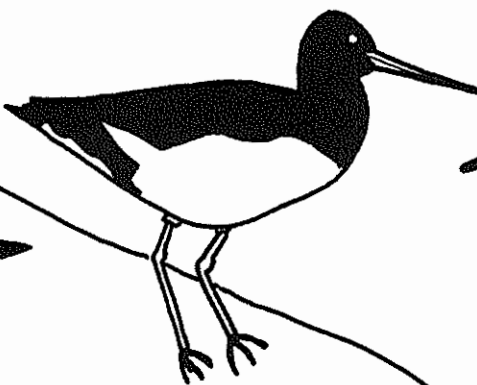
Ruddy turnstones, *Arenaria interpres*, breed in the arctic and winter all along the East coast. They are short, squat and pugnacious, and eat whatever they find under the rocks and seaweed they overturn.

The American oystercatcher, *Haematopus palliatus*, was nearly eradicated from the U.S. coast by overzealous hunters. Now, with protection, it has become more numerous and is found from Cape Cod south to Florida. This chicken-sized bird has a long, flat, chisel-like red bill. It opens bivalves by sticking its bill into a bivalve that is partly opened and cutting the adductor muscle before it can close.

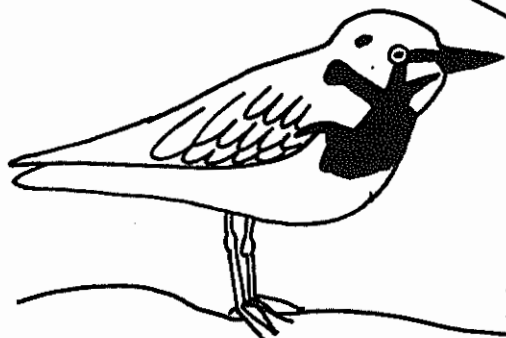


Least sandpiper
Calidris minutilla
size: 5 inches long

Greater yellowlegs
Tringa melanoleuca
size: 11 inches long



American oystercatcher
Haematopus palliatus
size: 16 inches long



Ruddy turnstone
Arenaria interpres
size: 7 inches long

