

A NATURE ALBERTA
CHECKLIST



SHOREBIRDS OF ALBERTA

Use this Checklist as your guide to explore
and discover the fascinating natural
history and biodiversity of our province.



NATURE
ALBERTA

A COMMUNITY CONNECTED BY A LOVE OF NATURE

The year was 1970. Six nature clubs came together to form the Federation of Alberta Naturalists. More than four decades later, and now known as Nature Alberta, we are grateful for the clubs, the people and the history that has enabled this organization to become the voice for the greater appreciation and conservation of Alberta's natural environment. We strive to connect Albertans with the natural world that exists all around us. By encouraging Albertans to learn more about and understand natural history and ecological processes, we help ensure that Alberta's natural heritage and its biodiversity is widely enjoyed, deeply appreciated and thoroughly protected.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cover photo: Spotted Sandpiper, stock photo

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SHOREBIRDS OF ALBERTA

Alberta is a large province with varied habitats, and exploring its biodiversity is an immense undertaking. Together, Nature Alberta and our partners have prepared this Checklist in hopes of inspiring Albertans to get out and discover the natural beauty of this great province.

Alberta is fortunate to have a broad diversity of bird species and a large community of birding enthusiasts. Through our Bird and Biodiversity Program, we strive to be a strong voice for the recovery of bird species at risk, to increase the appreciation of Alberta's bird biodiversity, and to promote birding as a worthy recreational pursuit that contributes to a healthy lifestyle. This checklist of Alberta's shorebirds highlights a fascinating piece of our province's biodiversity that we hope you will take the time to experience and enjoy.

PRINCIPLES OF BIRDING ETHICS

As a conservation-driven organization, Nature Alberta believes that by following these practices you help promote the health and well-being of birds and other animals, humans and habitat while out in the field. When visiting natural areas, you must always ensure your presence makes as little impact as possible upon the natural environment, and on the animals and plants that inhabit the area.

This means you will have to have some basic knowledge of natural areas and use good judgment. The following principles provide guidance on how to best treat and experience Alberta's natural areas, while ensuring that future generations will also have the privilege of enjoying them.

- Learn patterns of animal behaviour and know how to avoid interfering with their life cycles.
- Understand which wildlife species are most sensitive to disturbance and when they are most sensitive (e.g. nesting season).
- Stay on trails intended for human use whenever possible – this helps preserve the rest of the natural area.
- Understand the provisions of the Alberta Wildlife Act, Migratory Bird Convention Act and Species at Risk Act to assure the appropriate protection of wildlife and habitats.
- Understand the status of wildlife in Alberta, including what species in Alberta are at risk.
- Be prepared for unexpected events – this is an easy way to avoid preventable accidents or other mishaps.
- Inform those you notice engaging in harmful or risky behaviour that their behavior may endanger themselves or the wildlife.

- Report inappropriate behaviour to authorities. Violations of the Alberta Wildlife Act, Migratory Bird Convention Act, or Species At Risk Act should be reported to Report a Poacher (1-800-642-3800).
- Do not trespass on private property.
- Do not damage trees, vegetation or nests.
- Treat all wildlife, plants, places and people with respect.

People who enjoys birds and birding must always respect wildlife, the environment and the rights of others. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the American Birding Association Code of Birding Ethics.

WHERE TO GO BIRDING

To see most shorebirds, as the name suggests, you will have to visit the shores of lakes, ponds or rivers. The best places to look for shorebirds in the province include shallow lakes and sloughs, particularly when dropping water levels have left an expanse of muddy lake bottom. Strong winds play a role as well. Some shorebirds will tend to move to the upwind side while others, such as Avocets, tend to gather at the downwind side to collect what is blown towards them. In years of high precipitation, when lake water levels are higher, the reedy margin may be great for ducks but not for shorebirds. In wet seasons, migrating sandpipers may gather on flooded fields. Each year will be different.



Photo credit: Don Delaney



Photo credit: Don Delaney



American Avocet (top), Black-bellied Plover (bottom left), Long-billed Dowitcher (bottom right).

WHAT YOU WILL FIND AND WHY

At a glance, the photos in this Checklist give you a good idea of what kinds of birds to expect. Other water-loving birds, such as herons, ducks or gulls, are not included in this Checklist.

A common name for shorebirds is *waders*, and wading is what most of the birds in this Checklist do. You will find them walking about where water and land meet. This relatively narrow strip of habitat is called the *littoral zone*. From an ecological perspective, this zone is very rich, containing an abundance of organic nutrients released by decaying plants and algae. Here, the water is turbid and alive with swarms of bacteria and tiny crustaceans, including water fleas and shrimp, as well as aquatic insects such as the larvae of midges and mosquitoes. This is why shorebirds frequent shores. The littoral zone is a meeting place for some thirty kinds of shorebirds congregating in the shallows to take advantage of a seasonal feast.

LONG BILLS, SHORT BILLS

How do all of these birds, dependent upon the same food base, avoid competition with each other? By dividing the seating at the table, so to speak. To lessen competition, the various species each have their own specific niche. Birds with short legs stay close to the land and those with longer legs can wade out farther from shore.

Additionally, each species has its own unique set of 'utensils'. Plovers have short, straight bills, sturdy enough to root out bugs between the pebbles. The Avocet with its thin, up-turned bill scythes the water by feel. Dowitchers probe deep into the mud with a long beak that features a neat little hinge at the tip, like a pair of pliers that opens and closes to grab aquatic worms.



American Avocets Photo credit: Brian Genereux

EASY TO OBSERVE

Compared to songbirds flitting about in the foliage of trees or shrubbery, shorebirds are easy to find in their open surroundings. Close-up identification is possible with a magnification telescope or camera with stabilizer optics that produce brilliant images with superb detail. Having only binoculars, you may be tempted to walk up for a closer view. Most likely, the birds will react to your approach by flying farther away. A more productive tactic is to sit quietly by the shore, on a stone or a little stool, and let the birds come to you.

Shorebirds that breed in the arctic and pass through Alberta during spring and fall migrations show little or no fear of humans as long as you sit still. Feeding on the go and following the shore, the birds gradually come nearer until they are at your feet, close enough to admire the fine detail of their plumage. Such passive but intimate observation allows you to share a few moments in the high-intensity life of these delightful creatures; these fragile world-travelers that have flown here from thousands of miles away, with thousands more to go, on their way to and from the arctic tundra and the beaches of South America.



Baird's Sandpipers Photo credit: Don Delaney

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Why shorebirds need open country is a question of paramount significance. The wider the mud flats, the better their chances of discovering enemies. The main threat to shorebirds comes from Peregrine Falcons or Merlins, which may spot shorebirds from half a mile away or from high in the sky. Both falcons will approach low over ground or water but they are also adept at launching stealth attacks from behind reeds or other obstacles. This explains why shorebirds tend to stay well away from vegetation. It also explains why they flock together. As the saying goes, there is safety in numbers and early warning is vital. The more eyes to watch, the lower the risk of being surprised.

Shorebirds appear to have an amazing ability to focus on the ground at the tip of their beak, searching for minuscule food items, and simultaneously, with high acuity, keeping an eye on the sky. Some researchers have suggested that their eyes may have separate functions; one eye is used for close-up scrutiny, while the other eye remains alert to distant threats. For shorebirds, and for all wild creatures, survival depends on the necessities of eating and avoiding being eaten.

PLUMAGE COLOUR AND SIZE

Colour is important in bird identification. One challenge with shorebirds, however, is that the most colourful species, such as the **Red Knot** or the **Red Phalarope**, moult back into the plainest grey well before the end of summer, making them difficult to recognize. Another example is the **Black-bellied Plover**, well-named because of its bold finery during the breeding season, that turns into a dull-looking bird on the wintering grounds. The British name for this same species, Grey Plover, is then more appropriate.

Subtle colour differences are often the only way of separating shorebirds that look very much alike in size and shape, such as the sandpipers. Most have black legs, but the **Least** and **Pectoral Sandpiper** have yellow legs. Bright yellow legs are a year-round diagnostic feature of two of the most recognizable shorebirds in this province, the **Greater** and the **Lesser Yellowlegs**. The difference in size is substantial, but in the field size can be difficult to judge unless you see these two together.



Photo credit: Don Delaney

When it opens its long wings, the nondescript but vociferous **Willet** metamorphoses into a black-and-white beauty.



Photo credit: Brian Genereux



Photo credit: Steve Knight



Photo credit: Don Delaney

TOP: The size difference between the **Lesser** and the **Greater Yellowlegs** clearly shows when the two are seen together. Note that the bill of the latter is relatively longer than that of the former.

BOTTOM: A **Black-bellied Plover** in transition between summer and winter plumage.

THE LOCAL BREEDERS

All of Alberta's shorebirds are long-distance migrants that fly south well before winter sets in. Most are transients, but at least ten species nest at our latitude. First to arrive is the dapper **Killdeer**. The odd one may turn up by mid-March, when ponds and lakes are still frozen. They nest on bare ground, often well away from water. They do not make any attempt at nest building, but lay their four, spotted eggs in a slight depression, decorated with a few pebbles or twigs. At the sight of humans, the brooding bird leaves the nest and sneaks off for a short distance until it flies up and bursts out in vehement protest. If you are too close to its treasure, the **Killdeer** attempts to lure you away with a distraction display. Dragging itself along the ground as if crippled, the bird screams pitifully. Potential egg robbers such as crows and weasels may be turned aside by such behaviour, but no amount of scolding or wing-fluttering helps if the nest is approached by a cow. In a frantic attempt to halt the innocent bovine, **Killdeer** have been seen to literally "fly in the face of danger".

Like **Killdeer**, the **American Avocet** nests on bare ground. The breeding bird slips away from the eggs well before the approach of people, joining other members of the breeding colony in a collective protest. By contrast, locally breeding shorebirds such as the **Marbled Godwit** and the **Willet**, which hide their nests in the grass, stay put and leave its defence to a partner that flies out to meet the intruder in a highly agitated way. **Willetts** swoop aggressively overhead in a loud rush of wings. However, the brooding bird will flush only if you, unwittingly, almost step on the nest.



Photo credit: Dawne Colwell



Photo credit: Don Delaney

TOP: By the end of the breeding season, the **American Avocet** loses its cinnamon head and neck colour and turns all white like the juveniles.

MIDDLE: The first Canadian breeding record for the spectacular **Black-necked Stilt** was recorded at Beaverhills Lake in 1977.



Photo credit: Brian Genereux

BOTTOM: In display, the **Killdeer** shows the rufous colour of its rump that is hidden from view when the wings are folded.



Photo credit: Raymond Ng



Photo credit: Dawne Colwell

TOP: The **Whimbrel's** down-curved bill is shorter than the **Long-billed Curlew's**. Northern migrants, some **Whimbrels** make a stop-over in Alberta. Their typical flight call of "bi-bi-bi-bi" identifies them from afar.

BOTTOM: With its exceptionally long, down-curved bill, the **Long-billed Curlew** can snap up a spider or grasshopper without having to lower its head, which is important for a bird that needs to keep an eye out for approaching enemies.



Photo credit: Don Delaney



Photo credit: Don Delaney

In flight, the **Hudsonian Godwit** (top) can be recognized by its white rump and black tail, which sets it apart from its larger relative, the **Marbled Godwit**, (bottom). Both species often intermingle while feeding, but while the latter breeds in Alberta, the Hudsonian is a northern migrant.



Photo credit: Dawne Colwell



Photo credit: Don Delaney

TOP: When you walk along a lake or river, the **Spotted Sandpiper** flies ahead of you with short bursts of wingbeats, low over the water. It habitually teeters upon landing, bobbing its tail up and down. Some of the females are polyandrous. That is, they mate with several males in succession, producing eggs for

each one, and leaving the care of eggs and chicks to them. The adults lose their spots by late summer.

BOTTOM: The larger **Solitary Sandpiper** also has a habit of teetering upon landing. A breeding bird of wilderness wetlands, it can be told by its white eye ring and greenish legs. It likes to perch in trees, loudly scolding

people who invade its nesting territory.

FACING PAGE: The **Upland Sandpiper** (top) is a resident of open grassland. It often sits on fence posts to have a look around, a habit it shares with the **Wilson's Snipe** (bottom). Beautifully camouflaged by its plumage, the snipe nests in low marshy vegetation.



Photo credit: Steve Knight



Photo credit: Brian Genereux



Juvenile Wilson's Phalarope Photo credit: Brian Genereux

PARENTING

The eggs of shorebirds are relatively large and perfectly peryform or pear-shaped. Four of them, the usual number in a clutch, fit together like wedges in a pie, taking up the smallest possible space under the brooding bird. Unlike ducks, in most shorebird species, both parents share incubation duties. The eggs hatch in 17 to 24 days and the chicks are precocious. Within hours of birth they are quick on their feet and capable of catching insects. As soon as they can fly they are fit to travel and, with or without their parents as guides, they start the long migration southward.

Unlike most other birds, the male phalarope is drab-coloured, while the female is the one with the fancy plumage. The male **Wilson's Phalarope** does all of the brooding while the female spends her time feeding to recover from the energy loss associated with producing her large eggs.



Photo credit: Brian Genereux

The **Wilson's Phalarope** usually swims instead of walks. The female is the brightest coloured of the pair (top). Soon after she has laid the eggs, she leaves on migration, while her duller looking partner (middle) takes care of the nest and chicks. By late summer, the adult male moults into dull grey and white, resembling the young.

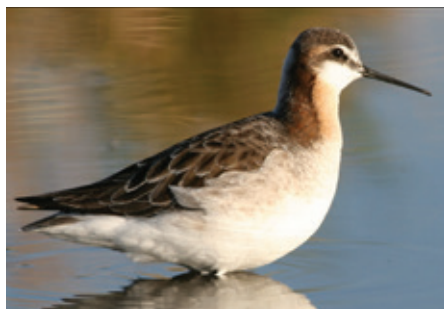


Photo credit: Dawne Colwell

While the Wilson's Phalarope nests in Alberta, the **Red-necked Phalarope** (bottom) is an arctic migrant that passes through the province in late May and is on its way back south again from late July to September. It commonly makes a pit stop on Alberta's lakes, swimming well off shore. If insect food is abundant, huge flocks may stay around for weeks.



Photo credit: Don Delaney



Pectoral Sandpiper Photo credit: Brian Genereux

THE SPRING MIGRATION

Bird migrations in North America take place along three major flyways: the Pacific, the Central and the Eastern, which partly converge over central Alberta. Traveling mainly at night, shorebirds follow a timetable that is as predictable as the seasons, but their choice of route is as capricious as the weather. With thousands of kilometres to go, flocks depart on tail winds. Little or no migration takes place when the province lies under a large dome of high pressure and the air is practically stagnant. In some years, dependent upon weather patterns, the mass of shorebirds may bypass central Alberta and choose a route over Saskatchewan instead.

Northbound migrants take advantage of the strong counter clockwise southerlies that precede cells of low atmospheric pressure moving on the jet stream from west to east. The migration of arctic shorebirds starts in the second week of May and may be over before the end of that month, unless the travellers find a place where food is abundant. This again depends on the weather.

The shallow wetlands of Alberta are natural recycling systems that convert decaying organic matter into nutrients for many life forms. The keystone species in this process of renewal is the chironomid midge. The adults resemble mosquitoes but are harmless and do not bite. Midge larvae are called bloodworms, which are 10-20 cm long. Their density in the muck at the bottom of the shallows can be astonishing, about 65,000 per square metre. Long-billed birds such as dowitchers, can extract the worms from the mud.

Avocets and sandpipers go for the pupae that rise to the surface and emerge as midges, locally called lakeflies or fish flies. On warm days, huge mating swarms of lakeflies hang like a smokescreen over the marsh. If shorebird arrival coincides with a big hatch of midges, the birds tend to stay long enough to fatten up before resuming travel. The right conditions can provide spectacular opportunities for shorebird watchers.



Photo credit: Brian Genereux



Photo credit: Miechel Tabak

TOP: The **Pectoral Sandpiper** is the largest of the sandpipers collectively called peeps. It is also the easiest to identify on account of its clearly defined breast shield of dark streaks.

LEFT: A Siberian relative, the **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** occasionally strays into Alberta during migration. This intercontinental vagrant often associates with **Pectorals** but can be told apart from **Pectorals** by its unmarked cream-coloured chest, a prominent white eyebrow and a reddish cap.



Photo credit: Brian Genereux



Photo credit: Don Delaney

The **Semipalmated Sandpiper** (top) is the most common peep in Alberta. The name has to do with the partial webs between its toes. The **Semipalmated** resembles the **Baird's Sandpiper** (bottom), which is slightly larger and more slender with longer wings. The colour of its back is buffy with a scaly feather pattern. The size difference between them is an uncertain field mark unless you see both species together. Even then it may be tough to tell one from the other because of individual variation between one **Semipalmated** and the next, as shown in the photo above. With all sandpipers, the females are larger than the males and females have longer bills. The difference in bill length between a male **Semipalmated** and a female may be up to 7 mm, which is close to half of its maximum length of 18 mm. Leg colour is no help in identification between the two species because both have black legs and a black bill. But a subtle difference between them is that the **Semipalmated** has a blunt-tipped bill and the **Baird's** a thinner and more sharply pointed one.



Photo credit: Don Delaney

The photo above clearly shows the difference between the pointy bill of the **Baird's Sandpiper** and the blunt-tipped bill of the **Semipalmated**. The bill of the **Least Sandpiper** (bottom) is also sharply pointed with a slight downward curve. However, the best field mark between the three peeps is that the legs of the **Least Sandpiper** are yellowish instead of black.



Photo credit: Brian Genereux



Photo credit: Brian Genereux

These two photos of the **Sanderling** demonstrate the seasonal difference in plumage colour. The **Sanderling** in the upper photo is in spring finery. The lower photo was taken during winter when the bird turns practically white. With their short legs, **Sanderlings** tend to stay on the water's edge. On wave-washed beaches, they run back and forth so fast that it looks as if they are mounted on wheels.



Photo credit: Brian Genereux

THE FALL MIGRATION

During their southward migration, some sandpipers may appear by late-June while spring migrants are still present in central Alberta. These early returning shorebirds are not the non-nesters, as birders used to think, but the adults of nesting pairs. By the end of June, most local shorebirds have fallen silent. Some already leave on migration in July, a few stragglers stay around into September. First to leave are the **Killdeer**. Some may try to overwinter.

Odd as it may seem, the females of several species depart their arctic breeding grounds as soon as the eggs have hatched. The chicks are then guarded by the adult male or left to fend for themselves. The reason for the early departure of the female has to do with the timing of her annual moult. She begins the flight south under full sail and completes moulting her wing feathers after arrival on the wintering grounds. In other shorebird species, it is the male that takes early leave.



Photo credit: Brian Genereux



Photo credit: Don Delaney

As the name implies, the **White-rumped Sandpiper** (top) has a white rump. However, that diagnostic field mark is only visible when the bird is in flight. On the ground, it looks much like any other peep, but a good field mark in spring is the neat pattern of dots along its upper body. Like all migratory shorebirds, the number of **Stilt Sandpipers** (bottom) stopping over in Alberta varies greatly, from hundreds to just the odd one mixed in with a party of dowitchers. By late summer, after it has lost most of its spring colour, the **Stilt Sandpipers** can be told by its hurried habit of plunging its slightly drooping bill in as far as possible, often submerging its head. Behind the three **Stilt Sandpipers** in the bottom photo is a **Lesser Yellowlegs**.



Photo credit: Miechel Tabak



Photo credit: Hans Hillewaert

The **Red Knot** goes through a stunning metamorphosis between seasons. In its nondescript winter plumage, it is easily overlooked or misidentified (top), but in full breeding colour (bottom) it is unmistakable. **Red Knots'** breeding range is circumpolar and they migrate back and forth to South America. There have been steep declines in their number and, in order to understand the cause, scientists have trapped and fitted thousands of **Knots** with numbered tags that can be read at some distance. By reporting the dates and locations, birders can help research efforts.



Photo credit: Miechel Tabak



Photo credit: Brian Genereux

The **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** (top) is another shorebird that has suffered major population declines in North America. Alberta's Beaverhill Lake was once internationally known for the large numbers of migrant **buffies** staging on its shores and surrounding pastures in late May. Today, the lucky birder may encounter a few **buffies** anywhere in the province. The **Ruddy Turnstone** (bottom) is in a class by itself, not only because of its striking plumage but also because of its habit of turning over pebbles and other lakeshore debris while hunting for food. On the way to its arctic breeding grounds, usually in the company of **Black-bellied Plovers** and **Red Knots**, the **Ruddy Turnstone** is among the last of the northern shorebirds to pass through Alberta in spring.



Photo credit: Brian Genereux

The **Dunlin**, an occasional vagrant in Alberta, is perhaps the most numerous shorebird of the world, migrating or wintering along the ocean shores of Eurasia, Australia and the Americas. In spring, the **Dunlin** is easily identified by its black belly, but in late summer and fall, after it loses the black, it can be told by its longish down-curved bill.



Photo credit: Brian Genereux



Photo credit: Raymond Ng



Photo credit: Miechel Tabak

As the name suggests, the **Western Sandpiper** is a vagrant from the west. It may be more common than generally thought, because it can be hard to identify and is easily confused with other peeps. A good field mark is the buffy colour of its back, which is more prominent in spring (top) than in late summer and fall (bottom). In contrast to the **Semipalmated** and the **Baird's Sandpipers**, the bill of the **Western** is longer and drooping. However, like the **Semipalmated Sandpiper**, the females of the **Western** are larger and have longer bills than the males. The difference between the extremes can be as much as 7 mm, almost one-third of the 24 mm maximum bill length. Like the **Semipalmated**, the **Western** has black legs and there are partial webs between its toes.

Plovers are classed as shorebirds, but they do most of their foraging on dry ground. It may seem surprising that the two largest plovers have obviously ignored the critical imperative for prey species to blend in with the background, which reduces the risk of being seen by predators. Instead of counter-shading their body contour by having a white belly and a dark upper side, as most birds have done for added camouflage, the **American Golden-Plover** (top) and the **Black-bellied Plover** (middle) are doing the opposite. Why? To render themselves more visible to potential mates and competitors on their arctic breeding grounds. However, soon after the nesting season is over, both plovers shed their black body feathers and revert back to being the plainest of migrants.

The photo at the bottom of the page shows both species in winter plumage and the size difference between them. **Black-bellied Plover** (left) and the **American Golden-Plover** (right).



Photo credit: Steve Knight



Photo credit: Steve Knight



Photo credit: Steve Knight



Photo credit: Brian Genereux

The **Killdeer** is the most common plover in Alberta. It nests in the province and is readily identifiable by its double breast band.



Photo credit: Brian Genereux

A close relative is the **Semipalmated Plover**, which features a single breast band. It nests in arctic regions and passes through Alberta in spring and fall, often in association with sandpipers.



Photo credit: Brian Genereux

The sandy-coloured **Piping Plover** nests on beaches and open ground around prairie lakes. It has regionally become rare and is classed as an endangered species because of increasing human disturbance of its habitat.



Photo credit: Tak Shibata

The diminutive **Snowy Plover** is an inhabitant of the western and southern United States and a rare wanderer to Alberta. Its legs are grey, whereas the legs of the **Semipalmated** and **Piping Plovers** are yellow.



Photo credit: Don Delaney



Photo credit: Brian Genereux

There are two species of **Dowitchers**, the **Long-billed** and the **Short-billed**. The former breeds mostly in Asia. During migration both species are common in Alberta and, if food is abundant, many stay around until October, locally forming huge flocks. In flight, a good field mark is the white wedge on its back.



Photo credit: Don Delaney



Photo credit: Don Delaney

The difference in bill length and plumage details between the **Long-billed** (top) and the **Short-billed Dowitcher** (bottom) is not always great and can be subject to individual variation. The colour of both dowitchers is more ruddy in spring than in fall and they are best identified by call.

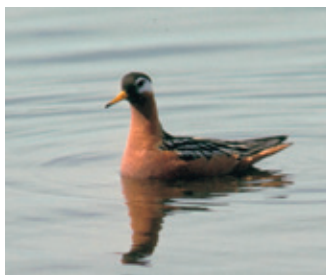


Photo credit: Edgar Jones



Photo credit: David Hofmann

On its way to and from arctic nesting grounds, the **Red Phalarope** (left) is the rarest phalarope to be seen in Alberta. Spring records number just two or three for the province, but there have been at least half a dozen sightings in late summer and fall, when this bird looks very different (right) from its red summer plumage.

REGULARS AND RARITIES

After six months of winter, spotting the first shorebirds of the season is always a thrill. Invariably, the **Killdeer** and **Lesser Yellowlegs** are in the vanguard. But a few individuals of other species are sometimes well ahead of the rest of their kind. For instance, an early flock of peeps might land on the lake shore right in front of you, to take off again nervously before you get a chance to identify them.

The first big wave of sandpipers does not arrive before the second week of May, and the last contingent may delay its arrival well into the third week of that exciting month. With a staggered timetable for various species, the spring passage of shorebirds is hurried and quite predictable, whereas the return migration is more drawn-out, but surprises are always possible.

As birding gains in popularity, the list of reported rarities grows. Official records of provincial shorebirds kept by the Royal Alberta Museum include rare vagrants from the west coast such as **Surfbird**, **Black Turnstone**, **Purple Sandpiper**, **Wandering Tattler**, as well as several strays from Eurasia, including **Spoonbill Sandpiper**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Little Stint** and **Rufous-necked Stint**.

For more information on the status of regional species, search the Wild Species Status Search tool on Alberta Environment and Parks' website.



Photo credit: Miechel Tabak



Photo credit: Tak Shibata

The **Ruff** is a stray from Eurasia that has been sighted at least a dozen times in the province. Females are nondescript and difficult to identify (top), but spring males look resplendent with an enlarged ruff of variously coloured feathers around the neck. An even rarer visitor is the **Surfbird** (left), a resident of the northwest Pacific coast. As of 2014, the **Surfbird** has been seen and photographed just once in Alberta.

CHECKLIST

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