



Photo: Maria Kemmer

IDENTIFYING SHOREBIRDS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

OVERVIEW

Like gulls, identifying shorebirds is a daunting task for inexperienced birders. These little balls of stripes, streaks, and smudges always seem to be on the move, and there are so many different species to look through in the field guide! But like gulls, knowing what to expect in certain habitats and certain times of year can help you narrow down what species you might be dealing with. Combine this with observations of relative size, shape, feeding behavior, and plumage characteristics, and you will be well on your way to being a shorebird-expert!

OCCURRENCE TABLE

Most shorebirds breed in northern areas and the Arctic, except for Spotted Sandpiper, which breeds throughout BC. We see shorebirds primarily when they stop over during migration in spring and fall, although some species also overwinter in good numbers in several coastal BC locations. This table outlines the timing of spring and fall migrations and key habitats within which the common shorebirds are found along the **south coast** of BC.

Species	Migration Peaks	Overwintering	Habitats
Dunlin	Peaks in early April, scarce by mid-May; October	Common in mixed species flocks	Coastal mudflats, creek-mouths, and gravel/sand spits for foraging; high tide roosts include rocky islets and flooded farm-fields (near coast)
Sanderling	April-May; early September	Common in mixed species flocks	Feeds mostly along sandy beaches
Western Sandpiper	Mid-April to mid-May; mid-July to early September	Rare flocks	Coastal mudflats, creek-mouths, and gravel/sand spits for foraging; high tide roosts include rocky islets and flooded farm-fields (near coast)
Semipalmated Sandpiper	Relatively rare in spring; mid-July to mid-August	Rare individuals (few)	Prefers freshwater habitats but can also be seen consorting with WESAs on coastal mudflats, etc.
Least Sandpiper	Peaks in early May; mid-July to mid-August	Rare individuals (few)	Can be found in a variety of habitats in spring, but tends to stay away from deeper water, preferring wet mud and grassy areas
Black-bellied Plover	Peaks in April; August to September	Common individuals	Forages in mudflats and other coastal habitats; sometimes roosts in fields (with Dunlin)
Spotted Sandpiper	Late April-early May; August to September	Rare individuals (few)	Protected gravelly and sandy beaches
Black Turnstone	Peaks April; September-November	Common in mixed species flocks	Wave-washed rocky shorelines of coastal BC
Surfbird	April; late summer to fall	Rare individuals (few)	Associates with turnstones in similar habitats

