

calidris alba

sanderling

Linking Communities

The Sanderling is a common sight in Saskatchewan, seen here longer than many other shorebirds. The brine shrimp of Chaplin Lake and Old Wives lakes attracts the Sanderlings in large numbers. With sightings averaging over 60,000 it is clear that these sites are important staging grounds for the Sanderling to obtain enough energy to finish migration and be able to breed.

Identification

Slightly larger and chunkier than the Semipalmated Sandpiper the Sanderling has a short black bill and black legs. In breeding plumage the head, mantle, and breast is rusty in colour. The belly is white and a white wing bar can be seen in flight.



Habitat & Distribution

The Sanderling breeds in the high Arctic and winters along the coast of North, Central, and South America. Breeding grounds can range from gravel patches and low-growing, wet tundra to well-drained clay slopes or tops of stony ridges. Non-breeding and migration grounds consist of hard-packed sand beaches, tidal mudflats, rocky coastlines, and inland bodies of water. Some winter as far north as southern Alaska, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland while others go the length of South America.

Feeding

Sanderlings are interesting to watch when they feed as they run down the beach after a receding wave to pick up stranded invertebrates. The Sanderling feeds mainly on adult and larval flies, small beetles, and burrowing amphipods which are obtained by pecking and probing. It will also snap mosquitoes and midges out of the air. When no animal prey is available, the Sanderling will eat plant material, including buds and shoots, roots, grass seeds, and algae.

Nesting

Females choose the nesting sight and form a shallow cup shaped hollow that is lined with lichen and leaves. Four eggs are usually laid. Once the clutch is raised one parent may desert the nest and incubation is done by the other parent who subsequently raises the brood. This desertion can be done by either the male or female. In some cases where a female lays two clutches the male will incubate one and the female the other. The chicks are born precocial and able to feed and walk within a few hours.

