

SANDERLING**Donald Shephard****Sanderling**

Imagine you weigh between two and three-and-a-half ounces and you must travel two to six thousand miles from your Arctic breeding grounds to your overwintering spot and back again each year. Further, to make life more difficult, you mainly travel along a narrow strip of coastline. What would you pack? To give you all the energy you needed, you'd pack fat. That's what Sanderlings do. They feast on high fat, high-energy Arctic insects before they head south. They stop along the way to feed on sand crabs, small mollusks and crustaceans, amphipods, isopods, and marine worms. You can see them now on beaches as Save Our Shorebirds volunteers do.

Sanderlings are most commonly seen in flocks running up a beach ahead of an incoming wave, then turning around and racing after the receding wave, to pick up stranded invertebrates or to probe in wet sand.

A shorebird, the Sanderling breeds around the Arctic, and migrates long distances, wintering from southern Canada south to South America, South Europe, Africa, and Australia. It is highly gregarious in winter, sometimes forming large flocks on coastal mudflats or sandy beaches.

The Sanderling, most widespread of all shorebirds, will turn up at nearly every beach in the world at some point in the year. During the breeding season they reside on the tundra, usually near a freshwater lake or pond. In the winter they can be found primarily on ocean beaches.

The Sanderling, a small sandpiper measuring 7 to 8 inches in length, shows light color with a conspicuous white wing stripe, straight black bill and black legs. During breeding season, it sports a rufous-colored head and neck with a wash of the same color extending onto its back. During the non-breeding season both male and female Sanderlings appear pale gray with a white chest and belly.

Juveniles look similarly to nonbreeding adults, but with a mottled black and white on their backs and with buffy patches on breast sides, streaked with fine black markings. In your spotting juveniles or adults in your scope you may notice it lacks a hind toe.

The mating system of Sanderlings appears to vary among areas, and possibly also among years. It is predominantly monogamous, but occasionally the female lays eggs for several different males in quick succession.

Nonbreeding individuals of Arctic-breeding shorebirds sometimes remain on the wintering grounds through the summer. Why make that long trip if you're not going to breed anyway? Many Sanderlings remain in South America without breeding, but only small numbers remain here along the North American coast. They choose nesting sites on dry stony patches near wet areas. The female lays three or four dull greenish eggs with small irregular brown spots around the large end. Downy young leave the nest a day after hatching. They soon pack on fat and head south.



Sanderling photo Ron LeValley
LeValleyphoto.com

POINT REYES BIRDING & NATURE FESTIVAL April 29 - May 2



Register today at www.pointreyesbirdingfestival.org.

The Point Reyes region is endowed with unique geography and pristine coastline, beaches, dunes, mudflats, bays, estuaries, freshwater wetlands, forests, grasslands, coastal bluffs and chaparral, which together support one of the highest levels of bird diversity in the country. As home base for some of the nation's top birders and naturalists, it offers the ideal setting for a spring festival for bird and nature enthusiasts at all levels of experience.

Last year, Festival participants took part in over 50 fabulous bird walks guided by such top birders as Jules Evens, Lisa Hug, David Wimpfheimer and Keith Hansen, as well as an outstanding pelagic trip to Cordell Bank. All enjoyed the tremendous camaraderie experienced by the 500 people who attended. Festival outings tallied a cumulative total of 200 species of birds, not to mention dozens of mammals, butterflies, marine mammals, and other wildlife, in Western Marin and Sonoma Counties.

This year the Festival is offering more than 70 outings and presentations, with events for beginners and kids. Alvaro Jaramillo will give the keynote address. There will be a screening of award-winning documentary, *Ghost Bird*, about the search for and "rediscovery" of the legendary Ivory-billed woodpecker. The Festival benefits the habitat conservation work of the Environmental Action Committee of West Marin (EAC). You can read about some of EAC's conservation work at www.eacmarin.org.