

## The International Shorebird Survey at Goose Rocks Beach

North America has the greatest diversity of shorebird species and largest numbers of shorebirds in the world. Shorebirds are a group of birds that include sandpipers, plovers, turnstones, knots, curlews, dowitchers, and phalaropes. Thirty-eight shorebird species spend some portion of their annual life



cycle in Maine. There are only a few locations along the southward migration path that provide adequate food resources in conjunction with nearby suitable roosting sites at the appropriate time to meet energy requirements. Therefore, shorebirds often concentrate in extremely large groups at distantly separated wetlands. Coastal areas in the Gulf of Maine are recognized as the most important southward staging areas for shorebirds in eastern North America.

In 1974 the [Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences](#) organized the International Shorebird Survey (ISS) to gather information on shorebirds and the wetlands they use. Almost 80,000 census counts have been completed at 1200 locations in 47 states of the U.S., with additional counts from Central and South America. The take-home message now is clear; many species of shorebirds depend on strategic migration staging sites.

Goose Rocks Beach has been chosen as one of the survey sites in Maine because of it's critical habitat for migratory birds. Volunteer surveyors walk the beach every two weeks from July 15 to October 15 noting each species of shorebird found and actually trying to count the number of birds. This can be a challenge because in peak migration time there can be hundreds of the more common species. Last week, for instance, there were 225 Semipalmated Plovers and 345 Semipalmated Sandpipers noted in a little more than an hour and last year over 2000 birds were counted in total.

Because large numbers of these birds concentrate in discrete areas of coastal habitat, they are highly susceptible to disturbance, development, and environmental contaminants. Although many species, like gulls, are able to get used to humans, shorebirds coming from the arctic are only on a staging area for 10-20 days and do not have time to acclimate to people and their activities.

Piping Plovers , as we know, are very susceptible to disturbance whereas sandpipers and sanderlings are a little more tolerant. They are all affected by human disturbance and need room to forage and rest before continuing their journey.



These birds are flying great distances, migrating from the high arctic breeding grounds of Canada sometimes to the furthest tip of South America. Most shorebirds are capable of flying 1,200 to 3,000 mile segments of their journey nonstop if they have adequate resources. The next time you are walking on the beach, give them a little extra room so they will have time to eat a little more and gather strength and they will have a much better chance of making it back to Maine next year.