

## Shorebirds of Goose Rocks Beach

Goose Rocks Beach is one of those special places in Maine that is visited by hundreds, if not thousands, of shorebirds as they make their annual journey from nesting grounds on the tundra of northern Canada to the shores of South America. While our local Piping Plovers nest right here at GRB, these other tiny bits of feather actually fly a remarkable distance of six to ten thousand miles each year. When we see them in the fall they are just on the first leg of that voyage as they rest and replenish energy on our beaches. They only eat twice a day depending on the low tide and they often fly at night. That means when we see them on the beach they are stressed, tired and hungry. We beach walkers can do the birds a real favor by walking around and not flushing the flocks as we take our walks and exercise our dogs. The birds will appreciate it when they are hundreds of miles at sea and need every last bit of energy to make it to shore.



There are several species of sandpiper, collectively called “peeps” by birders, that can be easily seen on any day from August into October and it can be great fun and a challenge to learn the differences between them. One of the most common is the Semipalmated Sandpiper, the name referring to its partially webbed feet. This little bird is only about six inches long and weighs 27 grams, less than an ounce. The juveniles, seen here, can have very bright grayish black plumage with whitish edges to the feathers of the back and wings giving a scalloped appearance.

The Semipalmated Plover, a cousin of the Piping Plover, is another very common and easily recognizable shorebird as they forage for small mollusks and crustaceans at low tide. Typically forming small flocks of eight to ten birds, they run in short bursts, stop to look for prey, then run on. Slightly larger at 7.25 inches and up to 60 grams, they have a black neckband and slightly longer legs than the Piping Plover. After breeding along rivers in the north from Alaska to Newfoundland, they winter in the Carolinas and along the Gulf Coast and sometimes as far south as South America.



Sanderlings are the familiar sandpipers we see running briskly along the edge of the waves on an incoming tide as they obsessively search for worms and insects. They have pale reddish-brown streaking on the breast and grayish brown coloration of the back and wing feathers. As the season progresses, they lose the reddish color and become more of a pale gray. Many times you will see them sound asleep with bill tucked under a wing, an indication of how exhausted they can be as they travel from the Arctic to the southern-most beaches of the world. Don't be alarmed if they hop away on one leg. The bird is not injured and this is normal behavior.