

Least Sandpiper

Calidris minutilla

Least Sandpipers are the smallest of the small sandpipers known as “peeps”—not much bigger than a sparrow. They have distinctive yellow-green legs and a high-pitched creep call. Look for them on edges of mudflats or marshes, where they walk with a hunched posture and probe for little crustaceans, insects, and other invertebrates. This common but declining shorebird migrates thousands of miles between its arctic breeding grounds and wintering grounds as far south as Chile and Brazil.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Least Sandpipers are tiny sandpipers with round bodies and relatively short, pointed wings. They have thin-tipped, slightly decurved bills and slim, medium-length legs.

Color Pattern

They have brown upperparts and white underparts. Their bills are black, and their legs are yellowish-green (this can be obscured by mud at times). Juveniles have crisp plumage that is rustier than that of adults. In flight, Least Sandpipers show whitish rumps bisected by a longitudinal black line.

Behavior

Least Sandpipers feed on invertebrates in the mud and sand along the edges of water. They often gather in loose flocks and frequently join other species, but they tend to be in smaller groups and feed toward drier edges than other small sandpipers.

Habitat

Least Sandpipers feed on mudflats and the edges of water bodies. They tend to favor muddier shores and estuaries than other sandpipers, and are not common on ocean beaches. They breed in wet tundra and interrupted boreal forest across much of northern North America.

Cool Facts

- Eastern populations probably fly nonstop over the ocean from the Gulf of St. Lawrence and New England to wintering grounds in northeastern South America, a distance of about 1,800 to 2,500 miles.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 5.1 - 5.9 inches
- Wingspan - 10.6 - 11.0 inches
- Weight - 0.7 - 1.1 ounces

