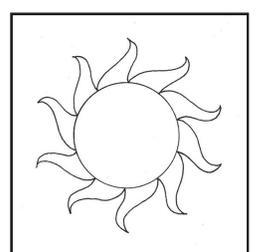
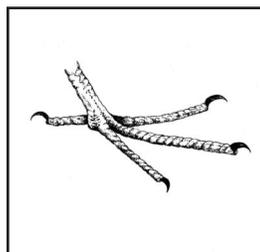
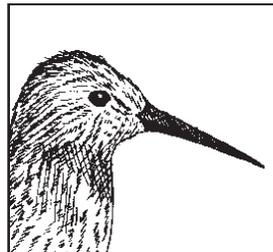
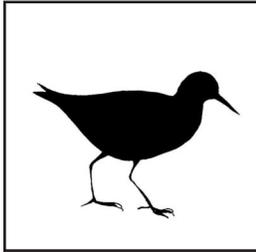
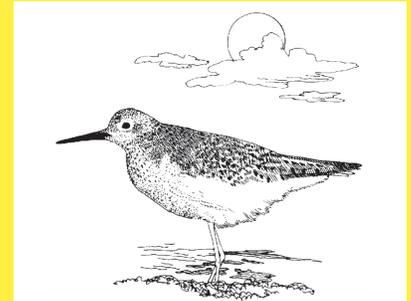


# Sandpipers

Order Charadriiformes  
Family Scolopacidae



**Sandpipers are small to medium-sized wading birds that we most often associate with shorebirds.** But they can be seen throughout Pennsylvania's wetlands, marshlands and along the shorelines of our lakes and rivers. **Sandpiper bills and necks are longer and more slender than plovers** (the killdeer is a common plover). They feed on insects, crustaceans, mollusks and worms, **probing the soft soil with their bill at the shallow edges** of marshes and ponds. Depending on the length of their bills and legs, the areas they search for food vary among the different species of sandpipers.

**Over 20 species of sandpipers and plover migrate through Pennsylvania** each spring and fall. And on a rare occasion, a strong storm may blow one in from one of our neighboring coastal states. But **only three species breed in the Commonwealth**; the killdeer, the spotted sandpiper and the upland sandpiper.



## Spotted Sandpiper

*Actitis macularia*



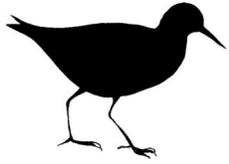
**The most common sandpiper in Pennsylvania is the spotted sandpiper.** About the size of a very plump robin, but with longer legs, spotted sandpipers **teeter and bob as they search the water's edge for food.** When taking flight they fly low over the water alternately flapping their wings and then gliding with stiff wings.

**Females initiate the nesting season,** arriving at their breeding grounds earlier than the male and **taking on the responsibility of establishing and protecting her territory.** But **the male actually incubates the eggs and cares for the young.** Eggs are laid in grass or moss-lined scrapes on the ground. The precocial chicks teeter just like the adults shortly after hatching.

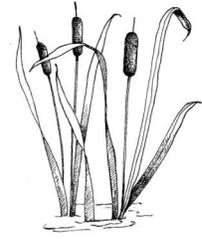
The **Upland Sandpiper** (*Bartramia longicauda*) is a **threatened species** in our state. They are larger than both the killdeer and spotted sandpiper – almost a foot tall - and walk in a jerking motion as they move through grasses looking for insects like grasshoppers and crickets. They'll nest among tall grasses in pastures, golf courses or disturbed fields.

If you are in the right place at the right time you may get to see some of the other beautiful sandpipers that migrate through out state, including the greater and lesser yellowlegs, dunlin and **solitary sandpiper** (*Tringa solitaria*) - below center. The elegant **American avocet** (*Recurvirostra americana*) is a striking black & white wader with a russet-colored head and neck (below left) seen only on occasion. Even rarer is the stately **black-necked stilt** (*Himantopus mexicanus*), which only makes its way north to Pennsylvania's southern-most wetlands once in a great while (below right). But many uncommon sandpipers get blown of course during storms, so it is worth scouring our wetlands for some of these beautiful visitors.





## A Simple Review of Sandpipers



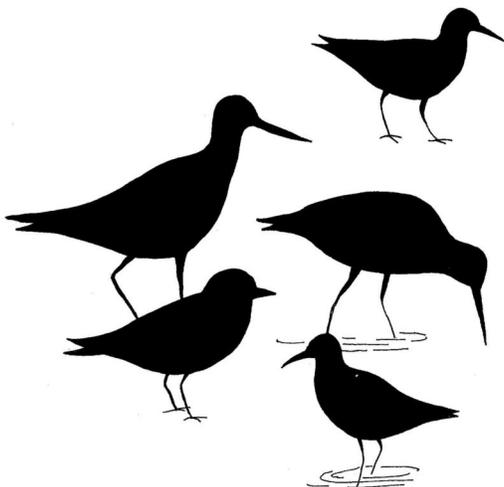
The **order of birds called charadriiformes includes some familiar shorebirds** like sandpipers and plovers. Woodcocks and snipes also belong to this order. Even though some people assume those gamebirds are more closely related to birds like pheasants and turkeys.

Pennsylvania is not known for its shorelines, at least not the shorelines you associate with the ocean. But we have lots of large rivers in the state and our northwest corner borders Lake Erie. **Any muddy or sandy edge of a body of water can be considered a shoreline and that's where you find most shorebirds.**

Our **most common shorebird is the spotted sandpiper.** They are easy to identify. When they walk along the water's edge **they teeter up and down** – sort of like a slow bobbing motion of a sewing machine. Even the chicks teeter soon after they hatch. The **precocial chicks** follow their mother as she feeds, quickly learning how to search for food in the muddy soil and which tiny insects and crustaceans to eat. If they are frightened, the bobbing gets faster. But if the birds stop, they stay motionless. No one seems to know why the spotted sandpiper behaves this way.

One of our sandpipers, the **upland sandpiper, is a threatened species.** They are much taller than a spotted sandpiper, which is about robin-sized. The upland sandpiper is longer legged and stands about a foot tall. They also **prefer grassy areas and will nest in fields and meadows.**

**Many other sandpipers pass through the state during spring and fall migration.** Any time you are near a lake or river edge it is worth scanning the shoreline for a glimpse of some of these attractive birds.



Different types of sandpipers practice feeding behavior known as “**resource partitioning.**” This means they can live and feed together without a lot of competition.

Some shorebirds have long legs and some have short legs; some have long bills and some have short bills. When they feed together, the long-legged, long-billed birds can wade further into the water and find small creatures deeper in the soil because of their physical features.

The short-legged, short-billed birds feed beside them finding small creatures in the shallower water and closer to the soil's surface. Many other kinds of birds practice resource partitioning too.