



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

www.mass.gov/nhesp

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*

State Status: **None**
Federal Status: **None**

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The Purple Sandpiper is a medium-sized and stocky sandpiper. In the winter, their non-breeding plumage is characterized by slate colored upperparts and streaking below. Their black, medium-sized bill is slightly downturned with an orange base. Their breeding appearance is brighter overall from a light brown plumage to brighter orange legs. Female are slightly larger than males and this is most noticeable in bill length.

The diet of this species changes seasonally from marine mollusks and other invertebrates in winter to arthropods (marine and terrestrial) and seeds in summer.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: In the America's, Purple Sandpipers primarily breed on islands in the high Canadian Arctic south to the eastern shore of the Hudson Bay. During the non-breeding period, it has the most northerly distribution of all shorebirds (Greenland, Canada, United States), occurring in small groups along exposed, rocky seacoasts of the north Atlantic. In Massachusetts, this species is predictably found during the winter months on rocky shorelines and is most common along the coast of Cape Ann.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: They nest on mossy tundra, heath, moorlands, rocky ridges, coarse gravel-sand beaches along rivers, and along barren coastal beaches. In the high Arctic, this species typically breeds from sea level to approximately 300 meters in elevation. In the low Arctic and subarctic, they are primarily an inland nester on uplands and near the fringe of frozen ground. In Canada, they have been documented breeding far inland and on low tundra near shore and on coarse gravel-sand beaches along rivers. Their feeding habitat during the breeding season includes patches of wet tundra and the intertidal zone.

During the winter, they are found on rocky coastlines, jetties, and rocky islets where they forage on gastropods (e.g. mussels), insects, and aquatic vegetation.



© Jay and Kevin McGowan

THREATS: Pesticides, oil, and other contaminants, and degradation of habitat may affect local populations. Egg collecting for human consumption also may impact some populations. Loss of habitat from global climate change may pose the biggest threat to this species.

REFERENCES:

Payne, L.X., and E.P. Pierce. 2002. Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/706doi:10.2173/bna.706>

Updated 2015

A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

1 Rabbit Hill Rd., Westborough, MA; tel: 508-389-6300; fax: 508-389-7890; www.mass.gov/dfw

Please allow the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program to continue to conserve the biodiversity of Massachusetts with a contribution for 'endangered wildlife conservation' on your state income tax form, as these donations comprise a significant portion of our operating budget.

www.mass.gov/nhesp