



**Natural Heritage
& Endangered Species
Program**

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

**Semi-palmated Sandpiper
*Calidris pusilla***

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

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The Semi-palmated Sandpiper is a small shorebird that feeds primarily on small aquatic and marine invertebrates. This species is similar in appearance to other species of small sandpipers and can be hard to identify. No geographic variation in plumage has been described for this bird, although bill length declines from the eastern to western portions of the breeding range.

Males arrive on the breeding grounds about a week before females and set up territories almost immediately. Once together, pairs will engage in nest-scraping for several days then create a nest in the ground, lined with grass, sedge, moss and other vegetation. Four eggs are the average size clutch, and a pair can and will produce a second brood if the first is predated.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: This species breeds widely in Arctic and subarctic Canada, from the Alaskan coast east to northern Quebec. In the winter they migrate to the northern and central coasts of South America

Flocks will gather in key migration staging areas and individuals from eastern populations will undertake a nonstop transoceanic flight from New England and southern Canada to South America, powered by extensive fat reserves. In spring, eastern breeders follow an Atlantic route from northeastern South America to staging areas along the northeast coast of North America, the interior U.S., and northern Canada, gathering the energy resources to complete migration to their breeding grounds. These annual spring and fall migrations create an elliptical migration route across the Western Hemisphere.

Although declining, Semi-palmated Sandpipers are still one of the most common migrant shorebirds that move



through Massachusetts and can be found in large flocks along sandy beaches and mudflats.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: Semi-palmated Sandpipers breed in low and sub-arctic tundra near water. They will nest in river deltas in dry shrubby areas with mixed sedges and grasses, sandy areas along rivers, or heath tundra.

During their migrations this species will congregate in staging areas of shallow water, muddy or sandy intertidal zones, along the edges of lakes, or at the

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

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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junction of short-grass marsh and tidal flats. They will often roost in large numbers on exposed beaches during high tide when marshlands are flooded.

THREATS: It is thought that legal and illegal hunting in the Caribbean and northern South America is a primary cause of this species' declining population. They are also vulnerable to reduction in their breeding range as a result of climate change. Loss and degradation of coastal and inland wetlands as well as exposure to toxins pose a threat to this species.

REFERENCES:

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