THE CHALLENGES

• Not commonly encountered in the Midwest
  Habitat specialists, not likely to be seen in yards, parks or forests.

• Few diagnostic field marks
  A combination of observations are often required for identification.

• Plumage is unreliable
  Adult breeding, nonbreeding, juvenile and molt can be present simultaneously.

• Species very similar in appearance
  Sorting out several nearly identical birds species can be daunting.
• Spend time with shorebirds

• Narrow down the list of suspects into comparison groups:
  “Peeps”, Tringa genus (Yellowlegs, etc.), oddballs.

• Focus on shape rather than plumage
  Proportions, bill shape, leg length are all very useful.

• Look for several ID clues
  Few species have singular diagnostic features.

• Pay attention to temperature
  Cold shorebirds are puffy shorebirds
ASSESSING A SHOREBIRD

Location Info: Lake St. Clair Metropark | September 14 | Shallow parking lot puddle

Small “peep” with proportionately large head
Warm tones overall
Capped look to head
Drooping bill
Short legs
Greenish/yellow legs

CONCLUSION: Least Sandpiper
WHERE TO FIND SHOREBIRDS

- Mudflats
- Beaches
- Flooded fields
- Sod farms
- Ponds
- Breakwalls
THE GROUPS

• **Genus Calidris aka “Peeps”**
  Includes: Least, Semipalmated, Sanderling, Pectoral, Dunlin

• **Genus Tringa**
  Both Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Willet

• **Plovers**

• **Dowitchers**

• **Godwits**

• **Phalaropes**
SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER
*Calidris pusilla*

- Straight, thick bill
- Short, black/gray legs
- Partial webbing between toes (difficult to see)
- Small size (slightly larger than Least, head appears smaller proportionately)
- Can be aggressive with other birds while foraging
LEAST SANDPIPER
Calidris minutilla

Bill has slight droop
(thinner tip than Semipalmated)

Small size
(slightly smaller than Semipalmated, head appears larger proportionately)

Short, green/yellow legs
(color can be obstructed by mud)

Frequently displays a cap

Often has rich, warm tones
TYPICAL PEEP COMPARISON
WESTERN SANDPIPER
*Calidris mauri*

- Bright chestnut cap and back in breeding or partial molt
- Longer bill than Semipalmated, Least
- Legs longer than Semipalmated
- Bill often has slight droop
- Slightly larger than Semipalmated

Rare in Great Lakes
**SANDERLING**

*Calidris alba*

- Elongated, “figure-8” nostril
- Longer, straight bill
- Significantly larger than Least and Semipalmated
- First impression is “white” sandpiper
- Back toe is absent
- Frenetic foraging style, including wave-chasing
SANDERLING
Calidris alba

- Mixed rusty and warm neutral tones
- Extensive speckling on head and neck
- Frequently found in groups
- Seems to prefer beaches on large bodies of water rather than mud flats

Breeding Plumage
BILL SHAPE REVIEW

**Sanderling**
Long, straight bill; elongated nostril

**Western**
Bill longest proportionately, slight droop at the tip

**Semipalmated**
Short, straight bill

**Least**
Thin, fine-tipped bill, with droop at the tip
BODY SHAPE REVIEW
PECTORAL SANDPIPER
*Calidris melanotos*

- Warm tones on back
- Yellowish legs
- Streaking with light brown background
PECTORAL SANDPIPER
*Calidris melanotos*

Larger than peeps, appears similar to a large Least Sandpiper

- Orange in the base of the bill
- Slight droop in bill tip
- Sharp contrast from breast streaking to white belly

*Birds in this photo are puffed up from being cold*
**DUNLIN**
*Calidris alpina*

Breeding Plumage

- Noticeably long, drooping bill
- Chestnut brown back
- Black belly
- Stocky body, large head portion

Often found in large groups

Arrives early in spring, late in fall
DUNLIN
Calidris alpina
Nonbreeding Plumage
BAIRD’S SANDPIPER
*Calidris bairdii*

- Long wings that extend beyond the tail
- Crisp, scalloped feather pattern, especially on young birds
- Steep forehead
- Long, straight, thin bill
- Warm, buffy color on the breast
- Warmer tones overall than White-rumped
WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER
*Calidris fuscicollis*

- Cooler tones overall than Baird’s in nonbreeding
- White patch on rump (frequently only visible in flight)
- Lighter, reddish base of the bill
- Bulky shape to body
- Wings extend beyond the tail (not as dramatically as Baird’s)
- Longish, straight bill.
**RED KNOT**

*Calidris canutus*

- Large, bulky Calidris
- Faint pale eyebrow
- Bill thick at base
- Horizontal posture
- White edging to gray feathers
- Mid-length greenish yellow legs
**RED KNOT**  
*Calidris canutus*  

**Breeding Plumage**

- Reddish throat and breast
- Long, pointed wings
RED KNOT
*Calidris canutus*

Breeding Plumage
BODY SHAPE REVIEW
THE TRINGA GENUS
LESSEYELLOWLEGSTringa flavipes

- Bill length approximately the same as head length
- Gives flight calls in two note groups
- Slightly thinner base to the legs as compared to Greater

Breeding Plumage
GREATER YELLOWLEGS
*Tringa melanoleuca*

- Bill length longer than head width
- Bill can appear slightly upturned
- Gives flight calls in three or four note groups
- Slightly thicker base to the legs as compared to Lesser
YELLOWLEGS COMPARISON
SOLITARY SANDPIPER

*Tringa solitaria*

- Nearly solid brown back with white spots
- Distinct eyering
- Long, thin bill with downward curve
- More compact than Yellowlegs
- Greenish legs
SPOTTED SANDPIPER
*Actitis macularius*

- Included as an honorary Tringa
- White patch or “comma” on the shoulder
- White eyering
- Bobs tail constantly
SPOTTED SANDPIPER
*Actitis macularius*

- Orange bill of average length
- Obvious eyeline and white supercilium
- Spotted back, breast and belly
- Yellow or orange legs

Breeding Plumage
**WILLET**

*Tringa semipalmata*

- Contrasting black and white wings in flight
- Heavy, straight bill
- Drab plumage overall
- Overall more robust than either Yellowlegs
- Dull leg color
- Slightly webbed toes
WILLET COMPARISON
BILL SHAPE REVIEW

Willet
Thick, straight bill

Greater Yellowlegs
Bill longer than head width, slight upturn

Lesser Yellowlegs
Bill equal to head width, relatively thin

Solitary Sandpiper
Medium length bill, thin, slight downward curve
SMALL PLOVERS
KILLDEER
Charadrius vociferus

- Longer bill than Semipalmated or Piping
- Two bands on neck and breast
- Much larger than Semipalmated or Piping
- Wide distribution
- Red eye ring
- Very vocal
SEMIPALMATED PLOVER

Charadrius semipalmatus

Dark cheek patch

Brown slightly darker than Piping Plover

Thin yellow eye-ring

Yellow legs
SEMIPALMATED PLOVER
Charadrius semipalmatus

Breeding Plumage

Orange bill base
Complete, single breast-band
Smaller than killdeer
PIPING PLOVER
Charadrius melodus

Breeding Plumage

- Small black forehead patch
- Very steep, bulging forehead shape
- Broken breast-band
- Orangish legs
- Lighter colors in facial pattern
- Lighter brown overall
PIPING PLOVER
Charadrius melodus
Nonbreeding Plumage
HEAD SHAPE REVIEW

**Killdeer**
Mid length bill, bold red eyering

**Semipalmated Plover**
Short bill with orange base, darker facial pattern

**Piping Plover**
Short bill, steep forehead, lighter facial pattern
THANK YOU!