



"The Shorebirds Are Coming, The Shorebirds are Coming!"

BY DAVE WILLIAMS

Starting in mid-July, more than 30 species of Shorebirds will pass through Massachusetts on their southern migration to their wintering grounds. Shorebirds will stop along our open beaches, mudflats, exposed gravel bars, and yes, even fields. These areas along our coast are vital to these long-distance migrants as they use them to rest and feed heavily to fuel their long migration. The Parker River National Wildlife Refuge with its beaches, mudflats, and marshes is a key stop-over for these migrating birds.

As the Spring migration of Shorebirds is rushed as they are in a hurry to get to their breeding territories, the Fall migration of Shorebirds is not rushed, it takes place over several months, peaking in August and continuing right into late October. Generally speaking, failed breeding Shorebirds leave their breeding grounds a week or so before successful breeders. Adult females depart their breeding grounds before the adult males, and the adult males depart a week or so before the juveniles.

Weather plays a big role in Shorebird migration. Because so many Shorebirds migrate long distances non-stop, they are looking for favorable weather conditions. Heavy movements of Shorebirds can occur with, or just in advance of, frontal systems. Some species, like Stilt Sandpiper, migrate much further east in the fall than they do in the spring. They're taking advantage of a West to East tailwind that makes the migration South much easier. For this reason, there are a number of species that we see in the fall but are extremely rare in the spring such as American Golden Plover and Long-billed Dowitcher.



Shorebirds in a particular area will move from place to place in the intertidal zone depending on the tide. When the open beaches, mudflats, and sandbars are exposed during low tide, the birds are actively feeding. During high tide, they will rest. Depending on where you are, a rising tide can push the Shorebirds right up close to your viewing spot. Some good places to view Shorebirds on the Refuge include the salt pannes with roadside viewing, Bill Forward Pool and North Pool, both accessible from the dike at the Hellcat Trail parking area, Stage Island Pool from parking lot 6, and the beachfront by Emerson Rocks accessible from either parking lot 6 or 7.

So now is the time to review your field guide and get ready to find some of these long-distant migrants. This is your chance to find a rarity! Or, perhaps you will come across a banded Shorebird. Shorebirds are banded/tagged as part of migration studies. Shorebirds can be banded in numerous ways including: field readable leg bands, colored bands, colored flags, PIT tags, and even satellite transmitters. Report a banded Shorebird to: <http://bandedbirds.org/>



NO MATTER WHAT, TRY
AND GET OUT AND VIEW
THESE FASCINATING BIRDS!