Audubon Florida: Beach Bird Identification - Shorebirds

Included are the birds most commonly seen on our beaches. Identification tips are by comparison to one another. Refer to your field guide for more species and id cues.

**Plovers:** round appearance, bill shorter than head width, stand still, spot their prey, then dart to catch it

- **Black-bellied Plover (BBPL):** large, about willet size, beady eyes
- **Piping Plover (PIPL):** small, light, yellow legs; rare
- **Semipalmated Plover (SEPL):** small, dark brown, often in flocks in winter
- **Wilson’s Plover (WIPL):** slightly larger than PIPL and SPPL, medium brown, heavy bill
- **Snowy Plover (SNPL):** small, light, black legs, very rare on FL East Coast

**Sandpipers and oystercatchers:** sewing machine motion feeding pattern; bill longer than head width

- **Sanderling (SAND):** small, runs like a wind-up toy, light grey in winter
- **Willet (WILL):** large, greyish in winter, black bars on wings in flight
- **Dunlin (DUNL):** slightly larger than SAND, bill’s tip droops down, brownish
- **Short-billed Dowitcher (SBDO):** mid-size, long bill, white eyebrow, greenish-yellow legs, brownish
- **Marbled Godwit (MAGO):** larger than Willet, bi-colored bill, slightly upturned, cinnamon color
- **Ruddy Turnstone (RUTU):** slightly larger than SAND, “colorful” scalloped brown back, black bib
- **Red Knot (REKN):** mid-size, bill mid-length, shape similar to SAND but larger
- **American Oystercatcher (AMOY):** large, black and white, striking red bill

Refer to bird field guide to ID species smaller than Sanderling like Semipalmated, Western, and Least Sandpiper, species larger than Willet like Whimbrel and Long-billed Curlew, and similar size as Willet like Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, as well as rarer sandpipers

*B Breeds in Florida

( ) Common species abbreviations provided in parentheses