

Some tips on the identification of 33 common waders found in India



If you have ever been to a beach, mudflat or backwater, you are bound to have noticed a diversity of birds in the

Key to their survival is not merely the size, but also the shape of their beaks. Virtually no two species have identical beaks.

The closer you look, the more obvious the differences become. And these differences determine the very diet of shore birds of inter-tidal zones that prey on crabs, oysters, mussels, worms, shrimps, snails, plankton and what not.

When Charles Darwin visited the Galapagos Islands, he observed that finches had different beak shapes and sizes and

Black and white waders

Pied Avocet and Black-winged stilt



Black and white waders

Pied Avocet and Black-winged stilt



Pied Avocet

- Black and White
- Black crown and hind neck
- Long bluish legs



Black-winged Stilt

- Thin straight bill
- Extremely long red legs
- Black above
- White below

Black and white waders

Eurasian Oystercatcher



- Red eye
- Red bill
- Red legs
- Upperside white
- White belly



Black and white waders

Crab Plover

Large black bill



Black mantle



Black flight feathers

Common and Wood Sandpiper

Upperside marbled

Supercilium
extend beyond
eye



Legs
yellower

Wood Sandpiper

Tail projecting
beyond closed
wings



Common Sandpiper

White upper
breast sides

Common and Wood Sandpiper

Finer bars on tail



Wood Sandpiper

Legs
yellower

Broad white wing
stripe



Common Sandpiper

Habit: Constantly bobs hind quarters

Common and Green Sandpiper

Dark and plain
upperside

Eye brow absent beyond eye

Paler above



Green Sandpiper

Dark streaks
on breast



Common Sandpiper

Habit: Constantly bobs hind parts

Common and Green Sandpiper

Wings dark above in flight



Green Sandpiper

Broad white wing stripe in flight



Common Sandpiper

Common Greenshank and Marsh Sandpiper



Common Greenshank and Marsh Sandpiper



Slightly upturned beak

Green Legs

Streaked on breast

Common Greenshank

Long very fine
straight bill



Small head

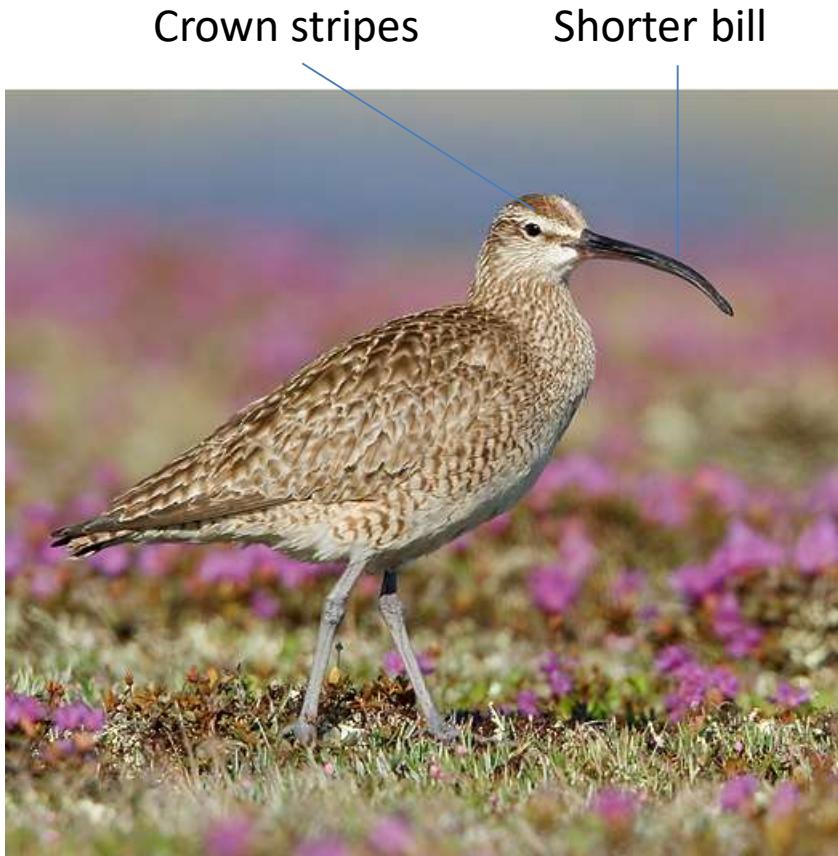
Greenish legs

Marsh Sandpiper

Eurasian Whimbrel and Eurasian Curlew



Eurasian Whimbrel and Eurasian Curlew



Eurasian Whimbrel



Eurasian Curlew

Lesser Sand Plover and Little Stint



Lesser Sand Plover and Little Stint

Browner above

Bill not longer than
distance from base
of bill to rear of eye



Lesser Sand Plover

Hunched look

Beak curved
at tip



Little Stint

Lesser and Greater Sand Plover

Bill not longer than distance from base of bill to rear of eye



Lesser Sand Plover

Darker legs

Bill longer than distance from base of bill to rear of eye



Greater Sand Plover

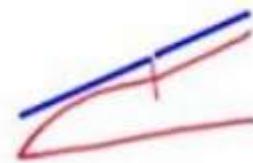
Paler legs
(greenish/yellowish)

Larger and paler than lesser

Lesser and Greater Sand Plover



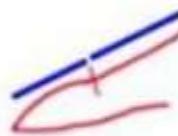
Greater



1. More pointed
2. Deeper at base
3. Culmen bulge around 1/2 bill length

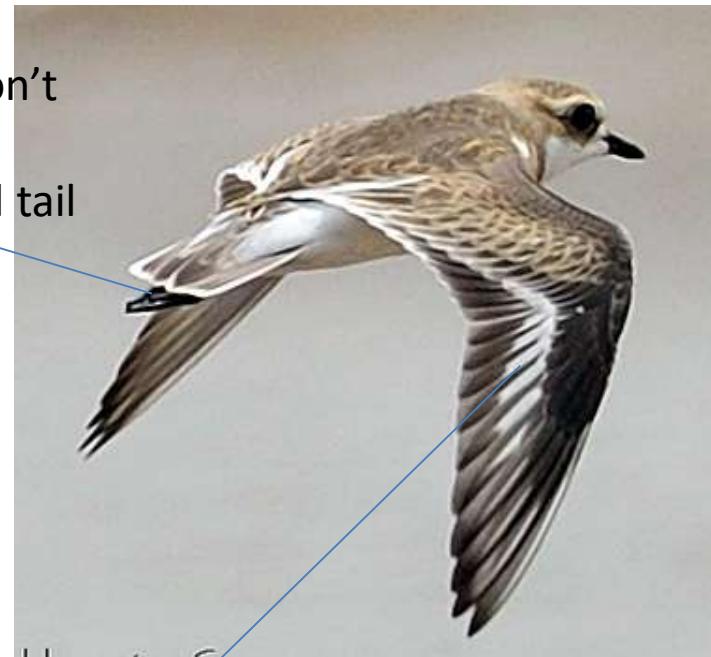


Lesser



1. Blunt-tipped
2. Shallower at base
3. Can be very long
4. Culmen bulge on final 1/3

Lesser Sand Plover



Feet don't
extend
beyond tail

White wing bar
narrower on primaries

Greater Sand Plover

Dark subterminal
band on tail



Feet extend
beyond tail

White wing bar
broader on primaries

Lesser and Greater Sand Plover

Breeding plumage

Full black mask and forehead



Lesser Sand Plover

White forehead spot



Greater Sand Plover

Birds in breeding plumage seen during March-June in India

Lesser Sand Plover and Kentish Plover

White collar
absent

Lesser Sand Plover



Legs longer than Kentish

White hind collar

Kentish Plover

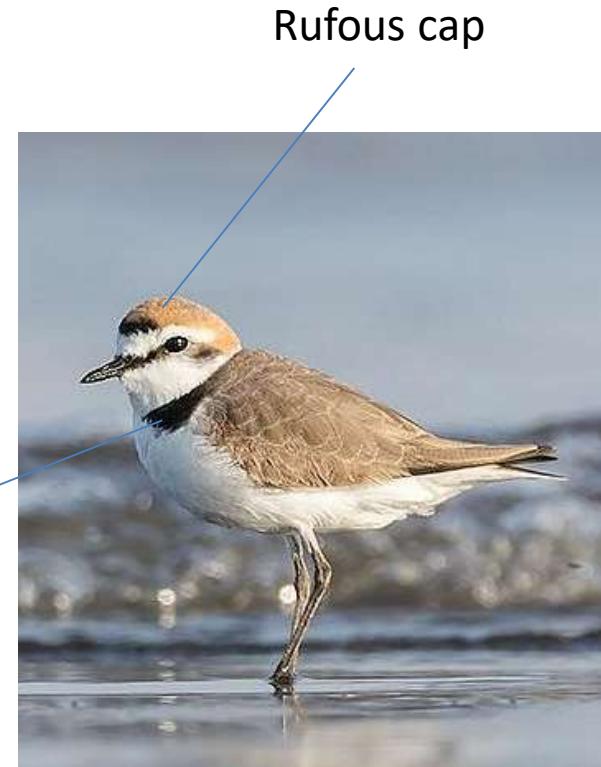


Lesser Sand Plover and Kentish Plover

Lesser Sand Plover



Kentish Plover



Black mask

Rufous
breast

Dark sides
to breast

Rufous cap

Lesser Sand Plover and Kentish Plover

Lesser Sand Plover

White collar absent



Kentish Plover

White hind collar



Narrow white
wing stripe

Little and Common Ringed Plovers

Breeding

Thick two
coloured
bill

Yellow eye
ring absent



Bright
yellow
orange
legs

Image: Andreas Trepte

Common Ringed Plover

Rare

Yellow eye
ring



Small dark
bill

Dull legs

Little Ringed Plover

Common

Little and Common Ringed Plovers

Non-breeding

Whitish supercilium
& forehead



Dull yellow
orange legs

Common Ringed Plover

Buffy fringed
upperparts



Little Ringed Plover

Buff forehead
and supercilium



Little and Common Ringed Plovers

Prominent wing
bar in flight



Image: Ashwin Trivedi

Common Ringed Plover

Only a narrow
wing bar in flight



Image: Rajesh Kalra

Little Ringed Plover

Large Plovers – Non-breeding

Grey Plover



- Larger
- Greyer upperparts
- Stouter bill
- Shorter legs

Pacific Golden Plover



- Golden spangling on upperside
- Golden-tinged supercilium

Large Plovers – Flight

Grey Plover



Black axillaries

Pacific Golden Plover



Grey underwing



Large Plovers – breeding plumage

Grey Plover



White spangling
to upperparts

Pacific Golden Plover



Black on face,
foreneck, breast
and belly,
bordered by white

Habit: Less gregarious

Habit: Always gregarious

Ruddy Turnstone

Non-breeding plumage

- Stocky built
- Short black bill



Blackish breast

White belly

Orange red legs

Ruddy Turnstone



Terek Sandpiper

Longish
upturned
bill



Short yellowish
legs

Terek Sandpiper

In flight

Grey rump and tail



White trailing
edge to
secondaries

Great Knot

Non-breeding plumage

Streaked crown and breast



Spots on flanks

Wing tips extend beyond tail



Longish tapered bill

Great Knot

In flight

White rump

Grey tail



Spots on flanks



Ruff and Reeve



- **Long neck**
- **Small head**
- **Downcurved bill**
- **Yellowish or orange legs**
- **Male bigger than female**

Ruff and Reeve

Male



Female

Greater Painted Snipe

Golden spotted
upperside



Male

Chestnut head



Female

Dark back

- Snipe like appearance
- Bill drooped at tip
- White patch behind eye
- Female more colourful than male

Small Sandpipers

Sanderling



Black legs

Short black bill

Dark shoulder

Small Sandpipers

Sanderling

In flight



Bold white
wing bar

Small Sandpipers

Dunlin

Non-breeding plumage

Plain grey
upperside



Black
legs

Drooped
bill tip

Lightly streaked
greyish breast

Small Sandpipers

Dunlin

Breeding plumage

Black belly
patch



Small Sandpipers

Dunlin

Flight



White wing
bar



White sides
of rump

Small Sandpipers

Curlew Sandpiper

Distinct
supercilium

Longer, more
downcurved bill

White
underparts

Non-breeding plumage



Small Sandpipers

Curlew Sandpiper

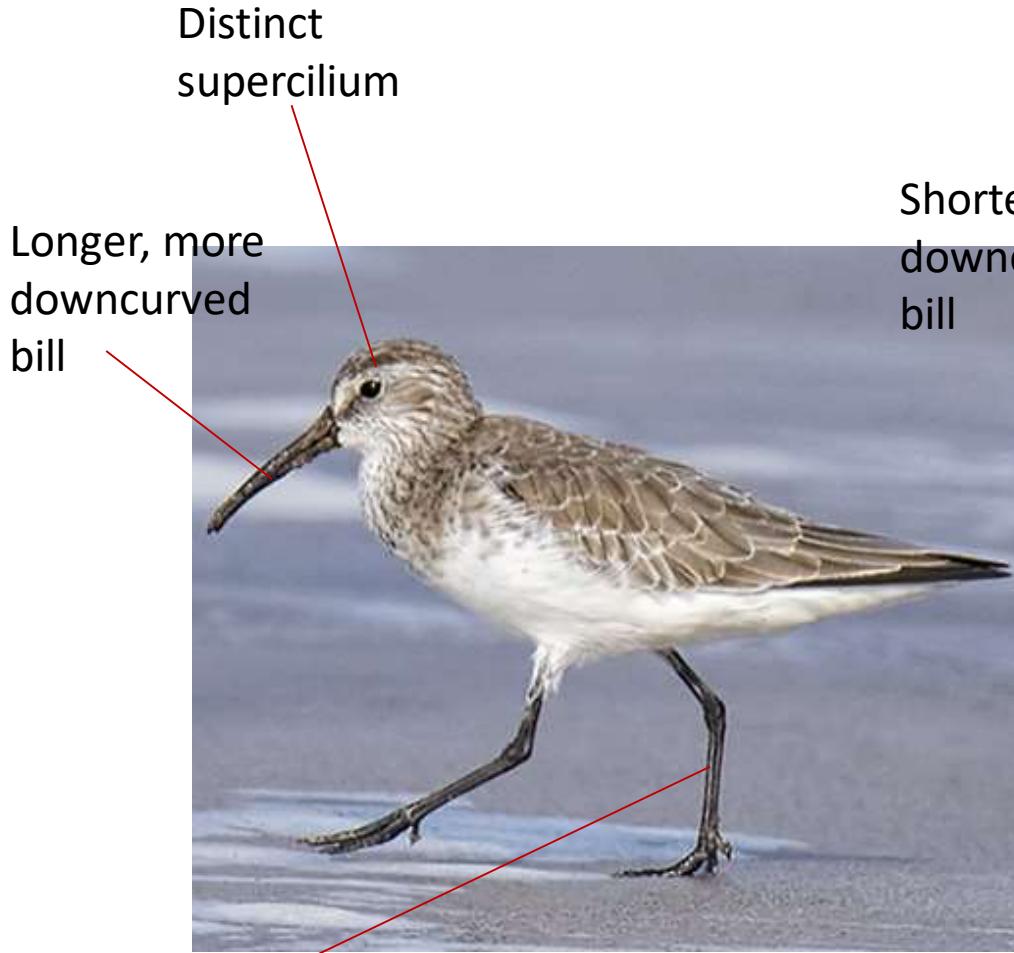
Breeding plumage

Scaly chestnut
and
black below

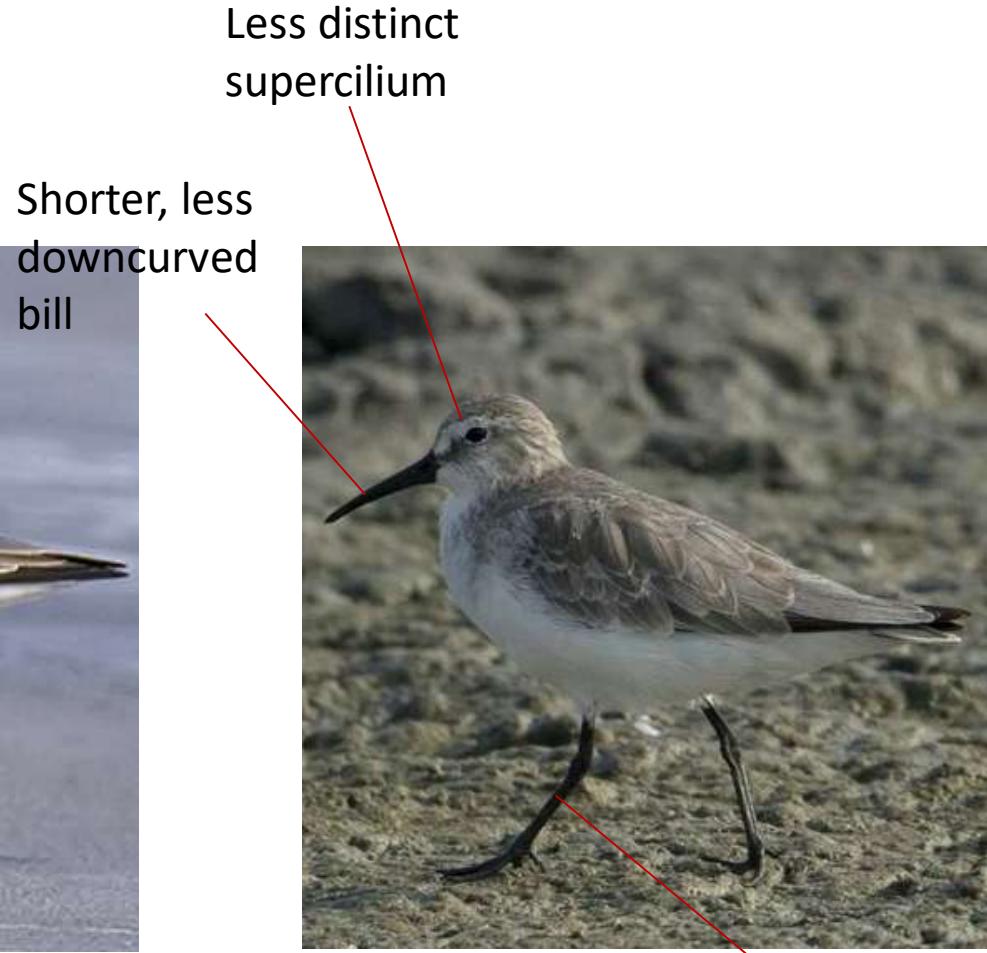


Small Sandpipers

Comparison of Curlew Sandpiper and Dunlin



Curlew Sandpiper



Dunlin

Shorter legs

Small Sandpipers

Broad-billed Sandpiper

Breeding plumage

Clear split supercilium

Dark eye stripe

Downcurved bill



Legs set well back

Small Sandpipers

Broad-billed Sandpiper

Breeding plumage



Juvenile

Small Sandpipers

Temminck's Stint and Little Stint

Plain upperside

Little brow



Temminck's Stint

Yellowish legs

Streaked upperside

Brow with rufous crown



Little Stint

Dark legs

Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits

(Non-breeding)

White eye brow
upto eye



Plain grey upperside

Upturned
bill



Scaly above

Shorter legs

Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits

(Non-breeding - flight)

White
Underwing



Black tail

Barred tail

White/grey rump



Black-tailed Godwit

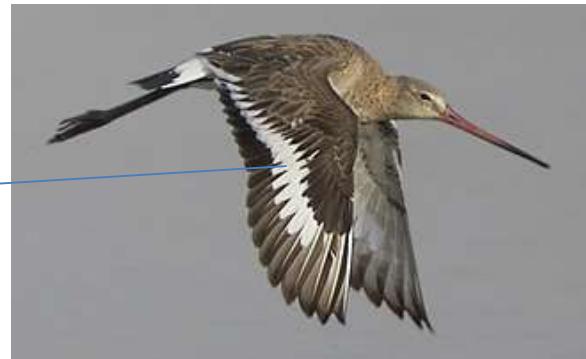
Bar-tailed Godwit

Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits

White rump



Black tail



White wing bar

Barred tail



Black-tailed Godwit

Bar-tailed Godwit

Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits

(Breeding)

Black-tailed Godwit



- Chestnut head and neck
- Underparts white and barred

Bar-tailed Godwit

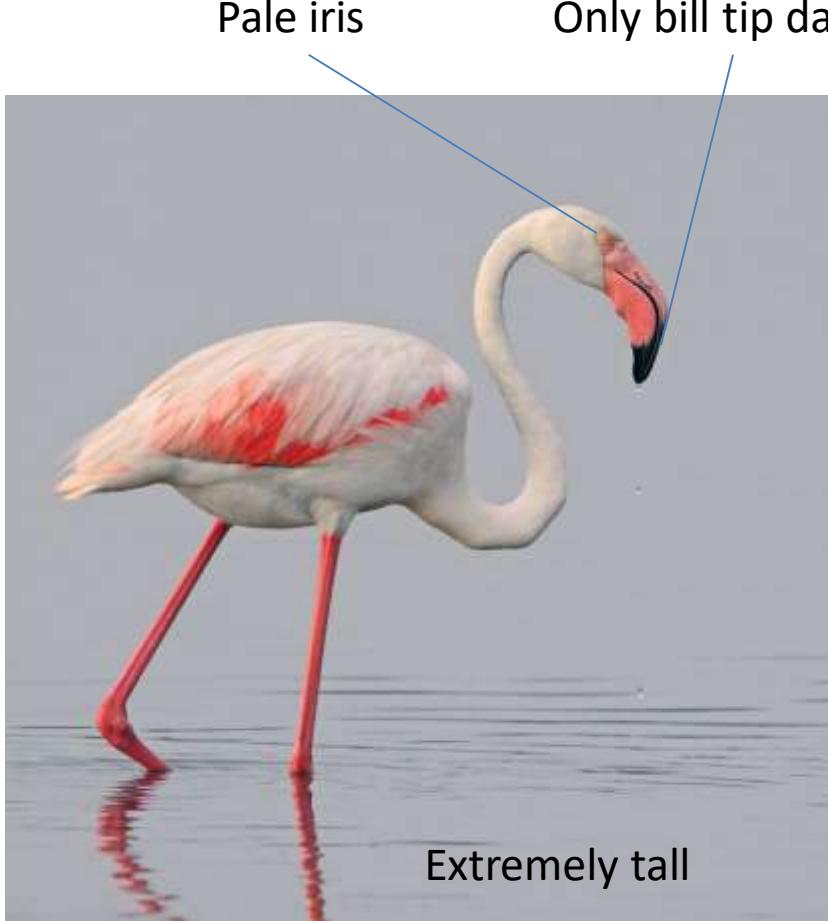


- Chestnut head and underparts
- Uppercase scaled

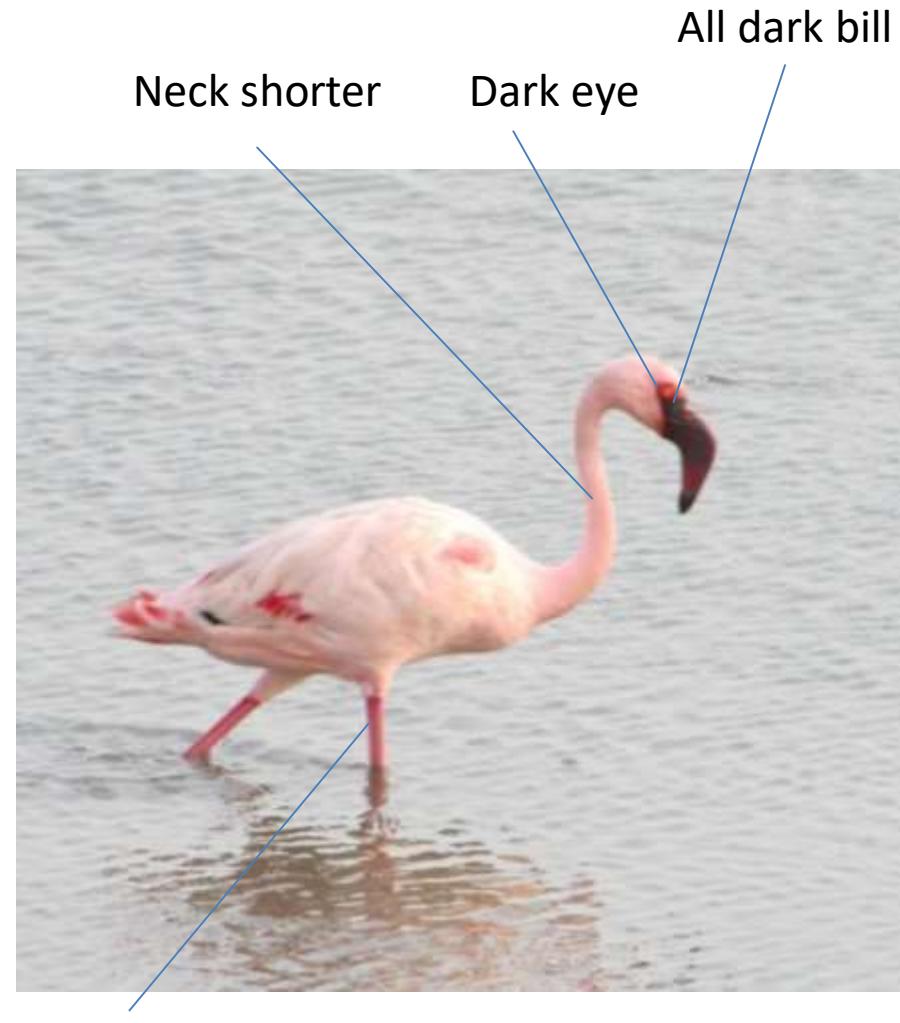
Greater and Lesser Flamingo



Greater and Lesser Flamingo



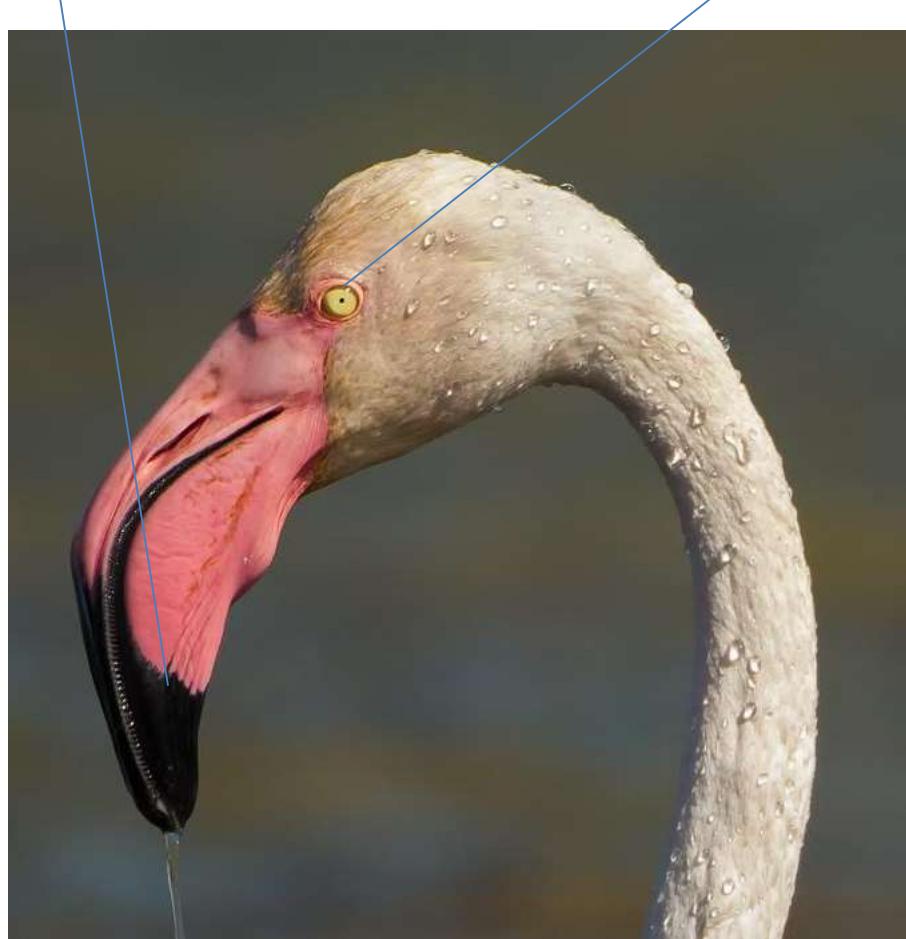
Greater Flamingo



Lesser Flamingo

Greater Flamingo

Only bill tip dark



Pale iris

Lesser Flamingo

All dark bill



Dark eye

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