

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

Tail projecting
beyond closed
wings



Wood Sandpiper

Legs
yellower



Common Sandpiper

White upper
breast sides

Common and Wood Sandpiper

Finer bars on tail



Wood Sandpiper

Legs
yellow

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

Crown stripes

Shorter bill



Eurasian Whimbrel

Uniformly streaked

Longer bill



Eurasian Curlew

White belly

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

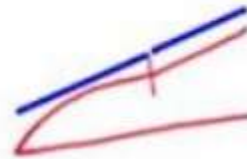
Paler legs
(greenish/yellowish)

Larger and paler than lesser

Lesser and Greater Sand Plover



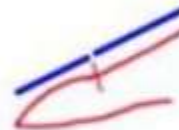
Greater



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



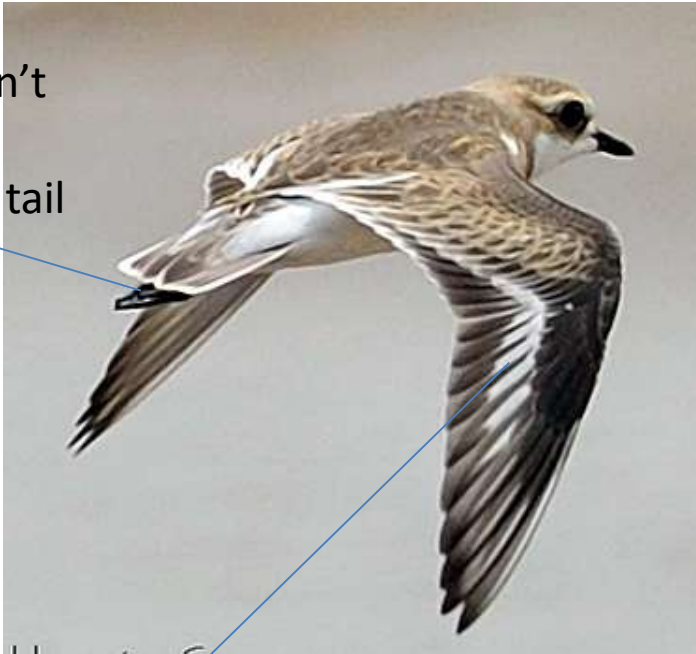
Lesser



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

White forehead spot



Lesser Sand Plover

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



Black mask

Rufous
breast

Dark sides
to breast

Kentish Plover



Rufous cap

Dark sides
to breast

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

Yellow eye
ring absent



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



Common Ringed Plover

Dull yellow
orange legs

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



Habit: Less gregarious

Pacific Golden Plover

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



Habit: Always gregarious

Ruddy Turnstone

Non-breeding plumage

- **Stocky built**
- **Short black bill**



Blackish breast

White belly

Orange red legs

Ruddy Turnstone

Breeding plumage

Upperside chestnut

Black and white
pattern on chest
and head



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



Short black
bill

Dark shoulder

Black legs

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

Non-breeding plumage

Distinct
supercilium

Longer, more
downcurved bill

White
underparts



Small Sandpipers

Curlew Sandpiper

Breeding plumage

Scaly chestnut
and
black below

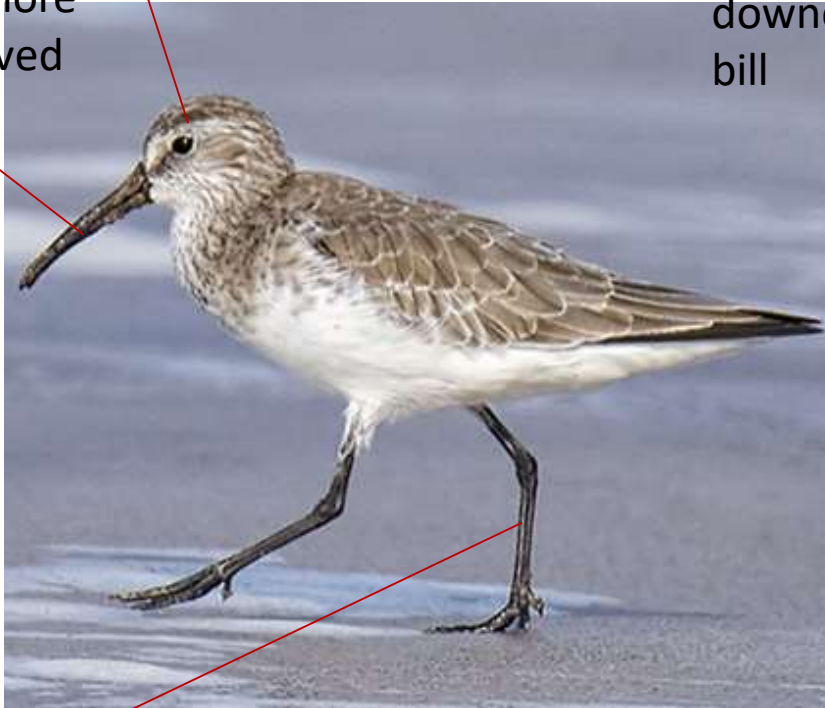


Small Sandpipers

Comparison of Curlew Sandpiper and Dunlin

Distinct
supercilium

Longer, more
downcurved
bill



Curlew Sandpiper

Longer
legs

Less distinct
supercilium

Shorter, less
downcurved
bill



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

Clear double
brow

Clear double
brow

Streaked
breast

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



Black-tailed Godwit

Barred tail

White/grey rump



Bar-tailed Godwit

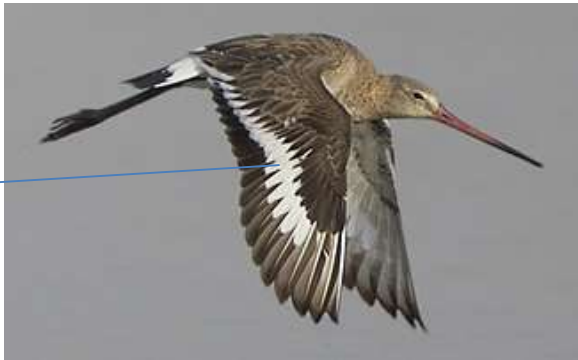
Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits

White rump



Black tail

White
wing bar



Black-tailed Godwit

Barred tail



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
- Upperside 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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