

# Gone in a Gust — Disappearing Wind Birds the Need to Track Shorebird Populations

*The restlessness of shorebirds, their kinship with the distance and swift seasons, the wistful signal of their voices down the long coastlines of the world make them, for me, the most affecting of wild creatures. – Peter Matthiessen, The Wind Birds*

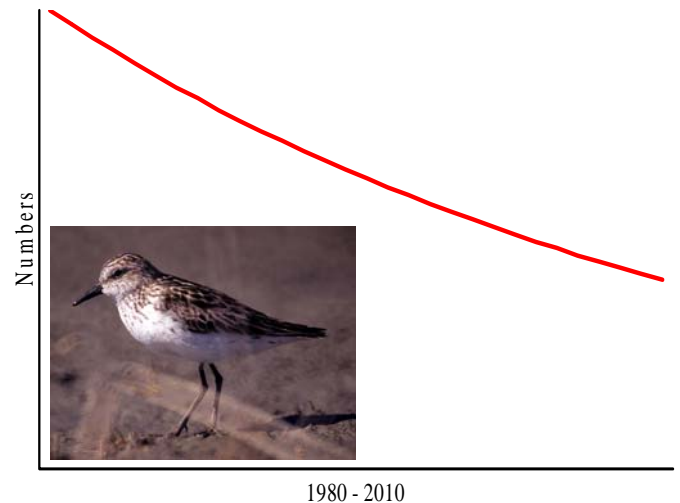
About 24% of the world's shorebird species occur in the U.S. and Canada; they can be found in every state and province. Of 51 shorebird species that breed in temperate, boreal, or arctic North America, most individuals of 40 species (78%) spend their winter in Latin American and Caribbean countries. Other Nearctic-breeding shorebirds travel to wintering grounds in eastern Asia, Australia, Polynesia, and northern Europe.

In general, shorebird populations are relatively small; more than one-third are thought to number less than 25,000 individuals. For many species, however, precise knowledge of their population size is lacking. Counts of shorebirds made during migration and on the breeding grounds suggest that numbers of many species are decreasing. In fact, no species is increasing at a continental scale. Further data, however, are urgently needed to adequately determine the extent and causes of declines.



The Long-billed Curlew is a large shorebird that inhabits grasslands of the mid-continent. Over the last century, they have disappeared from Midwestern states, and their overall range has been reduced by more than one-third.

Semipalmated Sandpipers are small shorebirds (peeps) that are bred in the Arctic and spend the winter on the coasts of northern South America. Along the way, they refuel in eastern Canada's Bay of Fundy, sometimes eating so much they can barely fly. These sandpipers have declined dramatically in the last three decades.



The public values healthy populations of shorebirds; people are fascinated by the remarkable accounts of their annual migrations. The long-distance flights of shorebirds link communities, countries, and continents in conservation. Each year, an increasing number of festivals across the continent are held to celebrate the return of migratory shorebirds.

To contribute to the maintenance and restoration of shorebird populations, experts from Canada and the U.S. have developed the *Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring (PRISM)*. When fully implemented, PRISM will provide detailed information on the status of all shorebird species that breed in North America. Research, development, and implementation of PRISM will require new funding of about \$1.2M per year.

