

## Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*

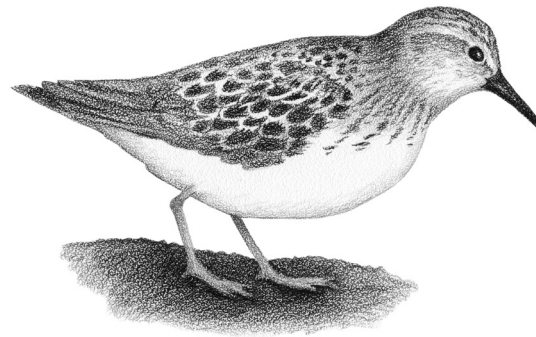


**Folk Name:** Sandchicken, Peep  
**Status:** Migrant, Winter Visitor  
**Abundance:** Uncommon  
**Habitat:** Mudflats

As its name suggests, the Least Sandpiper is our smallest peep, averaging only 6 inches in length. Small numbers have been found at scattered locations in our region in all months—except June. They are uncommon in both spring and fall migration and are usually rather rare in the winter months. Average flock size seen in the Central Carolinas is ordinarily less than 15 birds. A flock of more than 25 spent much of the winter of 2011–2012 in Pineville at the McAlpine WWTP. These birds spent time moving around the edges of the treatment ponds and foraging among grass stubble with a flock of American Pipits. A flock of 60 found on Lake Twitty in Union County on November 17, 2008, and a flock of 68 found at the McAlpine Plant on May 11, 2015, appear to be the largest counts of Least Sandpiper reported in the region.



*Least Sandpipers at wastewater treatment plant.*  
(Jeff Lemons)



“Occurs during both migrations, but does not appear to be at all common.”  
—Leverett Loomis, Chester County, 1885

Least Sandpiper has made the list of highlights several times on both Spring Bird Counts and Christmas Bird Counts in the region. Stanly Spring Count observers found four on April 29, 1961. H. Lee Jones spotted four during the Charlotte Spring Bird Count conducted on May 1, 1965. These were described as being the “first from Mecklenburg County,” and the observers on this count reported having the “best” diversity of shorebirds on that day, since the count first began back in 1940. Two Least Sandpipers were seen the same day on the spring count in Cleveland County. Charlotte birders tallied a flock of 28 on May 2, 1987. David Wright reported a flock of 23 at Lake Norman in Iredell County on May 27, 1996. A total of 17 counted on the Southern Lake Norman Christmas Bird Count on December 16, 2007, was later deemed “a respectable tally” for an inland location in the winter.