

SHOREBIRD ID 101

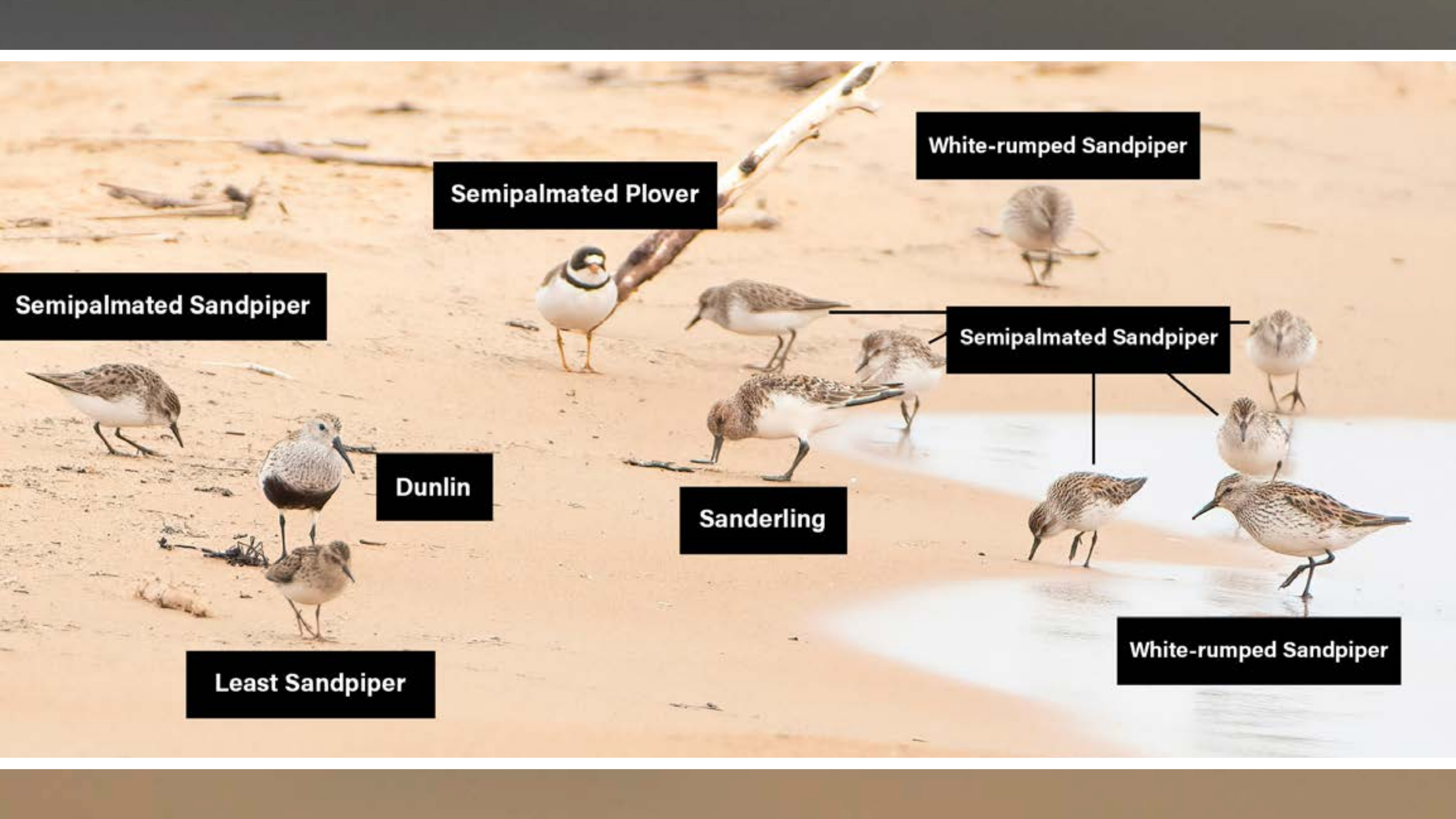
Great Lakes Edition



THE CHALLENGES

- **Not commonly encountered in the Midwest**
Habitat specialists, not likely to be seen in yards, parks or forests.
- **Few diagnostic field marks**
A combination of observations are often required for identification.
- **Plumage is unreliable**
Adult breeding, nonbreeding, juvenile and molt can be present simultaneously.
- **Species very similar in appearance**
Sorting out several nearly identical birds species can be daunting.





Semipalmated Plover

White-rumped Sandpiper

Semipalmated Sandpiper

Semipalmated Sandpiper

Dunlin

Sanderling

Least Sandpiper

White-rumped Sandpiper

GETTING **STARTED**

- **Spend time with shorebirds**
- **Narrow down the list of suspects into comparison groups:**
“Peeps”, Tringa genus (Yellowlegs, etc.), oddballs.
- **Focus on shape rather than plumage**
Proportions, bill shape, leg length are all very useful.
- **Look for several ID clues**
Few species have singular diagnostic features.
- **Pay attention to temperature**
Cold shorebirds are puffy shorebirds

ASSESSING A SHOREBIRD

Location Info: Lake St. Clair Metropark | September 14 | Shallow parking lot puddle

Small “peep” with proportionately large head

Capped look to head

Warm tones overall

Drooping bill

Short legs

Greenish/yellow legs

CONCLUSION:

Least Sandpiper



WHERE TO FIND SHOREBIRDS —

- **Mudflats**
- **Beaches**
- **Flooded fields**
- **Sod farms**
- **Ponds**
- **Breakwalls**

THE GROUPS

- **Genus Calidris aka “Peeps”**

Includes: Least, Semipalmated, Sanderling, Pectoral, Dunlin

- **Genus Tringa**

Both Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Willet

- **Plovers**

- **Dowitchers**

- **Godwits**

- **Phalaropes**

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER

Calidris pusilla

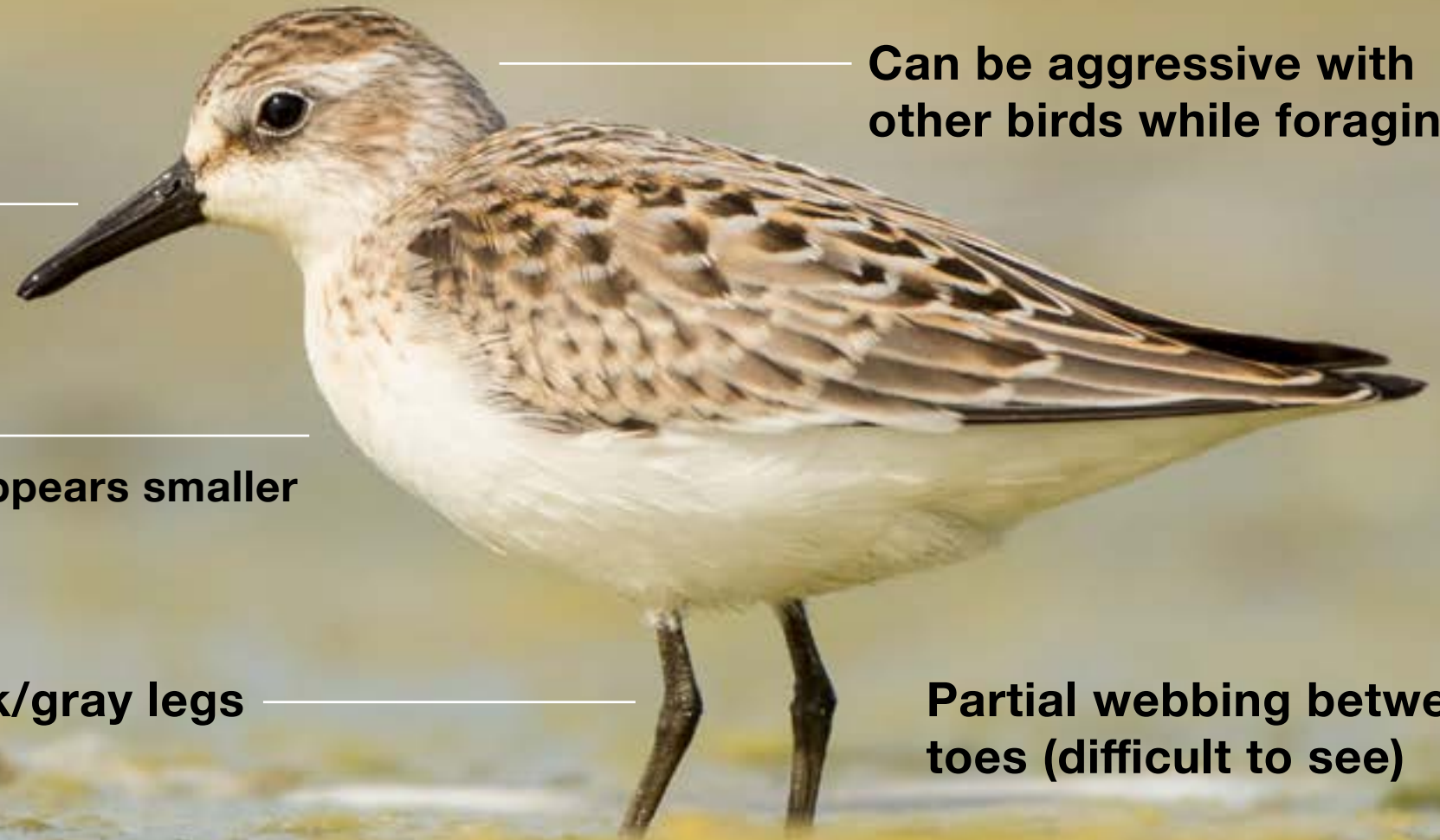
Straight, thick bill

Small size
(slightly larger than Least, head appears smaller proportionately)

Short, black/gray legs

Can be aggressive with other birds while foraging

Partial webbing between toes (difficult to see)



LEAST SANDPIPER

Calidris minutilla

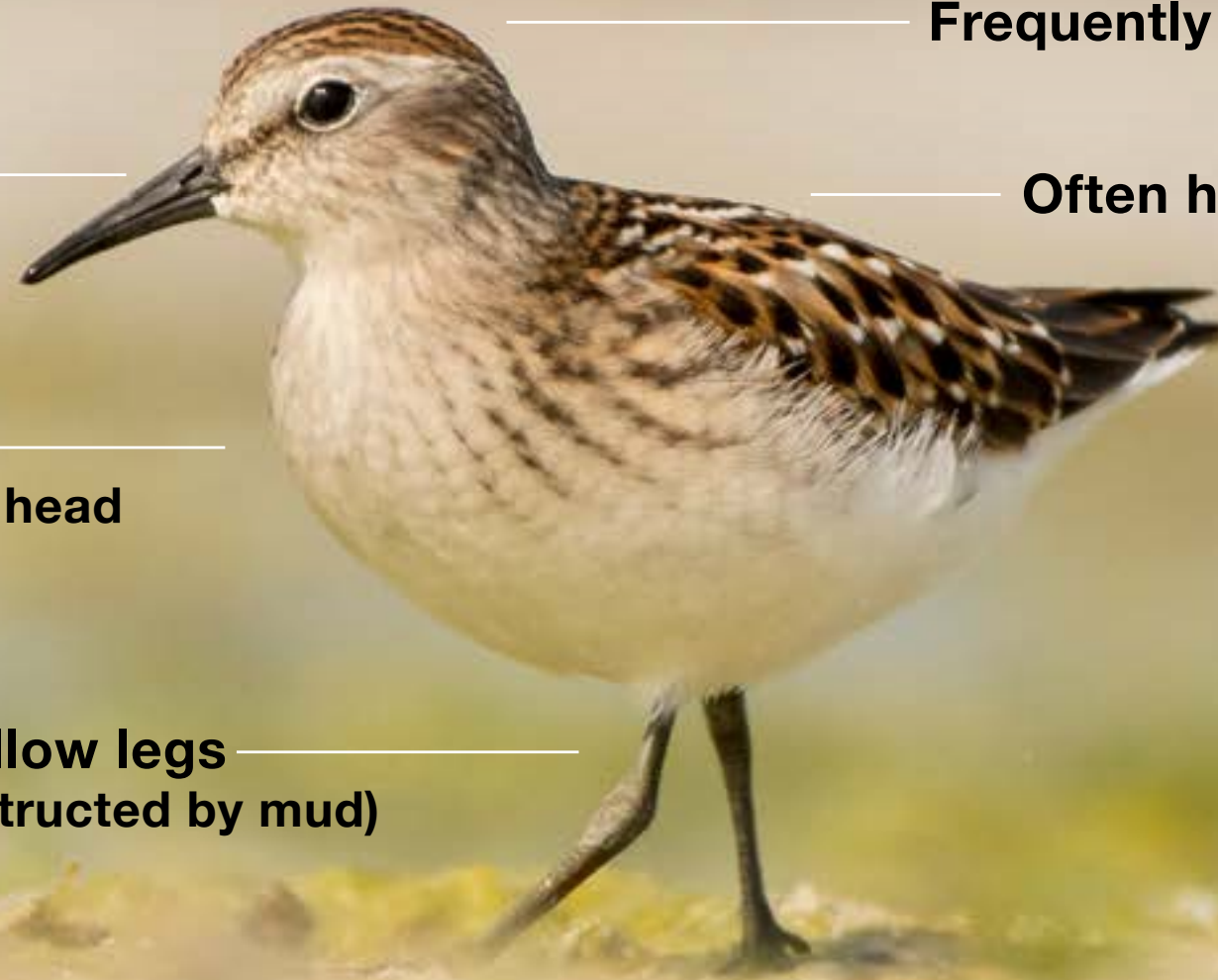
Bill has slight droop
(thinner tip than Semipalmated)

Small size
(slightly smaller than Semipalmated, head appears larger proportionately)

Short, green/yellow legs
(color can be obstructed by mud)

Frequently displays a cap

Often has rich, warm tones



TYPICAL PEEP COMPARISON



WESTERN SANDPIPER

Calidris mauri

Rare in Great Lakes

Bright chestnut cap and back in breeding or partial molt



Longer bill than Semipalmated, Least

Bill often has slight droop

Slightly larger than Semipalmated

Legs longer than Semipalmated



SANDERLING

Calidris alba

Elongated, “figure-8” nostril

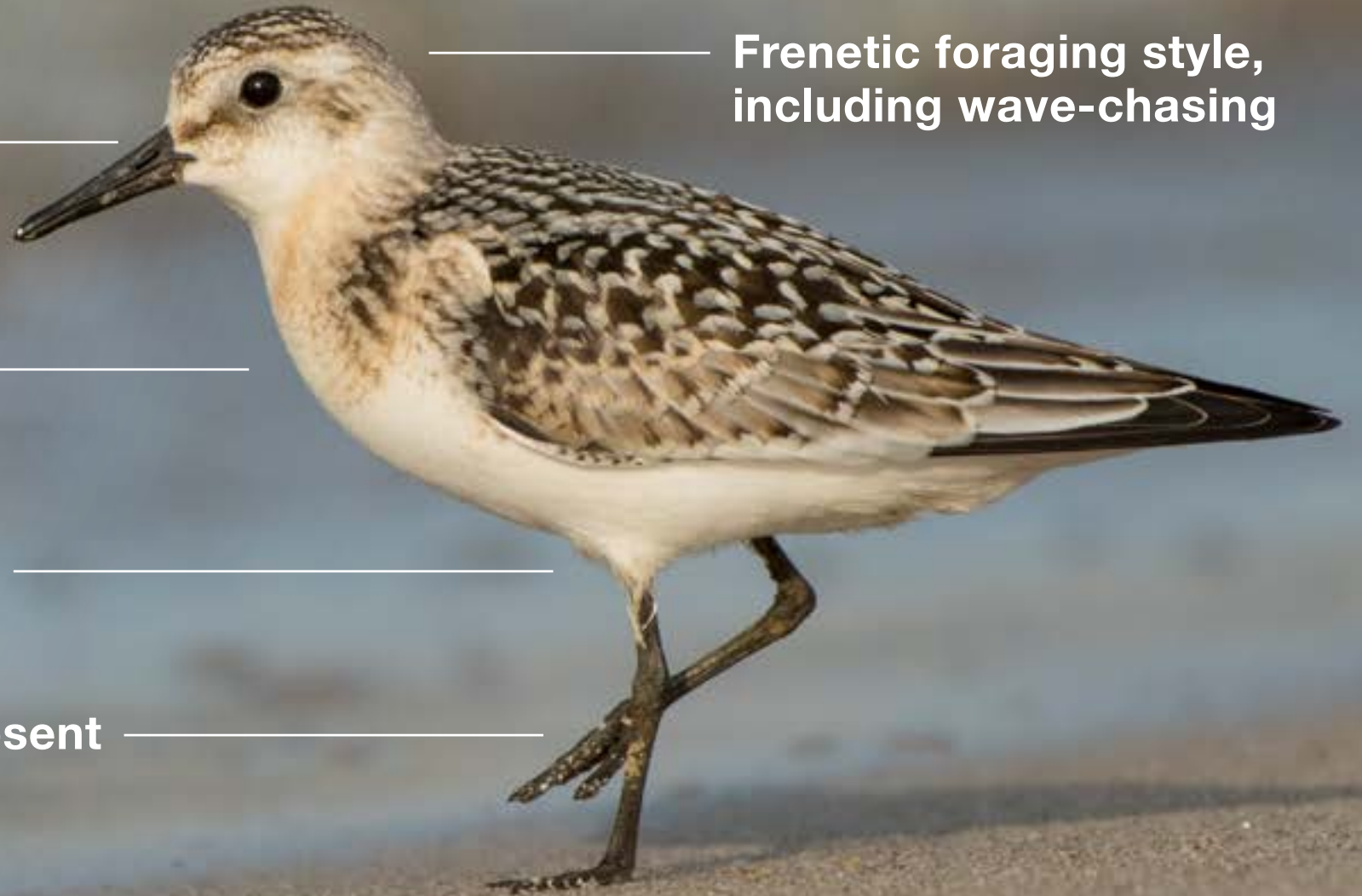
Longer, straight bill

Significantly larger than
Least and Semipalmated

First impression is “white” sandpiper

Back toe is absent

Frenetic foraging style,
including wave-chasing



SANDERLING

Calidris alba

Breeding Plumage

Mixed rusty and warm
neutral tones

Extensive speckling
on head and neck

Frequently found in
groups

Seems to prefer
beaches on large
bodies of water
rather than mud
flats



BILL SHAPE REVIEW

A vertical stack of four shorebird heads, each with a different bill shape. From top to bottom: a Sanderling with a long, straight bill; a Western with a long, slightly drooping bill; a Semipalmated with a short, straight bill; and a Least with a thin, fine-tipped bill. The birds are shown in profile, facing left.

Sanderling

Long, straight bill; elongated nostril

Western

Bill longest proportionately, slight droop at the tip

Semipalmated

Short, straight bill

Least

Thin, fine-tipped bill, with droop at the tip

BODY SHAPE REVIEW

PECTORAL SANDPIPER

Calidris melanotos

Warm tones on
back

Streaking with light brown
background

Yellowish legs



PECTORAL SANDPIPER

Calidris melanotos

Larger than peeps, appears similar to a large Least Sandpiper

Orange in the base of the bill

Slight droop in bill tip

Sharp contrast from breast streaking to white belly

**Birds in this photo are puffed up from being cold*

DUNLIN

Calidris alpina

Breeding Plumage

Chestnut
brown back

Black belly

Stocky body,
large head portion

Noticeably long,
drooping bill

Often found
in large groups

Arrives early in
spring, late in fall



DUNLIN

Calidris alpina

Nonbreeding Plumage



BAIRD'S SANDPIPER

Calidris bairdii

Warmer tones overall than White-rumped

Crisp, scalloped feather pattern, especially on young birds

Long wings that extend beyond the tail

Steep forehead

Long, straight, thin bill

Warm, buffy color on the breast



WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER

Calidris fuscicollis

Longish, straight bill.

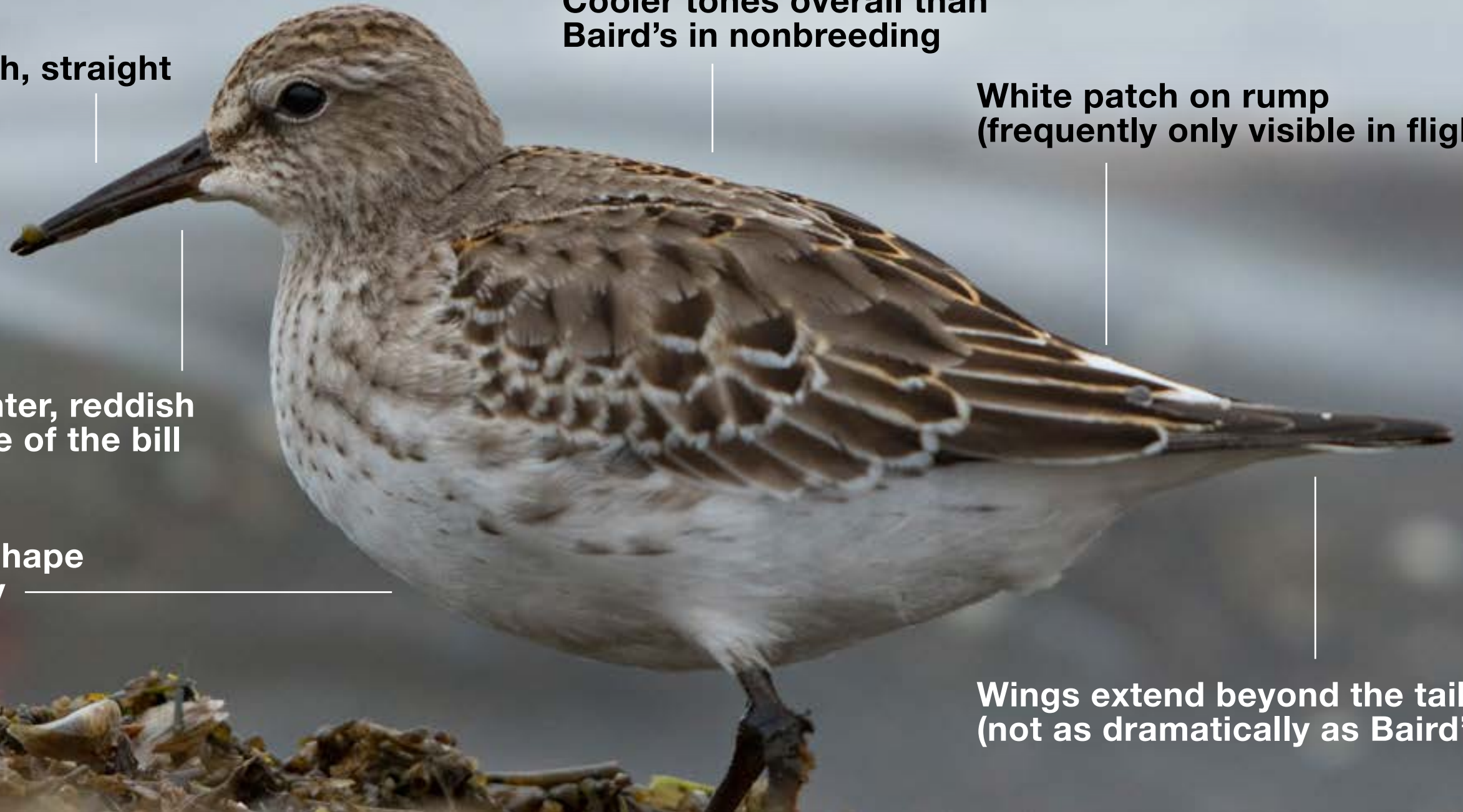
Lighter, reddish base of the bill

Bulky shape to body

Cooler tones overall than Baird's in nonbreeding

White patch on rump (frequently only visible in flight)

Wings extend beyond the tail (not as dramatically as Baird's)



RED KNOT

Calidris canutus

Large, bulky Calidris

Faint pale
eyebrow

Bill thick
at base

Horizontal posture

White edging to
gray feathers

Mid-length greenish
yellow legs



RED KNOT

Calidris canutus

Breeding Plumage



Reddish throat and breast

Long, pointed wings

RED KNOT

Calidris canutus

Breeding Plumage



BODY SHAPE REVIEW

CALIDRIS COMPARISON



White-rumped Sandpiper



Baird's Sandpiper



Red Knot



Dunlin



Pectoral Sandpiper



Western Sandpiper



Sanderling



Semipalmated Sandpiper



Least Sandpiper

THE TRINGA GENUS



LESSER YELLOWLEGS

Tringa flavipes

Breeding Plumage



Bill length approximately the same as head length

Gives flight calls in two note groups

Slightly thinner base to the legs as compared to Greater

GREATER YELLOWLEGS

Tringa melanoleuca

Bill length longer
than head width

Bill can appear
slightly upturned

Gives flight calls in three
or four note groups

Slightly thicker base to the
legs as compared to Lesser



YELLOWLEGS COMPARISON —



SOLITARY SANDPIPER

Tringa solitaria

Nearly solid brown
back with white spots

Distinct eyering

Long, thin bill with
downward curve

More compact than Yellowlegs

Greenish legs



SPOTTED SANDPIPER

Actitis macularius

Included as an honorary Tringa

White patch or “comma”
on the shoulder

White eyering

Bobs tail
Constantly



SPOTTED SANDPIPER

Breeding Plumage

Actitis macularius

Orange bill of
average length

Spotted back, breast
and belly

Yellow or orange legs

Obvious eyeline and
white supercillium



WILLET

Tringa semipalmata

Contrasting black and white wings
in flight

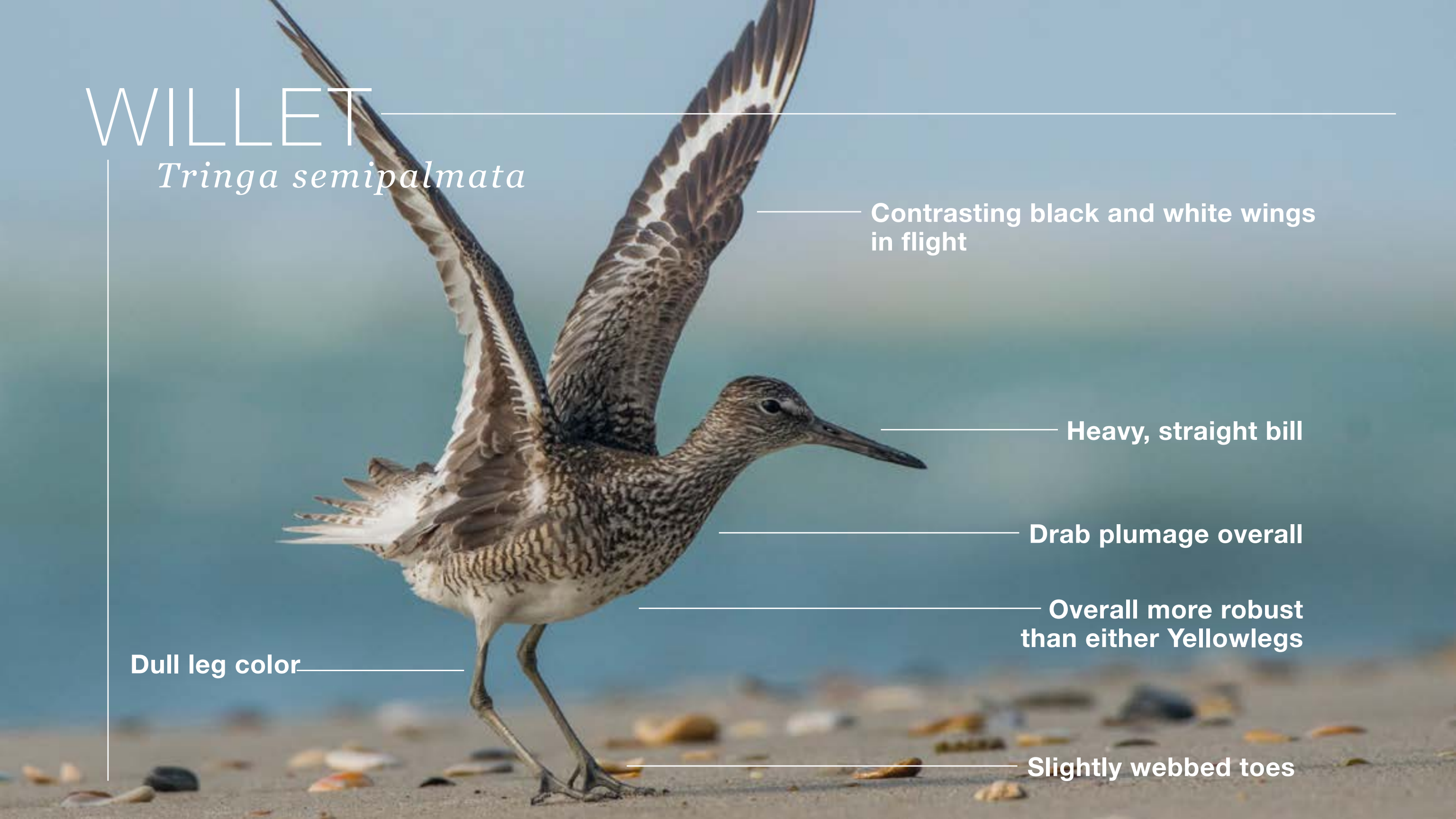
Heavy, straight bill

Drab plumage overall

Overall more robust
than either Yellowlegs

Dull leg color

Slightly webbed toes



WILLET COMPARISON



BILL SHAPE REVIEW

The image features four birds of different species, each with a distinct bill shape, arranged vertically from top to bottom. The top bird is a Willet with a thick, straight bill. The second bird is a Greater Yellowlegs with a long, thin bill that has a slight upward curve. The third bird is a Lesser Yellowlegs with a long, thin bill that is straight. The bottom bird is a Solitary Sandpiper with a medium-length, thin bill that has a slight downward curve. The birds are shown in profile, facing left, against a light gray background.

Willet

Thick, straight bill

Greater Yellowlegs

Bill longer than head width, slight upturn

Lesser Yellowlegs

Bill equal to head width, relatively thin

Solitary Sandpiper

Medium length bill, thin, slight downward curve

SMALL PLOVERS



KILLDEER

Charadrius vociferus

Longer bill than
Semipalmated or
Piping

Two bands on neck
and breast

Much larger than
Semipalmated or Piping

Wide distribution

Red eye ring

Very vocal



SEMIPALMATED PLOVER

Charadrius semipalmatus

Dark cheek patch

Thin yellow eye-ring

Brown slightly darker
than Piping Plover

Yellow legs



SEMIPALMATED PLOVER

Breeding Plumage

Charadrius semipalmatus

Orange bill base

Complete, single
breast-band

Smaller than killdeer



PIPING PLOVER

Charadrius melodus

Breeding Plumage

Lighter colors in facial pattern

Small black forehead patch

Very steep, bulging forehead shape

Lighter brown overall

Broken breast-band

Orangish legs



PIPING PLOVER

Charadrius melodus

Nonbreeding Plumage



HEAD SHAPE REVIEW

Killdeer

Mid length bill, bold red eyering

Semipalmated Plover

Short bill with orange base, darker facial pattern

Piping Plover

Short bill, steep forehead, lighter facial pattern





THANK YOU!