



February 2010, Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*)

Purple Sandpipers are *the* winter shorebird in northern New England. You might occasionally spot a small group of Sanderlings, some Dunlin, or even a Ruddy Turnstone now and then if you're lucky, but flocks of Purple Sandpipers are common off of many rocky points along the Atlantic coast anywhere from Newfoundland to the Carolinas. Here in Maine they arrive in late October or early November from their summer breeding grounds in the Arctic tundra where Purples nest farther north than any other shorebird. They are larger than most sandpipers and also darker, with a splash of yellow-orange at the base of their slightly drooping bills and orange legs and feet to match.

Purples are more of a rock sandpiper than a sandy beach peep, but invariably you'll find them close to the water's edge whatever the tide. The flock wintering at Seapoint usually numbers between 50 and 100, and I've gotten to know their hangouts and some of their behaviors. They can be noisy as a group in a softspoken way, and are fairly easily approached if you keep low and move slowly. Sexes are similar.