



## Sanderling

### Drietonstrandloper

*Calidris alba*

The Sanderling and Knot *C. canutus* have similar breeding ranges: northern Alaska, northern Canada, northeastern Greenland, and the northern Taimyr Peninsula, the last being the provenance of most, if not all, Sanderlings migrating to southern Africa. But the possibility that Sanderlings from Greenland also migrate to southern Africa cannot be excluded (Gudmundsson & Lindström 1992; Soloviev & Tomkovich 1995). The species breeds mainly in arctic tundra, extending northwards into polar desert, but rarely southwards into typical tundra (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Rogacheva 1992). The Sanderling and Knot thus breed closer to the north pole than any other species migrating to southern Africa.

The nonbreeding range spans 100 degrees of latitude; it occurs on shores between 60°N and the southern limits of South America, Africa and Australia (Hayman *et al.* 1986). It is almost exclusively coastal in its southern African distribution. The highest densities occur in central Namibia, the Cape Province between the Orange River estuary (2816CB) and Cape Point (3418AD), and between Cape St Francis (3424BB) and the Kei River estuary (3228CD) (Summers *et al.* 1987b). The isolated inland records are mostly birds on southward migration in the austral spring (Dowsett 1980a).

The combined Greenland and Siberian population was estimated to be 243 000 (Rose & Scott 1994), of which an estimated 78 000 (32%) migrate to southern Africa (Summers *et al.* 1987a).

**Habitat:** Preferred habitats are beaches of fine sand, wave-cut platforms, shores with piled-up seaweed, sheltered inlets, and estuaries with extensive intertidal sandbanks.

**Movements:** The movement patterns along the eastern Atlantic coastline remain poorly understood (Summers *et al.* 1987b). Those breeding in Greenland appear to migrate

through northwestern Europe to western Africa, while birds migrating from the Siberian breeding grounds remain in western Europe for the winter. However, Siberian Sanderlings also migrate to southern Africa, producing an unusual pattern.

A total of 2909 have been ringed in southern Africa, generating 22 recoveries in the northern hemisphere, and there are four recoveries of northern-hemisphere-ringed birds in southern Africa. There are three recoveries on the Taimyr Peninsula in the tundra breeding grounds: one of these was ringed on 22 April 1972 and recovered 52 days later on 13 June (Summers *et al.* 1987b; SAFRING). The ringing date coincides closely with departure from Zone 4, and the recovery date with the mean date of arrival on the Siberian tundra (Syroechkovski & Lappo 1994). At a flight speed of 80 km per hour, the flying time between Langebaan Lagoon and Dickson (13 000 km) would be six days, the remaining period being spent replenishing food stores. Energy considerations suggest that 'refuelling' would probably take place twice (Summers *et al.* 1987b).

Recoveries along the migration route show a remarkable longitudinal spread (3°W–50°E), from the Bay of Biscay to the Caspian Sea (Summers *et al.* 1987b; SAFRING). The likely western route is along the west coast of Africa to the Gulf of Guinea, across the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea to refuel at wetlands along the North Sea, and on via the Baltic Sea and the Arctic Ocean shore to Siberia. The eastern route crosses central Asia to the Black and Caspian seas, and then probably along the east African coast because Sanderlings do not occur in numbers on the Rift Valley lakes. Of 10 recoveries east of 20°E, nine were on southward migration; of the 13 west of 20°E, six were on southward migration, suggesting that the western route is used both on southward and northward migrations, and that the eastern route is used mainly on southward migration.

Some birds may undertake a loop migration, using the eastern route southwards and the western route northwards. There are three records of birds moving 'clockwise', but in each case the second observation was in a subsequent year: Port Elizabeth (3325DC) in September to Swakopmund (2214DA) in January; Port Elizabeth in September to Langebaan Lagoon (3318AA) in December; Olifants River estuary (3118CA) in November to Swakopmund in January (Summers *et al.* 1987b). The hypothesis of a loop migration receives further support from the models: reporting rates along the Namibian coast are highest in late summer and autumn.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** Stark & Sclater (1906) described it as 'abundant in the southern summer months along the coast'; this remains an accurate description of the status in southern Africa 90 years later. The large proportion of the flyway population spending the nonbreeding season in southern Africa means that South Africa and Namibia have a special conservation responsibility for this species. Much Sanderling habitat is also prime recreational habitat; the provision of undisturbed refuges during periods of high usage on tourist beaches is an important consideration in maintaining populations through the holiday season (Lane 1987).

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Recorded in 236 grid cells, 5.2%  
Total number of records: 3625  
Mean reporting rate for range: 11.7%

