

Ageing and Sexing Series*

Part 6: Ageing and sexing the Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*

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INTRODUCTION

This article updates information on ageing and sexing Purple Sandpipers *Calidris maritima* described by Prater *et al.* (1977).

The breeding range of the Purple Sandpiper is fragmented across the Atlantic part of the Arctic, sub-Arctic and alpine regions of northern Europe. The range covers parts of Canada, Greenland, Iceland, Faeroe Islands, Scotland, Fennoscandia, Svalbard and Russia, including the archipelagos of Franz Josef Land and Severnaya Zemlya (Cramp & Simmons 1983).

Cramp & Simmons (1983) and Payne & Pierce (2002) classed the Purple Sandpiper as monotypic, but the following subspecies have been proposed, based on differences in size. The largest Purple Sandpipers from Iceland have been named *C. m. littoralis* (Brehm 1831), whilst the small birds from the Belcher Islands, Nastapooka Islands, North Twin

Island and possibly east coast of Hudson Bay were recently named *C. m. belcheri* by Engelmoer & Roselaar (1998), though they did not examine the even smaller birds from Norway (see Table 2). Greenland birds have been named *C. m. groenlandica* (Løvenskiold 1950) but this distinction has not been accepted by others. Thus, the three proposed subspecies are, *C. m. littoralis* (Iceland) *C. m. belcheri* (southern part of Hudson Bay) and the nominate subspecies, to which the other populations belong (Engelmoer & Roselaar 1998).

The winter range encompasses the rocky sea coasts of the N Atlantic. In the E Atlantic, it occurs primarily from the Iberian Peninsula to the Kola Peninsula (Russia), thus occurring well north of the Arctic Circle in winter. It also winters in the British Isles, Faeroe Islands, Iceland and SW Greenland. On the North American coast, it occurs from Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, south to North Carolina (Cramp & Simmons 1983, Hayman *et al.* 1986, Payne & Pierce 2002).