

Bird Life

Late summer and early autumn sees the arrival in Ireland of many birds, either looking for wintering grounds or just to rest and refuel on their journey further south to their winter homes. A common visitor to Irish coasts and most often found on sandy beaches.

Sanderlings are one of these birds. They breed in the High Arctic Tundra—in North America and North Russia and islands in the Arctic and then fly south to warmer climates to overwinter, avoiding the freezing Arctic winters. The breeding season is very short, lasting from June to August. Eggs are laid in an unlined shallow nest in an exposed site, with both the male and female incubating the eggs.

Different breeding populations move to different parts of the world. Sanderlings are passage migrants in Ireland, stopping over on their way south, some as far as South Africa. They can fly up to 10,000km to warmer climates.

Wading Birds

Sanderlings are wading birds and can be seen in flocks busily feeding at the edge of the shoreline, jabbing their bills into the sand to catch their prey. They feed on insects and small crustaceans, worms and fish on the shore but will also eat seeds and plant buds.

Sanderlings are part of a larger family of birds known as sandpipers. These are wading or shoreline birds and the family also includes such birds as the Curlew and the Snipe.



To show their size, here are two Sanderlings next to an Oystercatcher.



Sanderlings scurry along the sand at the edge of the waves with a distinctive run. It looks like they are making a “bicycling” or a clockwork toy motion.

Scientific Name:

Calidris alba

Irish Name:

Luathrán

What they look like

Sanderlings are about 20 cms in length. They have black legs and bill and a white wingbar. In winter their plumage is grey on top and white underneath. In late spring and summer it becomes redder on top, with darker tones through it.



Here you can see the white wingbar on their backs.

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