

## Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) breeding in Massachusetts

*A breeding range extension southwestward of 480 kilometers;  
the first known United States breeding record*

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THE LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) breeds from subarctic Alaska to Newfoundland, with Cape Sable Island and Sable Island, Nova Scotia the southernmost limits of the reported breeding range (Godfrey 1966:155). Recent seasonal reports from *American Birds* (Finch 1971, 1975), indicate an increase in breeding records from coastal Halifax County, Nova Scotia, but this may represent intensified search rather than a population change (McLaren, pers. comm.). Reports from New Brunswick do not suggest breeding there (Christie, pers. comm.). The discovery of a recently dead Least Sandpiper chick on Monomoy Island off Cape Cod, Massachusetts here reported extends the breeding range 480km (260 nautical miles) southwestward, and is the first known breeding record of this species south of the Canadian border.

On July 12, 1979, the author accompanied Richard Harlow and a group of Tabor Academy students on a field trip to Monomoy Island, Barnstable County, Massachusetts. In mid-afternoon at the northwestern end of the island, student Timothy Smaldown found a freshly-dead shorebird chick in a *Spartina* marsh. The chick was completely downy, smaller than a ping-pong ball, and had a tiny black bill and thin dark legs; it was white below and a dark chestnut brown above, with the down white-tipped on the back wings and crown, giving it a "spangled" appearance [very similar to the illustration in *A Field Guide to the Nests, Eggs and Nestlings of North American Birds* by Colin Harrison (1978)]. The bird was subsequently preserved by an injection of 40% formaldehyde solution and con-

firmed as a *Calidris minutilla* chick approximately 3 days old (Jehl, pers. comm.). The specimen has been donated to the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University.

Monomoy Island is a typical Atlantic barrier beach of sand dunes and marsh extending in a north-south direction from the elbow of Cape Cod at Chatham. Once a peninsula, Monomoy recently (c. 1959) became an island about 16km long. On February 8, 1978, a severe storm caused a cut through the middle of the island dividing it into two islands. Marshes bordering the leeward side of the north island are dominated by *Spartina alterniflora* with *S. patens* growing on small elevated areas. A narrow sandy ridge separates the marsh from the waters and mud flats of Chatham Roads.

ALTHOUGH THE EXACT LOCATION was not noted, the Least Sandpiper chick is believed to have been found on a slightly elevated portion of the marsh adjacent to the ridge. Least Sandpipers in scattered flocks (an estimated 370, presumed migrants) were scattered over muddy areas of the marsh, but there was no recognized indication of agitated adults or other young.

Least Sandpipers occasionally linger on the Massachusetts coast through June with earliest autumn migrants arriving during the first week of July (Snyder & Griscom, 1955; Bailey, 1955), but there has been no previous suspicion of breeding. At Sable Island, Miller (1977) found that the species nests most abundantly in vegetation near fresh ponds, but that it also nests in extremely dry, sparsely-vegetated, sandy areas.

Clement (1961) reported a brood of Least Sandpiper chicks as early as June 11 at Cape Sable Island. Miller (1977) indicated that clutches are completed from May 23 to June 24 which, given 14-17 days for incubation (Jehl, 1970) would mean young hatch between June 6 and July 11 at that location.

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