

## Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Calidris subruficollis*



**Folk Name:** (none)

**Status:** Migrant

**Abundance:** Very Rare to Rare

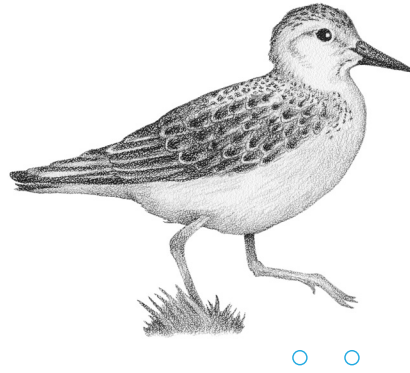
**Habitat:** Short-grass fields

The Buff-breasted Sandpiper is a larger and more distinctive sandpiper than the peeps with which it is closely related. It is 8 ¼ inches long, has longer legs, a smallish head, and its face, throat, and underparts are buff colored in all plumages. Its underwings are white.

This bird has been an erratic visitor in the Central Carolinas over the past four decades. A flurry of sightings were reported in the 1980s. Two sightings reported in 1999, and recently, there have been multiple reports again, since 2010. It is interesting to note that all Buff-breasted Sandpipers in this region have been recorded moving through during a brief four-week period in fall migration.

A group of local birders, led by Paul Hart and David Wright, discovered the region's first Buff-breasted Sandpiper cavorting with other shorebirds in the drying beds at the McAlpine WWTP in Pineville on August 29, 1982. The bird was seen for about 10 days. David Wright reported Buff-breasted Sandpipers at the same location on September 24, 1983, and August 27, 1984. He found a juvenile-plumaged individual there on September 1, 1984, and an adult there on 15 September—which stayed until 21 September. Wright also discovered a second adult “with rich pumpkin-buff breast” near Carowinds on September 19, 1984. A group of birders found a Buff-breasted Sandpiper present at the drying beds at the McAlpine WWTP from September 2–4, 1988, and Wright reported one again in Charlotte on September 9, 1989.

There were at least two reports of this sandpiper here in the 1990s, and several have been observed in the region since 2010. Taylor Piephoff reported one foraging along the shore of what was at the time a “dried up lake bed” at Cowan’s Ford Wildlife Refuge on August 27, 1999. Steve Tracy found one in Gaston County at the Allen Steam Plant on September 19, 1999. Jeff Lemons photographed four Buff-breasted Sandpipers in the grassy parking lot fields at the Charlotte Motor Speedway in Cabarrus County on September 11, 2010. These parking lots currently provide an excellent broad, flat habitat of short grass, dirt, and mud. Dwayne Martin found one near Mountain Creek on Lake Norman in Catawba County on



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September 15, 2011. Several birders repeatedly searched for Buff-breasted Sandpipers at the speedway in 2012 and 2013 with no success, but another showed up at one of the speedway parking lots on September 10, 2014. Most recently, Kevin Metcalf found a Buff-breasted Sandpiper with a mixed flock of shorebirds on the edge of the Catawba River on the Mecklenburg–Gaston county line on September 17, 2015. This bird lingered until at least 23 September. Metcalf provided this warning for other birders: “This bird is well camouflaged and I missed it in a couple scans with binoculars before it ‘appeared.’ Even knowing where to look, if it is standing it is easy to miss, so be patient if you still haven’t seen this bird.”

The Buff-breasted Sandpiper is listed on the Yellow Watch List of birds of the continental United States. It is a species with both “troubling” population declines and “high threats.” It is in need of conservation action.



*Buff-breasted Sandpiper on Catawba River. (Jeff Lemons)*