Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

READING MUSEUM SERVICE

COMMON SANDPIPER Z94
(Actitis hypoleucos)

Description
A smallish wader with contrasting brown upperparts and white underparts. It habitually bobs up and down, known as 'teetering', and has a distinctive flight with stiff, bowed wings. It lives close to upland streams and rivers, especially fast-flowing ones, as well as the edges of lochs and lakes. Its presence is often betrayed by its three-note call which it gives as it flies off.

The common sandpiper winters in Africa and travels north to breed. The European population is estimated at 500,000-660,000 pairs, with the majority breeding in Scandinavia.

In the UK the common sandpiper breeds between April and September in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the north of England. In winter a few may be seen along the south coast.

Breeding
Their nest is usually a shallow scoop on the ground, lined with leaves and plant stalks, under overhanging plants. But they sometimes nest in trees or shrubs, and even on rafts of floating vegetation. 3-5 yellowish eggs with dark mottling or spots are laid. The male does most of the incubation. As soon as they are dry, the hatchlings disperse away from the nest to hide among the surrounding vegetation.



What does it eat?
Insects and crustaceans. Common sandpipers feed restlessly and deliberately. They run along the water's edge, locating prey by sight on the surface and not by probing in the mud. They avoid soft mud and prefer to forage on rocky coastlines and breakwaters. They may even forage in concrete drainage ditches, and inland grasslands. They sometimes dash after prey that they have spotted some distance away.

What does it sound like?
A thin 'swee-wee-we'

Reading Borough Council

Heritage Lottery Fund

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Vital Statistics
Eggs: 3-5
Incubation: 21-22 days
Fledging: 26-28 days
Maximum recorded lifespan: 12 years
Length: 19-21cm
Wingspan: 38-41cm
Weight: 40-70g
UK breeding population: 15,800 pairs
UK wintering population: 100 birds



