

covert band usually joining clearer buffish/whitish loral region and forehead, all giving distinctive elegant appearance; reasonably fresh adult Caspian also tends to show more obvious narrow pale fringes to upperparts and coverts, and breeding-plumaged male has unmistakable dark lower border to well-developed and complete-looking rufous

breast band; in flight (and at rest) wings appear longer and more pointed, with upper-sides less patterned and underwings slightly duskier, and often gives sharp 'giut' call.

References Hayman *et al.* (1986), Hirschfeld (1991), Hollom *et al.* (1988), Rogers (1982), Taylor (1982/83, 1987).

Vagrant Stints

Where and When Semipalmated *Calidris pusilla*, Western *C. mauri* and Least Sandpipers *C. minutilla* are Nearctic vagrants, the vast majority to coastal parts of Britain and Ireland, mostly in late summer/autumn (but increasingly in spring, and Least and Semipalmated have overwintered); Semipalmated more or less annual, Least far less frequent, and Western exceedingly rare. Red-necked *C. ruficollis* and Long-toed Stints *C. subminuta* breed in E Siberia: the former has been recorded in the region a mere handful of times (most in Sweden) and the latter on a dozen or so occasions, with no particular pattern but predominantly in early autumn. All need to be distinguished from Little Stint *C. minuta*, which breeds on northern tundra and is common on passage throughout the region, wintering in region mainly in Mediterranean, where locally abundant.

Ageing An essential first step in stint identification is correct ageing. The following

summarises briefly the sequence of plumages and their characteristics. Fresh *juvenile* (from about July/August, i.e. when adults in moult) typically has very neat pale fringes to upperparts and wings and is normally the brightest of all plumages (wear reduces crispness and brightness as autumn progresses); scapulars (especially lower ones) smaller than on adults. *1st-winter* plumage (gained by moult of head, body and scapular feathers and usually some wing-coverts, typically during September-November) very like adult winter (see below), but with some retained, worn juvenile remiges and some coverts. Partial moult about December-May (variable number of flight and tail feathers, followed by all head, body and wing-covert feathers) produces *1st-summer* plumage, usually much as adult summer (see below) but variable, and can contain some winter-type feathers; many individuals, however, depending on species, spend *1st summer* around wintering area and

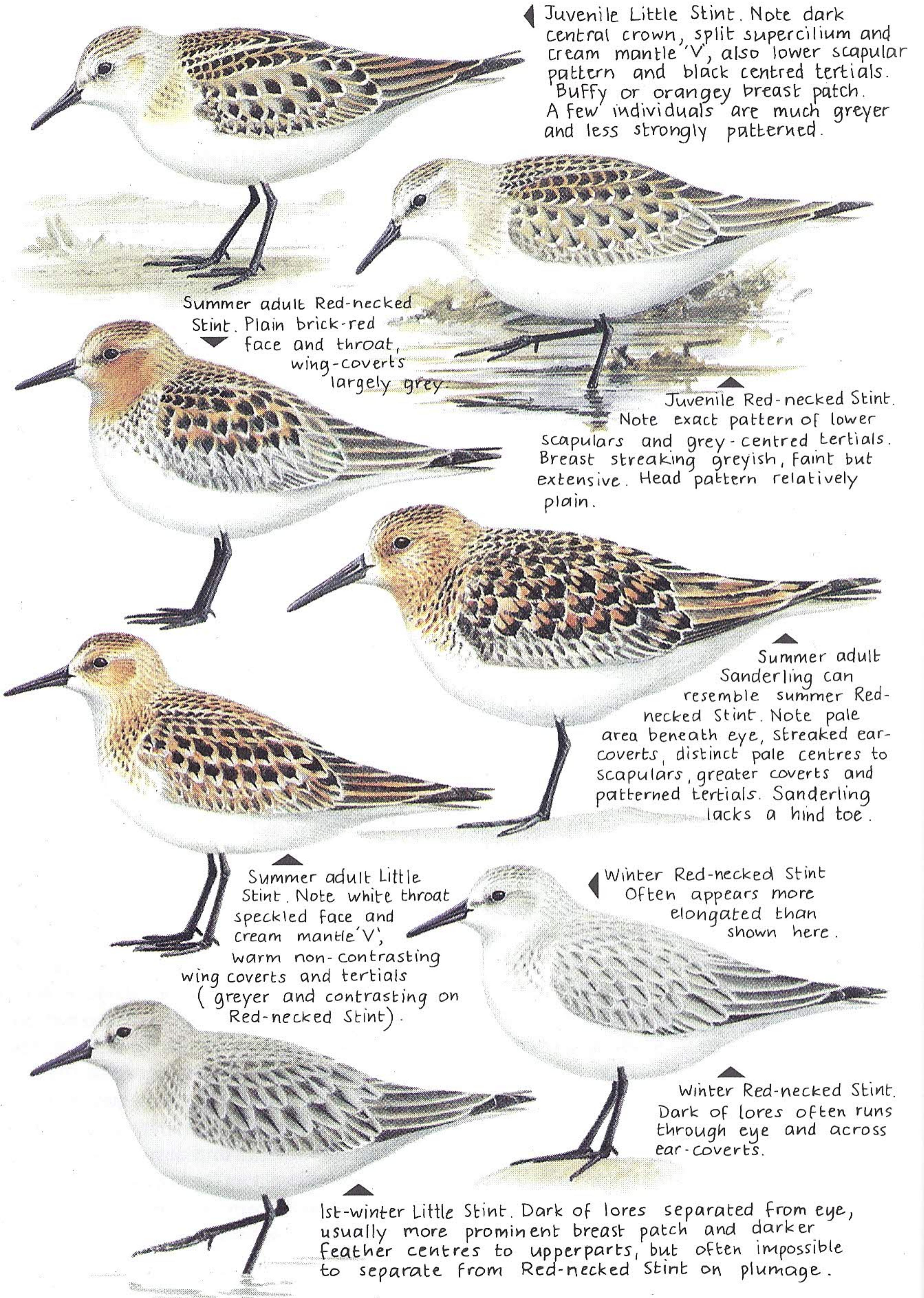
have plumage much as winter. Complete moult from late June to end September (but flight and tail feathers often not fully renewed until February) produces *adult winter* plumage, comparatively plain greyish/brownish with few distinguishing features, and generally apparent from October onwards. Moult of head, body and some inner wing-coverts in about January-April leads to much brighter *adult summer* plumage: when very fresh, pale upperpart and wing-feather fringes conceal underlying rufous tones, but fringes soon wear off; further wear during summer frequently produces dark-looking, untidy plumage by July/August. In transitional stages (i.e. during moult), birds show contrasting pattern of old, worn (pointed) feathers and fresh (usually much paler and brighter, rounded) ones, and correct ageing and identification requires careful examination of all feather tracts. All these factors, and the fact that some individuals may moult earlier/later than times given, should be borne in mind when interpreting descriptions which follow. **Identification** Additional important features are shape and structure (bill, toes, primary projection, etc) and voice; behaviour can also be a pointer (but no more). Remember that all *Calidris* waders have five rows of scapulars, 3 upper and 2 lower; scapular V is formed by pale outer edges of 3rd row from top, and mantle V by pale edges of outer feathers. It is stressed that all stints are extremely hard to separate in winter plumages, while correct identification of a vagrant requires thorough familiarity with all plumages of Little, hence its inclusion here (*Temminck's Stint C. temminckii*, sufficiently distinct, should cause no problems and is not discussed further; see Harris *et al.* 1989). The stints can be grouped into three pairs of closely related and very similar species, each group having particular characteristics. Descriptions apply mostly to typical individuals. Note that it is essential to use a combination of all features; even so, and with prolonged close views (always necessary) and good photos, odd individuals may still not be identifiable with total certainty.

Little and Red-necked Stints

Shape and Structure Both are rather small-headed, Red-necked having more rounded forehead. Comparatively long primary projection (3-4 well-spaced tips normally visible), but this not always reliable. Importantly, Red-necked has longest wings of any stint, looking elongated and attenuated at rear (can be striking in mixed flocks) and with lower, flatter head-to-tail profile.

Bare Parts Both have stout-based, short black bill: Little's averages marginally longer and fine-tipped, lower mandible showing very slight decurvature; Red-necked's fairly blunt-tipped (sometimes slight 'blob' effect) and straight or slightly decurved. Legs black on both, in some lights can appear tinged greenish, greyish or brownish (beware: mud-covered legs often look pale); toes unwebbed.

Plumage Juvenile Typical individuals reasonably separable. **1 HEAD** Red-necked shows somewhat plainer head than Little, with greyer (uniformly streaked) crown, often duller supercilium (no split effect), with white sides to forehead and black lores often rather prominent; more evenly marked ear-coverts (tending to lack Little's paler patch behind eye) also contribute to more uniform head pattern. On Little, dark central crown contrasts with (usually) prominent white supercilium and narrow lateral crown-stripe (split supercilium) and with pale grey nape/hindneck. **2 UPPERPARTS** On Red-necked, inner wing-coverts and lower scapulars fairly plain grey with darker shaft streaks (lower scapulars with dark 'lozenge' shape at tip), contrasting with blackish-centred and rufous-fringed upper scapulars and mantle (Little has black centres and sharp pale/rufous fringes to inner greater coverts and to both upper and lower scapulars, not contrasting with mantle); mantle and scapular Vs either lacking or indistinct on Red-necked (mantle V and usually also scapular V very obvious on Little), and tertials greyish-centred with dark shaft streaks and whitish fringes or occasionally some rufous near tip (tertials black-centred with pale to strong rufous fringes on



Little). Note that occasional Little are much greyer above, with little/no rufous and indistinct V marks, and may, rarely, have rear lower scapulars very like Red-necked. **3 BREAST PATTERN** Red-necked often shows pinky-grey wash on breast sides or sometimes across entire breast, with extensive faint (diffuse) streaking on breast sides. Little has an initially strong orangey/rufous wash on breast sides (sometimes extending faintly across breast), with usually only a few dark, but sharp, streaks. **Adult winter/1st-winter** The two are very similar, rather uniform brownish-grey above with darker shaft streaks, and extremely difficult/impossible to separate on plumage alone. Red-necked averages slightly paler (more greyish) and more uniform above, with less extensive dark feather centres, and often shows dark area on head (blackish lores extending through eye to ear-coverts). Little sometimes has faintly streaked complete pale greyish breast band (apparently never shown by Red-necked). Considerable individual variation, however, and structure (more elongated appearance of Red-necked) more useful in field. 1st-winters of both retain some worn, browner, juvenile wing-coverts. **Adult summer** Typical individuals more easily separable with good views. Best features of Red-necked are: unstreaked bright brick-red coloration of head (crown dark-streaked), throat and breast (breast with extensive white fringes when fresh), but red variable in extent (can include most of head, throat and upper breast or be confined to ear-coverts and a thin band across upper breast); blackish chevrons forming generally complete necklace (beneath the red) on lower breast and distinctly white breast sides, with streaks extending to upper flanks; chin and forehead often white, with pale supercilium (often more prominent behind eye); mantle, scapulars and sometimes some tertials have black centres and broad bright rusty fringes, but inner wing-coverts and most/all tertials (and often some/many lower scapulars) very contrastingly plainer, greyish or brownish (as winter); mantle V variably distinct, can be faint/lacking. Little has orangey or chestnut

head and breast (including sides) extensively streaked/spotted dark (can appear uniform from distance), but throat always white; usually has pale split supercilium (variable); inner wing-coverts, lower scapulars and tertials do not contrast with rest of upperparts; mantle V usually prominent (but less than on juvenile). Note that summer-plumaged Sanderling *C. alba* can resemble Red-necked, but is larger, bulkier, has fine streaking on ear-coverts and throat, lacks hind toe and, when worn, lacks dark necklace (see also Grant 1986).

Voice Little gives a short, sharp, fairly high-pitched 'tit', 'stit' or 'chit' flight call, often in short series; Red-necked's is less sharp, slightly lower and more squeaky, 'week', but often with an 'I' or 'r' sound, 'kreep', 'klüt', 'klürp'. Much practice needed, however, to interpret calls, which also vary depending on bird's 'mood' or degree of alarm.

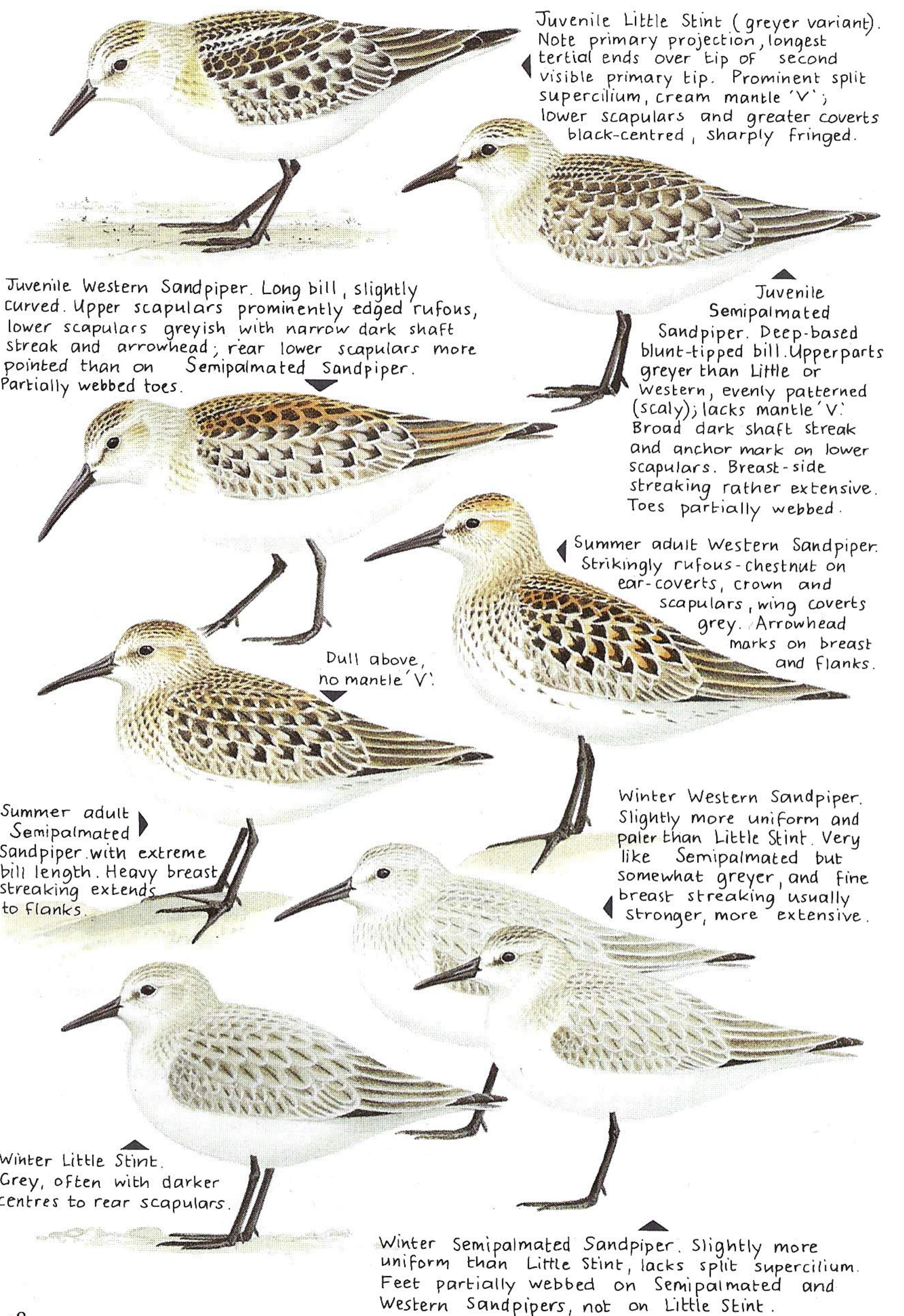
Behaviour Little is usually very active and lively, making fast runs, but will also pick more slowly and methodically. Red-necked often similar, though frequently more lethargic, more deliberate in feeding actions.

Semipalmated and Western Sandpipers

These two very similar species need also (especially Semipalmated) to be distinguished from Little Stint (see above).

Shape and Structure Semipalmated rather as Little in shape, marginally stouter, and has shortish primary projection (2-3 closely spaced tips). Western similar but with comparatively larger and squarer head and longer body (looks rather flat-backed and often front-heavy), with very short primary projection (1-2 closely spaced tips).

Bare Parts Classic Semipalmated have short (1-2 times loral length), straight, deep-based and blunt-tipped bill, often with lateral expansion at tip ('blob-tipped' effect), but some have longer, slightly decurved or down-kinked bill close to Western (overlap with shorter-billed birds of latter). Western typically has longer/much longer (up to 3 times loral length), slightly decurved, more



tapering and fine-tipped bill (can recall Dunlin *C. alpina*). Both have legs as Little Stint, but toes partially webbed; Western often looks slightly longer-legged than Semipalmated.

Plumage Juvenile Main distinguishing features are: 1 **HEAD** Typical Semipalmated have prominent whitish supercilium, contrasting with fairly uniformly streaked dark crown (lacks clear split-supercilium effect and dark crown 'ridge'), dark lores and dark ear-coverts; narrow white eye-ring often accentuated by greyish/streaked area above eye. Western can look comparatively 'pale-faced', with prominent white supercilium usually broadest on forehead sides, contrasting with dark loral line, and ear-coverts paler (as nape) than on Semipalmated; streaked crown greyish, usually darker in centre (usually with rufous tones, which also frequently present on ear-coverts); upper half of thin white eyering sometimes merges with supercilium. 2 **UPPERPARTS** On Semipalmated, generally much less rufous and more scaly in appearance than on Little Stint or Western Sandpiper: dark-centred feathers (inner coverts slightly paler) have prominent buff/whitish fringes; rear lower scapulars show broad dark shaft streak with very broad anchor-shaped 'blob' inside whitish tip; V marks lacking or very faint. Western is greyish or rufous above, but always with some rich rufous fringes on at least mantle and prominently on upper scapulars, with lower scapulars and inner coverts normally contrastingly greyer (rear lower scapulars more pointed in shape than on Semipalmated, with narrower shaft streak and dark arrowhead shape inside white tip); mantle and scapular Vs faint or lacking (sometimes more distinct). Note that some Semipalmated can show some stronger rusty tones to upperparts and crown, and the brightest of these can be very like Red-necked, Western or Little. 3 **BREAST PATTERN** Typical fresh Semipalmated has buffish wash often extending across whole breast, with fairly extensive (but diffuse) dark streaking at sides, while fresh Western has pale to fairly strong orangey-buff wash to

breast, with sometimes better-defined dark streaks at sides (breast markings, however, variable). **Adult winter/1st-winter** Upper-parts of both average slightly more uniform than on Little Stint (lone individuals difficult to judge). Semipalmated tends to be a shade browner, less grey, than Western (which is also paler than Little/Red-necked), and below has diffuse streaking restricted to greyish breast sides (centre of breast white), whereas Western has fine but sharply defined streaks on pale grey breast sides (at very close range seen to extend as complete narrow band of very fine streaks across whole breast). 1st-winters of both show worn retained juvenile wing-coverts (browner and more broadly paler-fringed than more uniform, greyer adult winter feathers). Of interest is that most juvenile Western appear to moult earlier (from late August) than Semipalmated, but this may not be relevant to vagrants (which often delay moult). **Adult summer** Relatively easy to separate. Fresh-plumaged Semipalmated dull above, with dark feathers fringed greyish/buff (V marks absent or very faint), lacking obvious rufous (with wear, can show some brighter tinges above and on crown and ear-coverts), but with inner wing-coverts brownish-grey and contrasting with black-centred scapulars; heavy streaking across breast extends to upper flanks. Western normally highly distinctive, with chestnut colour, especially around head, very striking: extensive rufous-chestnut bases to lower scapulars and usually also on sides of crown, ear-coverts and upper scapulars, with fairly contrasting plain greyish inner wing-coverts and tertials; below, arrowhead markings cover entire breast and extend well down flanks, often continuing as streaks onto undertail-coverts (in worn plumage, marks may form almost solid blackish areas on breast). In late summer, when moult to winter almost complete, presence of just one or two arrowheads is diagnostic of Western. **Voice** Semipalmated has a coarse, distinctly low-pitched, short 'turp', 'chrrup' or 'krrüt'. Western gives thin, high-pitched 'jeet' or

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'krreep', rather drawn-out, but will often utter fairly harsh Dunlin-like 'kree'.

Behaviour Semipalmed much as Little Stint, but also occasionally more hesitant (almost plover-like) in feeding action. Western more akin to Dunlin, tends to be more methodical in surface-picking movements, frequently probes in mud; often wades, in deeper water than other stints.

Least and Long-toed Sandpipers

Shape and Structure Least is the smallest of all stints, tiny, with steeper and more rounded forehead than almost equally small Long-toed's longer, flatter forehead; appears short-legged, short-necked and often hunched (more compact), whereas Long-toed is longer-legged and longer-necked, with smallish head (can recall miniature Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*). Both (especially Long-toed) can look long-bodied, and have very short/invisible primary projection (1 or 2 closely spaced tips). In flight, toes project distinctly beyond tail on Long-toed but not on Least (but latter shows somewhat clearer wingbar).

Bare Parts Both have medium-length, fairly narrow-based and fine-tipped black bill, often slightly decurved (note lower edge of lower mandible); Long-toed has clear pale (yellowish) base to lower and sometimes also upper mandible (whole base always dark on Least). Both have pale (yellowish, yellow-green, yellow-brown, even dull orangey) legs (but beware dark-legged stints with mud-covered legs) and unwebbed, rather long toes; on Long-toed, however, middle toe abnormally long, clearly longer than bill length (about same as bill on Least).

Plumage In most plumages, Least generally appears browner, with fewer bright colours than Long-toed, which can recall Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *C. acuminata* in general pattern (particularly of head). Both can resemble Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos* (exceptionally small individuals of latter not unknown). **Juvenile** Easily distinguished by following characters. **1 HEAD** Least is generally plainer and less contrasting, with duller supercilia

meeting across forehead (can occasionally have very narrow darker central forehead) and dark lores, cheeks and ear-coverts with slightly paler area below/behind eye (so dark ear-covert patch may appear more obliquely positioned than on Long-toed). On Long-toed, supercilia normally whiter, stop short of dark forehead (but often drop down to break loral stripe) and continue strongly behind eye to meet paler, grey-brown nape (creating capped effect), often with whitish or pale rufous outer crown-stripe giving split supercilium (can be striking); whole pattern is emphasised by generally more solidly dark rear ear-coverts. **2 UPPERPARTS** Overall, Least looks more scalloped above compared with 'stripy' appearance of Long-toed; usually has rufous fringes but colour subdued (and rapidly becomes rather dull, in August/September), and wing-covert fringes complete and more buffish (not white), giving comparatively more uniform pattern (mantle V inconspicuous). Long-toed much brighter rufous, with tertial edges prominently rufous/rusty, and with clear, contrasting whitish tips/fringes to inner median coverts (but pale tips usually broken by thin dark central line), and frequently shows distinctive mantle V; lower scapulars normally longer and with larger black area near tip than on Least. Both become much plainer when worn, but Long-toed should still average somewhat less uniform than Least. **3 BREAST** On Least, buffy-brown with rather uniform coarse dark streaks often forming breast band; on Long-toed, streaks finer and often extend to flanks (unmarked on Least), but breast centre often paler/unstreaked. **Adult winter/1st-winter** Both are much browner (less grey) than other stints treated here. Best separated by pattern of scapulars and (mainly inner) wing-coverts: on Long-toed these have well-marked blackish centres and contrasting broad greyish-brown fringes (on Least, diffuse dark centres/shaft streaks and narrow pale fringes, creating less contrasty pattern). Note that differences become less marked in worn plumage, but Long-toed's larger dark centres still more obvious. Head pattern much as for juveniles

