

Dunlin

Calidris alpina

Bird · Winter visitor · Aug–Apr



Photo by Charles Homler d/b/a FocusOnWildlife, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

A small, dumpy wader with a slightly downcurved black bill — the standard against which other small waders are judged. In winter it is plain grey-brown above and white below; in summer plumage it has a bright chestnut back and a distinctive black belly patch. Dunlin winter on the Solway mudflats in very large numbers, and passage birds pass through in spring and autumn.

BEHAVIOUR

Dunlin feed in busy, tightly packed flocks, working the tideline with a fast 'sewing machine' probing action. Their flight is the spectacle: several thousand birds wheeling in unison ahead of the rising tide or a hunting peregrine, flickering dark and then white as the whole flock turns. Only small numbers breed in Britain, mostly on northern moorland; the winter birds are visitors.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Sandpipers and allies (Scolopacidae)
SIZE	17–21 cm · starling-sized
UK STATUS	Red-listed