

June's photo plainly depicts a shorebird. The feature that is most striking in the picture is the series of heavy dark markings that extend along the sides well down onto the flanks and across the belly. Also noteworthy is the fairly heavy, long, and slightly decurved blunt bill. A small whitish mark anterior to the eye and a dusky breast round out the features that make the pictured bird distinctive and its identification reasonably straightforward.

The longish and slightly decurved stout bill immediately removes plovers as possibilities, while the heavy patterning on the underparts eliminates the structurally similar Red Knot. Few East Coast scolopacids (sandpipers) have such prominent and extensive flank markings, most notably the juvenile Dunlin, White-rumped Sandpiper, and Purple Sandpiper.

Despite the fact that the pictured species appears to have the long-winged appearance of a White-rumped Sandpiper, the overall darkness of the bird, heaviness of the bill and ventral markings, and the absence of a pale supercilium (eyebrow stripe) all serve to discount that species. Likewise, the relatively undrooped and blunt bill tip, extensive dusky wash across the upper breast, and the prominent white mark in front of the eye remove the Dunlin as a candidate.

At this point only the Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*) remains as a possibility, which is precisely what this mystery sandpiper is. The Purple Sandpiper is identified by the combination of the bold pattern on its underparts, dusky chest markings, heavy blunt bill, white mark in front of the eye, and chunky build. The species' short legs and preference for rocks are also suggested by the photograph. Its hardy constitution makes it one of only a handful of sandpiper species regularly occurring in New England during the winter. The individual in the picture was photographed in May at Scituate, Massachusetts.



Photo by Wayne R. Petersen

## AT A GLANCE

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Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

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