

Sanderling vs Semipalmated Sandpipers: Getting Experience Telling Them Apart



People frequently have trouble learning to identify sanderling (*Calidris alba*), vs semipalmated sandpipers (*Calidris pusilla*). Both are relatively small and have similar markings. A large part of learning to tell them apart is gaining experience seeing them in the field under a variety of conditions. This training module tries to simulate that. You will first learn some identifying features, then will see a number of examples, where you can try your skill at correctly identifying them.



Note

No one can identify every bird species under all conditions all the time. You will run into times when you cannot be sure.

This is expected. The key is to understand how to handle this situation when it happens. Depending upon your task (or goal) you may need to make notes, discard the information, or simply report it as an uncertain observation regarding species.

To refresh your memory, there are four species of birds that we target, can you identify them?



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red knot - REKN



ruddy turnstone - RUTU



sanderling - SAND



semipalmated sandpiper - SESA

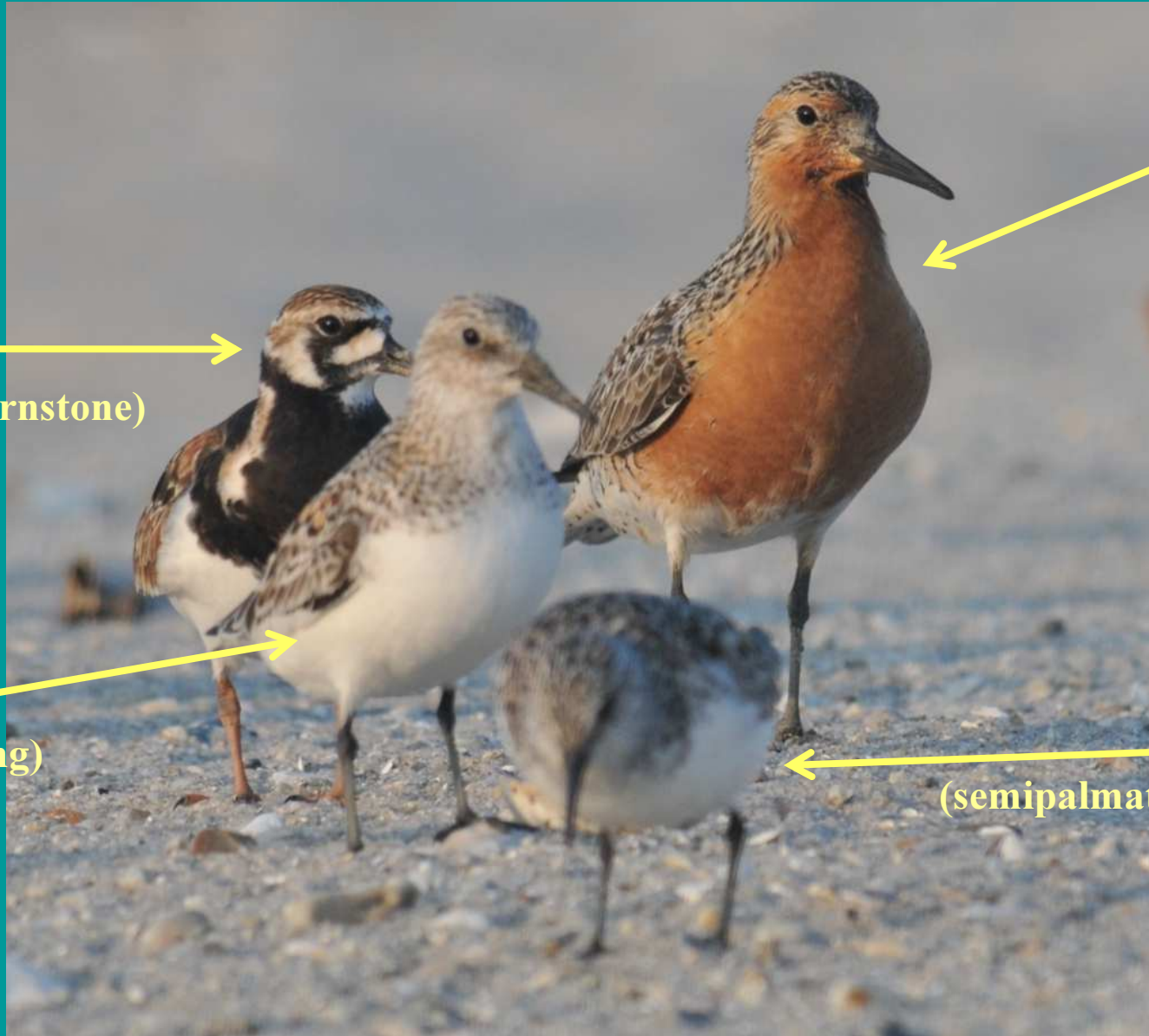
Relative sizes and colors:

RUTU
(ruddy turnstone)

SAND
(sanderling)

REKN
(red knot)

SESA
(semipalmated sandpiper)



Two other species commonly encountered with our target species are dunlin



Note: Some dunlin (DUNL) have been flagged. If one is encountered, record it.

And short-billed dowitcher (SBDO).



Now lets dive deeper into sanderlings and semipalmated sandpipers

Both are commonly encountered at our survey sites. Both may occur together in mixed flocks. While sanderling are larger, almost the size of a dunlin, their plumage is variable and at a distance the relative sizes may not be obvious. Sanderlings have a rounder, chunkier appearance of the body and bill. The face pattern is blander, their head is larger, their body looks “chunkier” from all angles, and their bill is stouter.



sanderling - SAND



semipalmated sandpiper - SESA



Though not typically helpful in the field, semipalmated sandpipers have a fourth toe. And their foot is partially webbed, for which they are named.



4th toe



Partial webbing

The following slides will have the birds in a variety of situations. Try to identify them, then go to the next slide to see how you did and learn some pointers of what to look for.

Note the relative sizes



Note the relative sizes



dunlin

sanderling

semipalmated sandpiper



Note the plumage variation in the sanderlings

semipalmated

sanderling

semipalmated





Three semiplumbed sandpipers behind a sanderling





Light colored sanderling in a group of semis



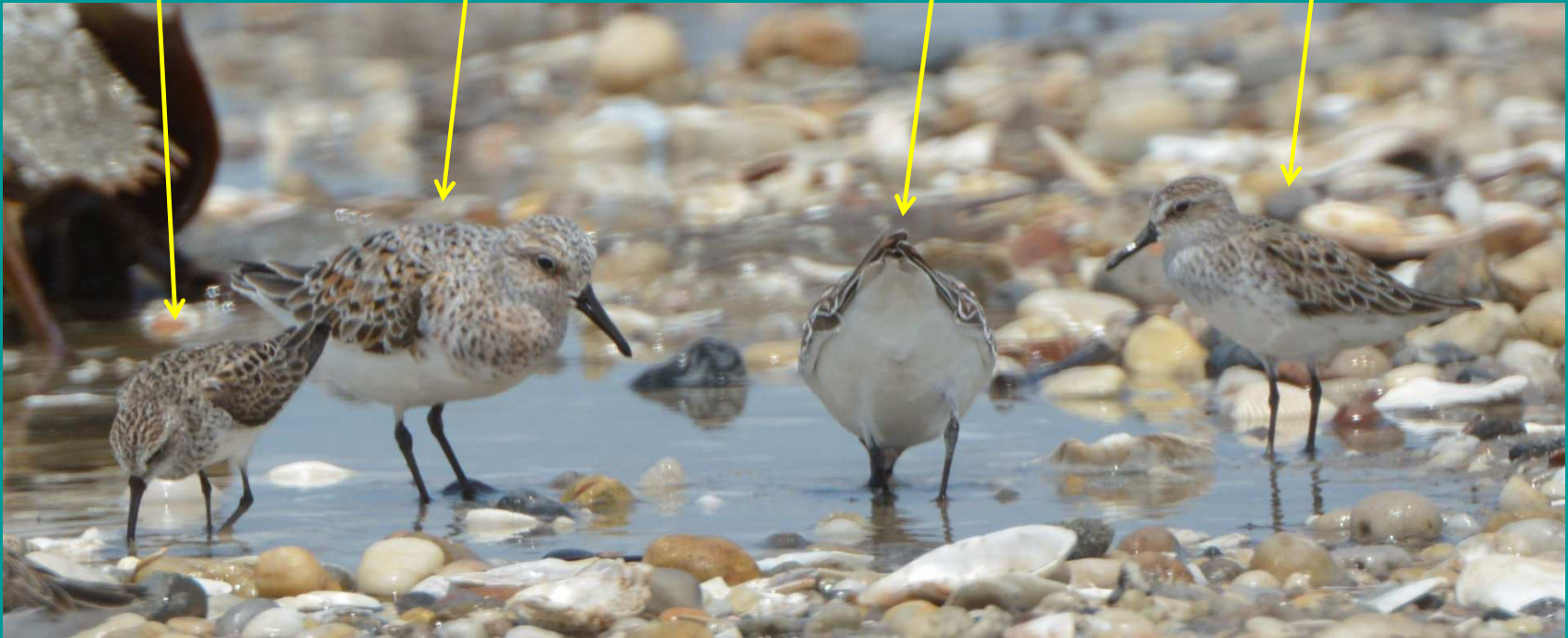


semi

SAND

Probably a
SAND

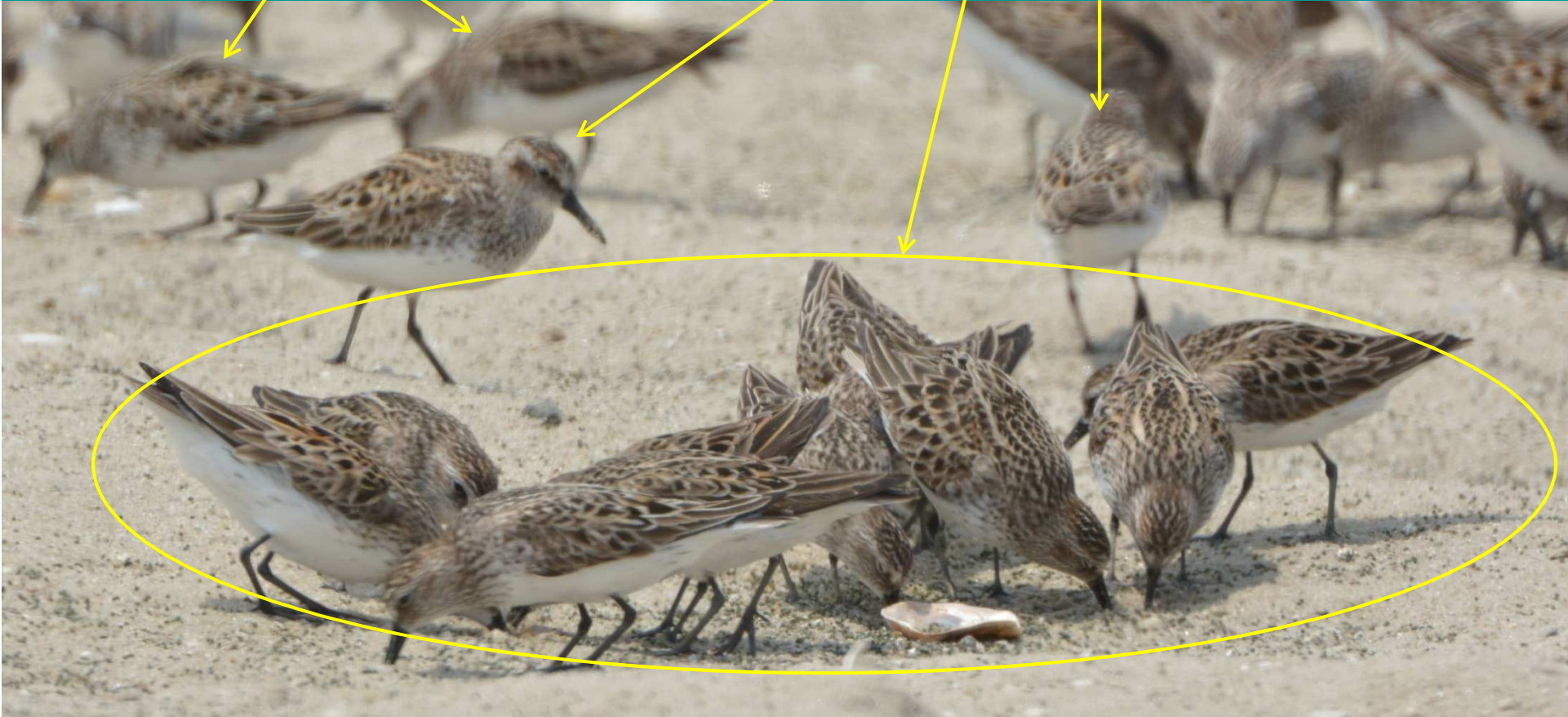
semi





sanderling

semipalmated sandpipers





sanderling in front of a group of semipalmated sandpipers





semi

SAND





ruddy turnstone

semi

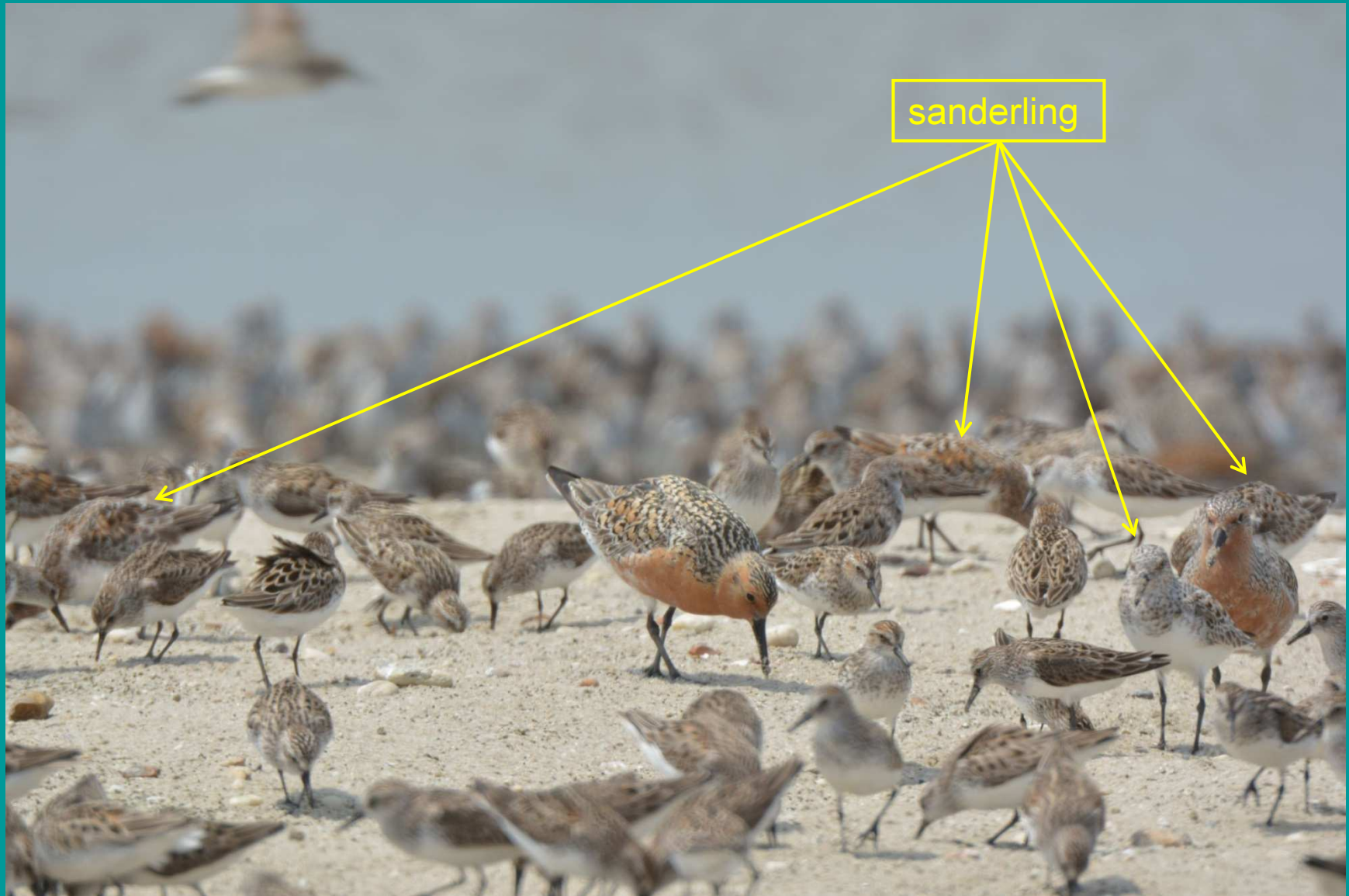
sanderling



dunlin



Two red knots and at least four sanderling in a group of semipalmated sandpipers





Two sanderling among a group of semipalmated sandpipers



Credits

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