

SANDERLING

Calidris alba

Other: *Hunakai*

monotypic

non-breeding visitor, regular winterer

The Sanderling breeds in arctic regions around the world and has a broad wintering range including temperate and tropical regions of both Hemispheres (Dement'ev and Gladkov 1951c, Cramp and Simmons 1983, Higgins and Davies 1996, AOU 1998). It is a regular and fairly common wintering species in the Hawaiian Islands and has been recorded regularly (but less commonly) in Micronesia, the Line and Phoenix Is, Samoa, and Wake and Johnston atolls (Stickney 1943; Clapp and Sibley 1967; Amerson and Shelton 1976; Clapp 1968a, 1990; Pratt et al. 1987; Rauzon et al. 2008). Sanderlings first arrive in the Hawaiian Islands in mid to late July and remain until early to mid-May; smaller numbers over-summer than are found in the other, larger, regularly wintering shorebirds. Slight peaks in counts during mid-Oct and mid-Apr indicate some stopover of transients from the S Pacific but the majority of individuals that reach Hawaii appear to over-winter there. Sanderlings are found primarily in wet habitats, including beaches and coastal lagoons and ponds. The Hawaiian name, *Hunakai*, means blowing sea foam. The first report of this species in Hawaii by a Westerner was that of Archibald Menzies, who shot one on the beach W of Waimea, Kaua'i 12 Mar 1792 and, thinking it was a new species, named it *Charadrius littoreus* (Wilson 1920). Small or "runt" individuals are occasionally encountered in Hawaii (cf. [HRBP](#) 5711-5712) which can be mistook for smaller species of *Calidris* sandpipers (see [Semipalmated Sandpiper](#)).

Sanderlings are relatively uncommon in the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands*, with numbers indicating a greater proportion of transients than are found in the Southeastern Islands, especially to the NW. They ("beach-runners") were first noted on Laysan and Lisianski in Mar 1828 by C. Isnebeck (*in von Kittlitz* 1834). Clapp and Woodward (1968) list five specimens collected by the POBSP at scattered locations. Higher counts for each group, many recorded during the POBSP project (see [Seabird Page](#) for references), include 13 on *Kure* in Sep 1964; 12 at *Midway* in Apr 1996 (see also [HRBP](#) 0365, 6522); 7 at *Pearl and Hermes* in Mar 1968; 25-30 on *Lisianski* in Mar 1954; 111 on *Laysan* on 3 Jan 2012 (Rutt in press; may have been an unusual winter concentration as the high count is otherwise 30-35 birds); 19 at *French Frigate* in Dec 2004; and 1 on *Necker* in Jun 1923 (Wetmore *in* Olson 1996); there are no reports for Gardner or Nihoa. Reflecting a Pacific-wide pattern, records of over-summering birds are proportionally less numerous to the N, with none recorded at Kure, Midway, or Laysan and only 3 on Lisianski in 1967 (Clapp and Wirtz 1975), but annually in small numbers at French Frigate (e.g., Amerson 1971) and including the single record for Necker.

Sanderlings have been recorded on most aerial [DOFAW Waterbird Surveys](#) on *Ni'ihau*, with a high count of 400 on 12 Sep 1996, indicating relatively high populations on this seldom-visited island (although Fisher 1951 noted only 2 there in Aug 1947). A preponderance of sandy shoreline and seasonal wetlands there provides optimum habitat for this species. Higher counts for other *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands*, several recorded during in-land-wide [DOFAW Surveys](#), include 48 at Kawa'iele State Sanctuary, *Kaua'i*,

22 Nov 2003, 48 also at Barking Sands PMR 15 Dec 2015, 45 flying over Kilauea Pt. NWR 7 Apr 2011, and 41 island-wide in Jan 2004; 200 at Kahuku, *O'ahu* 22 Oct 1983, several counts >100 at Waipi'o Peninsula in the 1970s-1980s (e.g., *E* 31:106 and see also [HRBP](#) 0358, 0658, 5224, 5696, 5711-5712) and near Kahuku in 2014-2016, and 360 island-wide in Jan 1995; 65 at Ohiapilo Wetlands, *Molokai* 12 Mar 2010 and 70 island-wide in Aug 1994 (see also [HRBP](#) 5842); 251 at Kealia Pond NWR, *Maui*, 5 Oct 2006, counts >100 annually there in the early 2010s, and 208 island-wide in Jan 2007 (see also [HRBP](#) 6496); 25 on *Lana'i* 21 Oct 1989 and 35 island-wide in Jan 1990; 5 on *Kaho'olawe* 14 Aug 2002; and 32 at Kona (Kealakehe) WTP, *Hawai'i I* 9 Jan 1995 (see also [HRBP](#) 0244) and 40 island-wide the in Jan 2000.

Statewide, [DOFAW Surveys](#) show a cyclic pattern in the 1980s-1997, with peaks in 1986-1990 and 1995-1997, followed by a marked decline in 1998 and a steady increase through the 2000s. The high counts were of 515 in Jan 1995 and 501 in Aug 1996. [Christmas Bird Counts](#) indicate that populations may have declined in w. O'ahu between the 1970s and 2000s but increased again through the mid 2010s ([Graph](#)) and that large numbers recorded around Honolulu in the 1960s have since diminished ([Graph](#)). Small numbers (usually < 5) of over-summering birds are encountered annually at favored locations; the only double-digit records are of 10 birds at Nu'upia Ponds, Mokapu Peninsula, O'ahu 11 Jul 1986, and 12 birds at Ma'alaea, Maui, 21 Jun 1993.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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