

SPECIES OF THE MONTH**BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER****SEPTEMBER 2026**

Arizona was the last U. S. state to have a confirmed report of Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Calidris subruficollis*). The first record was at Paloma Ranch, west of Gila Bend, in Maricopa County, 11-12 September 2002. Since then, 6 more reports have been accepted by the Arizona Bird Committee (ABC) between August and November in 4 counties: Maricopa, Pinal, Pima, and Mohave. The last confirmed report was 9-26 October 2024 at Evergreen Turf sod farm, Pinal County.

Buff-breasted Sandpipers breed along Arctic coastlines from central Alaska east to Devon Island, Canada. They typically leave their nesting area in late July to early September and migrate south more than 30,000 km to their wintering grounds in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. Their principal migration route both in the fall and the spring is through Canada, central United States, and central South America. However, during their fall migration, small numbers of birds diverge from this route and may fly down the Pacific coast and through eastern Canada and the United States. In migration birds typically forage in short grass habitats, including sod farms and drying edges of ponds.

The Buff-breasted Sandpiper, like the Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*) and Mountain Plover (*Charadrius montanus*), challenge the presumption that shorebirds prefer wetlands, mudflats, and similar habitats over comparatively dry upland areas. The Buff-breasted Sandpiper has a lek mating system that is uncommon among shorebirds. The leks are dispersed over a large area with males defending small territories that only serve as display sites to attract females. After selecting a mate, the females then leave to nest and raise their chicks elsewhere.

A medium-sized sandpiper, the Buff-breasted sandpiper has a dove-like head, short straight bill, thin neck, and pale unmarked face with a prominent dark eye. In all plumages, it is overall buffy with an unmarked breast. Underwings are always white with prominent dark "commas" at the wrists.

This species numbers have significantly declined due to market hunting in the late 1800s and loss of habitat along its migratory route in the Great Plains of North America and wintering grounds in South America. The use of agricultural landscapes during migration and overwintering periods has led to exposure to agricultural chemicals that proved to be toxic to birds.



Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Evergreen Turf sod farm, Pinal County, 14 October 2024. Photo by Tony Shrimpton, Macaulay Library at Cornell Lab (ML624978291)