



WADER  
GURU



*Which is the world's smallest wader / shorebird?*

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**Short answer:** Quail-Plover

**Long answer:** The smallest wader in the world is the Quail-Plover *Ortyxelus meiffrenii* which measures just 10 cm from the tip of its bill to the end of its tail. It weighs in at a minimum (adult) of just 16 grams. Making it also the lightest wader species in the world.

Should the Turnicidae be transferred to the sub order Larii, thus removing them from the waders / shorebirds suborder of Charadrii, then the smallest would be widely accepted as Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* at just 13 cm and weighing in at 17 grams according to the *Handbook of the birds of the World (HBW Vol III)*.

Having said that, despite stating that this is the smallest species of wader in the world, both *HBW Vol III* and *Shorebirds and identification Guide to the Waders of the World* then go on to contradict themselves by quoting sizes for the Little Stint *Calidris minuta* being a minimum of 12 cm.



Quail-Plover *Ortyxelus meiffrenii* © Nik Borrow



Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* © Elis Simpson

*Shorebirds of the Northern Hemisphere* has all of the smaller *Calidris* Sandpipers as the same minimum length of 13 cm, but gives the wing span of Least Sandpiper as 28 cm and Little Stint as 30 cm, thus making Least the smallest.

If we refer back to Witherby's *The Handbook of British Birds* we find that in the measurements of the Little Stint and Least Sandpiper (which is referred to there as the American Stint) in wing, tarsus and bill, Least Sandpiper is consistently smaller.

*The Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa - The Birds of the Western Palearctic* has the following; Least Sandpiper 11-12 cm with a wing of 33-35 and Little Stint 12-14 cm and wing of 34-37.

Whilst the comparative sizes of these species does vary, it is clear that in most cases the Least Sandpiper is indeed the smallest.

**Similar topics:** Which is the world's largest wader/ shorebird?

## Sources:

Chandler: *Shorebirds of the Northern Hemisphere* (2009)

Cramp et al.: *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa - The Birds of the Western Palearctic Vol III* (1983)

del Hoyo et al.: *Handbook of the birds of the World Vol. III* (1996)

Hayman et al.: *Shorebirds and identification Guide to the Waders of the World* (1986)

Snow et al.: *The Birds of the Western Palearctic Concise Edition Vol. I* (1998)

Witherby et al.: *The Handbook of British Birds* (1940)