

# SCIENCE FOR THE BIRDS

## SCIENCE IN ACTION



Diana spends a lot of time in the mud counting shrimp, shorebirds' favourite food.

**DIANA HAMILTON**

**KNOW**  
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**BIRTHPLACE:** Windsor, Nova Scotia

**FAVOURITE FOOD:** Fruit, especially strawberries

**FREE TIME:** Enjoys reading and playing with her two sons, Ben and Aaron. They even do crazy experiments, like seeing how much water a diaper will hold!

**WORKPLACE:** Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick

On a nice summer's day, Dr. Diana Hamilton likes to watch birds from her "perch" in the middle of mud! Diana is an expert on semi-palmated sandpipers. These tiny shorebirds weigh about as much as four marbles, but twice each year they fly almost non-stop between the Arctic, where they nest, and South America, where they spend the winter.

On their flight south, the birds make one stop, and that is on the mud flats in the Bay of Fundy. The sandpipers stop for two weeks to do one thing: eat, and eat, and eat some more. "The Bay of Fundy is like a gas station for the birds," says Diana. "It's where they

fuel up to ensure they have enough energy to make the flight south."

Diana and her students capture the shorebirds and place small radio transmitters on their feathers. Then they track the birds' movements from a plane or from a hideout in the bush.

Diana has always enjoyed birds and other animals. As a child, she was active in the 4H Club and had many pets, including a cow, Snowflake, which Diana rode. "I was going to be a vet," she says, "but then I found that research was so much fun. I get to take things I like, such as birds, and learn all about them."