



## Piping Plover FACT SHEET

# Piping Plover: An Endangered Species

## Background

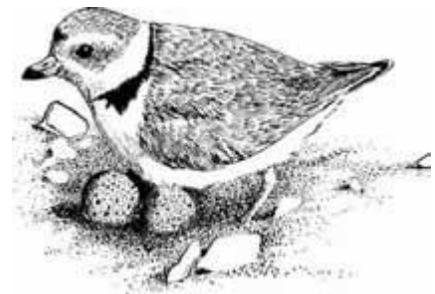
The piping plover is an endangered shorebird that nests and feeds along coastal sand and gravel beaches. The adults can be recognized by their size, shape and colouring. They are about the same size as a sparrow, and have orange legs, a black band across their foreheads from eye to eye, and a black ring around their necks. Their body is sand-coloured, which helps them blend into their surroundings.

## Population and Range

The piping plover has been on the endangered species list since 1982 and has seen a declining trend in population size. In 2013, there were only 389 plover pairs in eastern Canada. This species ranges from Canada to the United States and the Caribbean. They are here in Canada for the summer months – around the Great Lakes in Ontario, in the Prairie Provinces and in Atlantic Canada, where they can be found in each of the four provinces. In the winter, they migrate to the southern United States and the Caribbean.

## Nests

Piping plovers usually arrive in Atlantic Canada in April to establish nesting areas and form pairs. Their nest is a small depression in the sand, just above the high tide line, which may contain a few small shells and rocks for camouflage. They usually lay four eggs. Both adults help with incubation and after about 26 days, the young hatch. Within hours, they leave the nest and follow their parents in search of their first meal. A favourite food is beach hoppers or marine worms and insects, which they find in the sand. If all goes well, after about 20 to 25 days, the young are able to fly.



Male and female piping plovers take turns incubating eggs.

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Piping plovers will stop feeding when humans get too close.

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## What you can do to help

Respect signs and stay out of areas of the beach that are closed for piping plover.

Leave your dog at home.

Remember to take any litter home with you that you may have brought to the beach.

Learn more about this and other endangered species.

Share what you know about the piping plover with family and friends.

Find out how you can help through guardian programs in your area.

## Defences

To protect themselves from danger, piping plover chicks crouch motionless in the sand so that they are almost impossible to see because of their camouflage. The adult plovers try to lure predators or danger away from the eggs or young chicks by pretending to have a broken wing and then flying away when they have lead the predator a safe distance away.

While these are very good strategies, too much time spent not eating, or too much time spent away from the nest, can also be harmful. If the young chicks aren't able to gain enough weight, the migration will be extremely difficult or impossible for them. Should the adults spend too much time away from the nest while the eggs are incubating, they will get cold and won't hatch.

## Location

In eastern Canada, piping plovers are closely monitored by Parks Canada in Atlantic Canada at Gros Morne, Kejimikujik, Kouchibouguac and Prince Edward Island National Parks.

In the summer of 2013 there were 6 piping plovers pairs nesting in Prince Edward Island National Park, 9 pairs in Kouchibouguac National Park, and 5 pairs in Kejimikujik National Park.

## Want to know more?

### Prince Edward Island National Park

Mailing Address:  
2 Palmers Lane, Charlottetown PE, C1A5V8  
Telephone: (902) 672-6350  
Fax: (902) 672-6370  
Website: [www.pc.gc.ca/pei](http://www.pc.gc.ca/pei)

## Reasons for Species Loss

### Human Use of Beaches

Piping plover nests are very difficult to see and are sometimes walked on by accident. Piping plovers will also stop feeding when people get too close.

Sometimes, people bring dogs with them to the beach. Piping plovers see them as predators, which keeps them from feeding. Unleashed dogs have also been known to destroy piping plover nests.

### Predators

Garbage, which people sometimes leave on the beaches, can attract predators. Increased populations of predators such as red foxes, raccoons, skunks, crows, and gulls increase threats to piping plover populations.

### Natural Events

Storms will sometimes cause the tides to rise to such a level that the piping plover nests are flooded and the adult plovers will expend more energy to "re-nest."