



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

**TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW Time (7:18)**

**GREAT LAKES PIPING PLOVER (HOST – SARAH LEON WITH JACK  
DINGLEDINE )**

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

**P R O C E E D I N G S**

(Music plays.)

**MS.LEON:** Hello there. This is Sarah Leon for the US Fish and Wildlife Service. I'm on the phone today with Jack Dingledine, the Great Lakes Piping Plover Recovery Coordinator. Hi, Jack. How are you doing?

**MR. DINGLEDINE:** I'm very well. Thank you.

**MS.LEON:** Great. Jack, do you have some time to talk to us today about the piping plover?

**MR. DINGLEDINE:** Yes, I do.

**MS.LEON:** Earlier this year we actually covered the Atlantic Coast piping plover population. But can you tell us a little about this species to remind our listeners?

**MR. DINGLEDINE:** Yes. The piping plover is a small, sand colored shorebird that in some ways resembles a killdeer, but is distinctive as a shorebird in that it has these bright orange legs and a very distinctive black band around its neck, and also a single black band across the forehead.

The bird nests on wide, sandy beaches here in the Great Lakes and also on the Atlantic Coast. The birds make a very simple scrape out on the beach and normally line this scrape with some small pebbles or shells. That's where they lay their eggs. Typically,

it's a clutch of four eggs. They hatch in about 25 to 30 days.

Then the young chicks are out and they run around on the beach. They're precocial, which means that they feed themselves and they're out there. The parents tend to them as they are raised. It takes about 30 days before those chicks are able to fly.

Birds here in the Great Lakes arrive sometime in April and they stay through most of the spring and summer. Then our birds return to their wintering grounds beginning in late summer, August or September.

**MS.LEON:** Okay, Jack. This is a wide-ranging species, breeding in three geographic regions. There's the Atlantic Coast population, the Northern Great Plains population, and the Great Lakes population of course. But only the Great Lakes population is listed as endangered. Can you tell us why this is?

**MR. DINGLELINE:** Well, historically, we think that the bird was never particularly abundant in the Great Lakes. Some authors have estimated that there was between 600 and 800 pairs in the Great Lakes historically. But by the 1970s, the birds were extirpated from all the states in the Great Lakes but Michigan and their numbers were reduced drastically.

In fact, by the time they were listed as endangered in 1986, there were only 17 breeding pairs remaining. So you could imagine with a population that had reached a level of only 17 breeding pairs, they really were considered critically endangered at the time that they were listed.

Now they're doing better. Last year we had 71 breeding pairs in the Great Lakes. Which is a big improvement over the number at the time of listing, but still critically endangered.

**MS.LEON:** Now we're finding that climate change is actually having a profound effect on birds throughout the country. How might the Great Lakes population be affected with the onset of climate change; what are the future implications for small shorebirds?

**MR. DINGLELINE:** That's a great question. In fact, we're currently working on a proposal with other federal agency partners to help us get a better understanding of how climate change might affect Great Lakes' piping plover as well as other shorebirds in the Great Lakes.

Some authors predict that one of the effects of future climate change will be decreased levels of water in the Great Lakes. That will result in much wider, broader shorelines, at least temporarily. That could potentially have a benefit for piping plovers who like these wide, sandy beaches.

But there's a lot we don't know yet about how climate change will ultimately affect piping plover habitat. It could be better in the short-term but then maybe not as good over the

long-term. We don't know what the configuration of the shoreline will look like if we have drastic, prolonged declines in water levels in the Great Lakes. But we're working on trying to get some of those answers.

**MS.LEON:** All right, Jack. Can you tell us about some of the conservation actions that are currently under way, and who are some of the key cooperators helping to carry those out?

**MR. DINGLEDINE:** We have a lot going on in the Great Lakes in terms of recovery activities. We do regular surveys and nest protection at every site. It's still our goal here in the Great Lakes to find every breeding pair and to put up one of these wire nest enclosures, like they use on the Atlantic Coast, to help protect eggs from predators. Then there's some additional signs and just some thin rope that goes around an area to establish a temporary closed area on the beach. They keep people away from birds and let them successfully get through a full breeding season.

One of the other things that we do in the Great Lakes that's a little different, we have a salvage captive rearing operation. If nests are abandoned for whatever reason during the season, we have the opportunity to bring those in to a temporary facility where we incubate the eggs, hand-rear the chicks, and then release them back out into the wild within the same year. It's not a captive breeding program, but we're able to salvage eggs and return chicks to the wild within one season. And that's been a big boost to our population.

We have lots of different partners involved in recovery in the Great Lakes. They range from the National Park Service, particularly at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, to the US Forest Service, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. We have universities like the University of Minnesota who has been very active in recovery and research activities for many years.

Then relative to our salvage captive rearing operation, the Detroit Zoo has led an effort to actually bring people from zoos from across the country to Michigan to assist in our salvage captive rearing efforts. So we have a broad range of partners, everywhere from federal and state agencies to universities, and even nonprofit organizations.

**MS.LEON:** Just thinking a little more about our listeners at home, what can someone who is truly interested in this species do to make a difference; is there anything they do to help recovery?

**MR. DINGLEDINE:** I think the first thing that they can do is be sure that if you're out on the beach and you see some of our signs asking people to keep their distance from our nest sites, to please obey those signs. And if you bring your dog to the beach, please be sure that you keep your dog on a leash.

Also, if you bring food or other materials to the beach, if you would please take those

with you because litter can also attract potential predators to piping plover. So keeping the beach clean is something that people can help.

Lastly, I would say here in the Great Lakes there's opportunities for people to volunteer to help us with some of our efforts. We have some sites, such as at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, where volunteers assist us in some of the early nest survey and protection efforts that we have going on at that location. So there's also good volunteer opportunities here in the Great Lakes, as well.

**MS.LEON:** Thank you so much, Jack, for taking some time out of your day to talk to us about this bird. It was a real pleasure having you on.

**MR. DINGLEDINE:** Thanks so much. It was a pleasure.

**MS.LEON:** For the US Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Sarah Leon. Thanks for listening.  
(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)