

NOVEMBER 2010

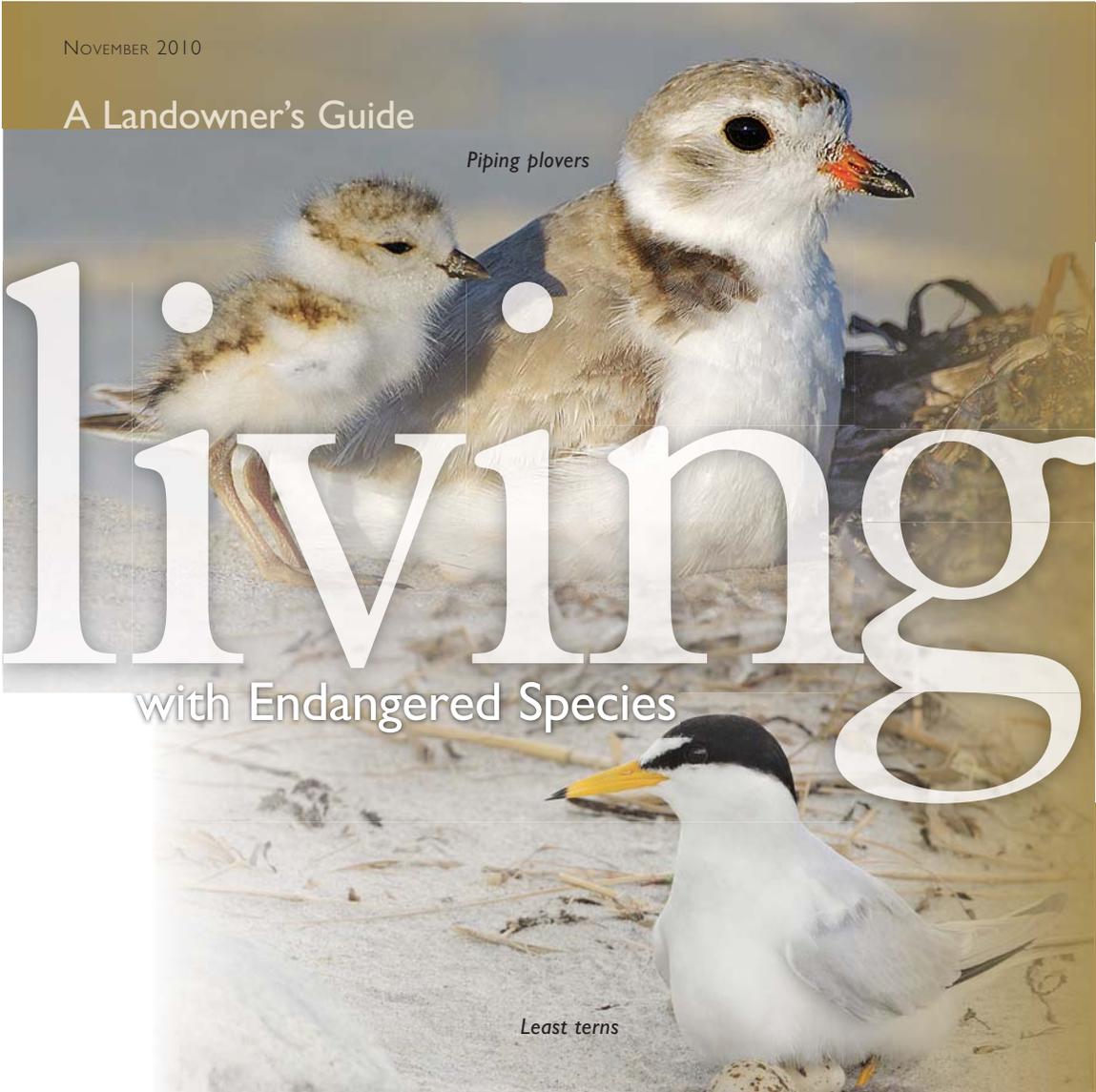
A Landowner's Guide

Piping plovers

living

with Endangered Species

Least terns



introduction

Each spring, piping plovers and least terns return to southern Maine's coastal beaches to nest and raise their young. Both species are so rare that they are listed as endangered in Maine (at risk of extinction in our state). Piping plovers are also federally listed as threatened.

The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW), Maine Audubon, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service work in partnership with private landowners and others to conserve these rare birds.

Partnerships between private landowners, nonprofit organizations, and federal, state and local governments are essential to the recovery of piping plovers and least terns in Maine.



why are they so rare?

Loss and degradation of sandy beach habitat (from development and beach stabilization projects) is the primary reason for their decline.

Along with more people, come more predators like raccoons, foxes, and crows due in part to increased food availability in areas of human use.

Predators eat the eggs and chicks of plovers and terns.



Pets, such as unleashed dogs and outdoor cats, have caused nest failures and even killed newly hatched chicks and fledglings.

People can also inadvertently harm plovers and terns if nests aren't marked and protected.

Piping Plovers



Feeding Habits:

Besides the sandy beach, foraging occurs at low tide in the intertidal zone (sand flats and estuaries) and where seaweed washes up.

The plover's diet primarily consists of marine worms, crustaceans, and insects.



Nesting Habits:

Nests are usually above the tide line, on sandy beaches, and in areas of sparse vegetation.

Upon arrival, pairs establish and defend breeding territories.

Nests are shallow scrapes in the sand, in which up to four eggs are laid.



Defense of Nest and Chicks:

When an intruder gets close to a nest or chick, the parent will peep loudly and drag one wing on the ground.

This draws attention away from the nest and chicks.

A predator may follow the injured-looking parent, in search of an easy meal.



Chicks and Fledglings

Piping plover chicks hatch with the ability to run and to find their own food. Broods of chicks often forage together, and their parents are usually nearby.

- During a plover chick's first week of life, its best defense against predators is to freeze.
- The chicks' sand-colored down helps them blend in with the beach, but also makes them easy to be trampled.

At 25 days of age, plover chicks have reached their adult size and are able to fly. By mid-August, they begin their first migration along the Atlantic coast to winter on beaches from North Carolina to Florida, the Bahamas and the Gulf coast.



Least Terns



Feeding Habits:

Least terns forage just offshore near river mouths and in estuaries.

They catch fish by diving headfirst into the water.

Courtship involves males offering fish to potential mates.



Nesting Habits:

Nests consist of a small scrape in the sand just above the high tide line.

They lay 1- 3 eggs and both parents incubate for 21 days.

Terns nest in colonies in Maine; 100-200 pairs may nest together at one site.



Defense of Nest and Chicks:

Colonial nesting allows terns to work together to spot predators.

When a colony is disturbed, adults take to the air and chicks may scatter or hide.

Adults vocalize, dive-bomb, and defecate on potential predators to drive them away.



Chicks and Fledglings

After hatching, least tern chicks remain near their nest for several days and are dependent on their parents to feed them fish. As they get older they hide in the wrackline (washed-up seaweed) or in the vegetation.

Tern chicks fledge in 21 days, but still need to learn how to capture their own fish. Fledglings can be seen by the waterline waiting for parents to feed them. After they learn to fish on their own, they disperse from the beaches, migrating over 2,000 miles to South America!



management

Landowner Options

Piping Plover Nest Enclosures: Fences that are 15 feet in diameter can be placed around each nest by biologists to protect the eggs from predators.

Signs and Fencing: Restricted Area signs, along with stake and twine, prevent the eggs of both species from being inadvertently crushed underfoot, and create undisturbed foraging and resting areas.

Predator Control: Removal of predators by professionals has been found to dramatically increase fledgling success in Maine and in many other States.

Volunteer Steward: You can also help out by monitoring your land, repairing fences, asking people to leash pets and educating renters and visitors.





what you can do to help

Keep dogs leashed and cats indoors (April 1st to August 15th).

Stay out of fenced areas marked with “Restricted Area” signs.

Never chase or pick up plover or tern chicks.

Refrain from feeding the gulls; they may become predators of young chicks.

Leave no trace:

- Fill holes in the sand; they trap flightless chicks.
- Take food and trash with you; garbage attracts predators!

Fly kites away from nesting areas. Birds mistake kites for predators, leaving their nests to ward off the “intruders.”

If you see any disturbances to nesting areas, please notify the proper authorities.

Volunteer! All ages welcome. Call Maine Audubon for more details (207) 233-6811.



questions?

Frequently Asked Questions

What if I see a plover nesting in an unprotected area?

Call Maine Audubon at 233-6811 and let us know! We appreciate hearing from you.

If I see an abandoned chick, what should I do with it?

Do not pick up the chick or go near it. Parents are seldom far from their chicks. Please leave the area and the parents will return.

How long will the exclosures and fencing stay up?

After the chicks hatch (28 days), exclosures are removed. The fenced area continues to provide a safe haven for foraging and resting chicks. We will work with you to remove fencing to meet your individual needs.

What should I do if I see someone harassing the birds?

Immediately call Maine Audubon at 233-6811, Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge at 646-9226 or the Warden Service (reached by calling the State Police). If you can't reach anyone above, call your local police.





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