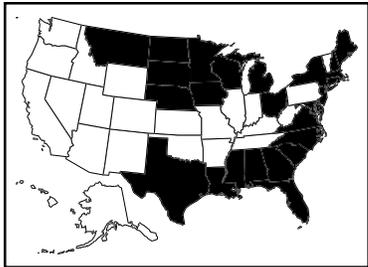
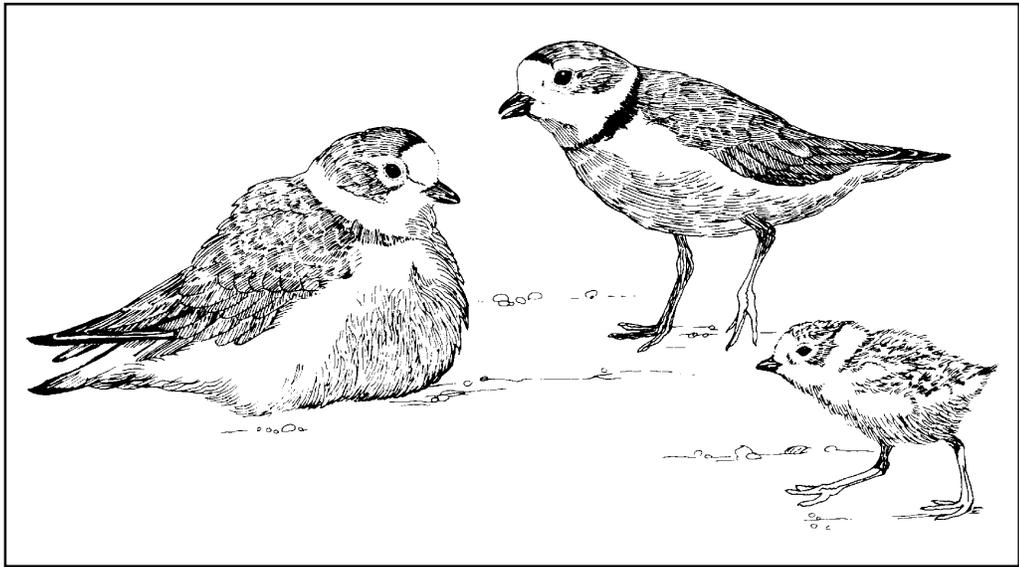




Endangered Species Facts



States in which the piping plover is found. This map includes both summer and winter locations.

Piping Plover

The piping plover in the Great Lakes area is an *endangered species*. Endangered species are animals and plants that are in danger of becoming extinct. The Northern Great Plains and Atlantic Coast piping plovers are *threatened species*. Threatened species are animals and plants that are likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. Identifying, protecting, and restoring endangered and threatened species is the primary objective of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's endangered species program.

What is the Piping Plover?

Scientific Name - *Charadrius melodus*

Appearance - These small, stocky shorebirds have a sand-colored upper body, a white underside, and orange legs. During the breeding season, adults have a black forehead, a black breast band, and an orange bill.

Habitat - Piping plovers use wide, flat, open, sandy beaches with very little grass or other vegetation. Nesting territories often include small creeks or wetlands.

Reproduction - The female lays four eggs in its small, shallow nest lined with pebbles or broken shells. Both parents care for the eggs and chicks. When the chicks hatch, they are able to run about and feed themselves within hours.

Feeding Habits - The plovers eat insects, spiders, and crustaceans.

Range - Piping plovers are migratory birds. In the spring and summer they breed in the northern United States and Canada. There are three locations where piping plovers nest in North America: the shorelines of the Great Lakes, the shores of rivers and lakes in the Northern Great Plains, and along the Atlantic Coast. Their nesting range has become smaller over the years, especially in the Great Lakes area. In the fall, plovers migrate south and winter along the Gulf Coast or other southern locations.

The Great Lakes population of the piping plover is at a perilously low level. Since 1983, the number of nesting pairs has ranged from 12 to 32. In 2000, all of the Great Lakes pairs nested in Michigan.

Why is the piping plover endangered?

Habitat Loss or Degradation - Many of the coastal beaches traditionally used by piping plovers for nesting have been lost to commercial, residential, and recreational developments. Through the use of dams or other water control structures, humans are able to raise and lower the water levels of many lakes and rivers of plover inland nest sites. Too much water in the spring floods the plovers' nests. Too little water over a long period of time allows grasses and other vegetation to grow on the prime nesting beaches, making these sites unsuitable for successful nesting.

Nest Disturbance and Predation - Piping plovers are very sensitive to the presence of humans. Too much disturbance causes the parent birds to abandon their nest. People (either on foot or in a vehicle) using the beaches where the birds nest sometimes accidentally crush eggs or young birds. Dogs and cats often harass and kill the birds. Other animals, such as fox, gulls, and crows, prey on the young plovers or eggs.

What is being done to prevent extinction of the piping plover?

Listing - The Great Lakes population of the piping plover was listed as an endangered species in 1986, and the Northern Great Plains and Atlantic Coast populations were listed as threatened species that same year.

Recovery Plans - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed recovery plans that describe actions that need to be taken to help the bird survive and recover.

Research - Several cooperative research groups have been set up among federal and state agencies, university and private research centers, and the Canadian Wildlife Service. Studies are being conducted to determine where plovers breed and winter, estimate numbers, and monitor long-term changes in populations.

Habitat Protection - Measures to protect the bird's habitat are conducted each year (often by volunteers), including controlling human access to nesting areas, nest monitoring and protection, limiting residential and industrial development, and properly managing water flow. In Michigan, several landowners have formally agreed to protect plover nesting habitat.

Public Education - Many states and private agencies are running successful public information campaigns to raise awareness of the plover's plight. In Michigan, residents of coastal communities where the birds nest have been contacted by an "ambassador" and provided with information about the plight of the plover.

What can I do to prevent the extinction of species?

Learn - Learn more about the piping plover and other endangered and threatened species. Understand how the destruction of habitat leads to loss of endangered and threatened species and our nation's plant and animal diversity. Tell others about what you have learned.

Volunteer - If piping plovers live near you, join the "Plover Patrol" (information about the "Plover Patrol" is on the website to the right). Or volunteer your time at a nearby Nature Center, Wildlife Sanctuary or National Wildlife Refuge. Make sure you control pets, and always remove litter on beaches. Encourage others to do the same.