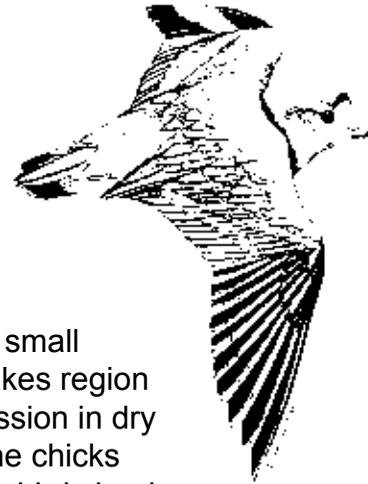


# Great Lakes Piping Plover

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The Great Lakes piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) is a small migratory shorebird that breeds on beaches in the Great Lakes region from May to early August. It lays four eggs in a small depression in dry sand and cobble which are incubated for about a month. The chicks grow quickly and are able to fly in less than four weeks. The birds begin their southern migration in July and all birds have left the Great Lakes area by September. Great Lakes piping plovers spend the winter along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from North Carolina to Texas.

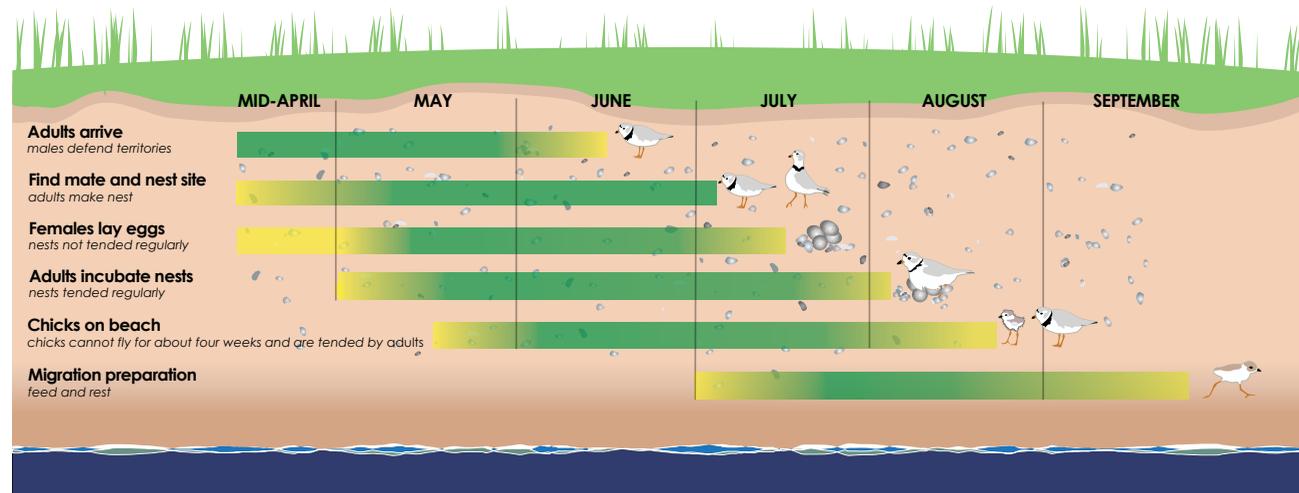
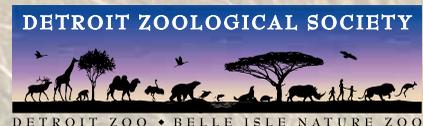
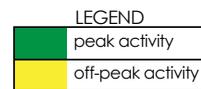


Illustration provided by Environment Canada

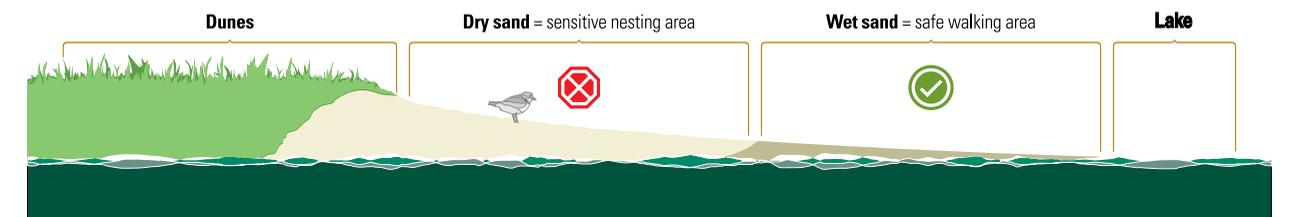


The Great Lakes population has ranged from 50 pairs to more than 70 since 2001, but it is still small enough to be vulnerable to shoreline development, public recreation, predators, human disturbance and extreme weather events. The Great Lakes piping plover population was listed as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act in 1986.

Recovery of the Great Lakes piping plover population is a cooperative effort by individuals, government agencies, universities and conservation organizations. These groups protect and monitor nesting piping plovers throughout the Great Lakes region every summer. Thanks to their hard work and dedication, the number of piping plovers has slowly been increasing since the 1990s.

## Help keep piping plovers safe by following these tips when you are on the beach.

- 1. Stay away from nest enclosures and posted piping plover breeding areas.** When nest sites are observed, walk along the wet sand close to the water's edge.
- 2. Always keep dogs leashed.** Roaming pets can chase and disturb nesting plovers resulting in nest abandonment. All public beaches have leash laws and these will be enforced.
- 3. Pack out your food waste and garbage** to avoid attracting predators and scavengers that will endanger piping plover adults, chicks and eggs.
- 4. Do not operate vehicles on beaches with nesting piping plovers.** Vehicles can disturb piping plovers, destroy nests and damage beach and dune habitat.
- 5. Report the location of piping plovers and their nests** to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or to your state Department of Natural Resources.
- 6. Leave driftwood and algae on the beaches.** Piping plovers and their chicks find food in algae and use driftwood for protection from predators and as shelter.
- 7. Report people or pets disturbing piping plovers or their nests** to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or a state conservation officer at the number listed in this brochure.
- 8. Learn more** about what you can do to help protect piping plovers at your beaches.



(Source: Bird Studies Canada)

Illustration provided by Environment Canada

To report piping plover activity or problems, contact the following organizations:

### U.S. Fish and Wildlife

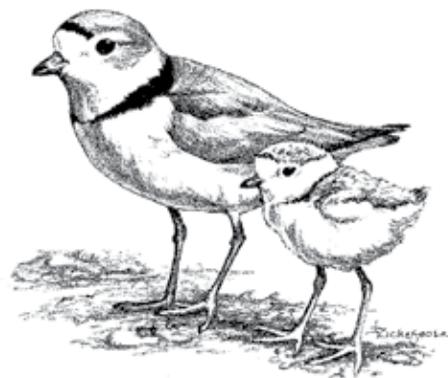
Michigan: (517) 351-2555  
Wisconsin: (920) 866-1717  
Illinois: (847) 381-2253

### Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Endangered Species Coordinator  
(517) 373-1263

### Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Avian Ecologist  
(608) 266-1571



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## Why are Great Lakes piping plovers endangered and what is being done to help?

Many activities affect the Great Lakes piping plover population. Habitat alteration from development or invasive plants can reduce the amount of nesting habitat available to the birds. People who walk too close to nests or dogs that chase adults can cause birds to abandon their nests. Predators can eat chicks or eggs and cause the parents to abandon the nest.



### Protecting Nests and Nesting Sites

Starting in April, sites along the Great Lakes with proper nesting habitat are surveyed to locate nesting piping plovers. Once a nest is found it is protected by placing a wire enclosure over the nest. This provides protection from predators, while allowing the adult plovers to come and go for feeding. The entire nesting site is posted to inform people to keep their distance.

### Monitoring the Population

Most nests are checked daily so that biologists can track survival of adults and chicks. Additionally, threats to plover habitat and nesting success are recorded. This information is used to manage and protect the population. Almost all plovers in the Great Lakes are marked with unique colored leg band combinations, allowing scientists to study dynamics of the population.

### Habitat Changes

Piping plover habitat can be changed or destroyed when beach habitats are developed for housing. If carefully planned, development can occur on shorelines without affecting nesting plovers, landowner enjoyment or access to the shoreline.

Invasive plants such as spotted knapweed, lime grass and phragmites alter habitat along the shorelines and dunes, making it less desirable for nesting plovers. Land managers remove invasive plants each season from many sites where plovers occur.

### Unleashed Dogs

People walk on beaches with their dogs often letting them roam unleashed. Dogs will chase plovers causing them to neglect their nests. Dogs will also chase and catch chicks, resulting in death or injury.

### Environmental Affects

Many environmental conditions affect piping plovers. Each season, strong storms wash away nests; sometimes eggs can be relocated to a captive rearing facility while the adults ride out the storm. Lake levels can affect the amount of suitable nesting habitat available. Invasive aquatic species have changed the Great Lakes, leading to an increase in Botulism E outbreaks and plover mortality. Climate change is an unknown factor that may have a significant impact on plover distribution and habitat availability in the future.

### Predators

Predators that eat piping plover eggs, chicks and adults can have a major impact on the population. Gulls, crows, merlins and coyotes are the most common predators although other species also pose a threat. Human activity near plover nests can attract predators when food scraps are left on the beach.

### Salvage Captive Rearing

Most piping plover nests are monitored daily and every year some nests are abandoned. Eggs from these nests are collected and sent to a captive rearing facility at the University of Michigan Biological Station. The Detroit Zoological Society coordinates the efforts of staff from zoos and aquariums across the U.S. to artificially incubate the eggs and hand rear the chicks. When these chicks are able to fly, they are released to join and increase the wild population of piping plovers.

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