

BAND IDENTIFICATION SKILLS FOR NON-BREEDING PIPING PLOVERS. Sidney B. Maddock, P.O. Box 1359, Buxton, NC, 27920; Sbmaddock@aol.com.

Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) surveys can be modified to increase the location and identification of banded birds. The ability to detect these birds is influenced by the observer's knowledge of Piping Plover habitat types, roosting and feeding behaviors, posture and movements, and vocalizations; the birds can move within a mosaic of habitats in response to factors including weather, tide, and human disturbance. Binoculars can be used to scan a large area, but a spotting scope allows more accurate scanning of certain habitats or groups of birds. The observer should use a spotting scope to check for bands above and below the leg joint on each Piping Plover; it is easy to miss bands using binoculars. Attempt to determine the band type (metal, plastic, or flag), color, and location on the leg; one band may be placed above another or a single band may have multiple colors. Patience and accuracy are critical. The leg of a roosting bird may not be visible or the bird's feathers, sand, or wrack may cover the band. The band's colors may fade or a band may have fallen off. Certain colors may be difficult to identify. Note if you do not see the leg clearly or if you are unsure of the band. As the Piping Plover is federally listed as a threatened species on the wintering grounds, avoiding disturbance is a priority. The observer should monitor the Piping Plover's posture, movements, and vocalizations and not move too close. Disturbing the Piping Plover can result in possible adverse impacts or reduced survey accuracy. A disturbed bird may fly out of the immediate survey area preventing band identification and it may flush other birds in the area.

High quality digital photographic equipment paired with a powerful telephoto lens (840 or 1200 mm) can be useful to identify bands; the files provide a record that can be reviewed later and an increased ability to identify bands by enlarging and sharpening the file. Potential issues include: substantial equipment costs; increased survey time; additional equipment weight; additional time to review pictures; and disturbance risks if the photographer is not knowledgeable about plovers or does not have appropriate equipment. Photography even may allow identification of FWS band numbers, but success is dependent on lighting and weather conditions, patience, and the willingness of the individual bird to approach the photographer close enough to allow band identification. Date, band information, a simple description of the location and GPS coordinates, activity, and habitat type should be written down and provided to relevant researchers and managers.