



# Piping Plover

## *(Charadrius melodus)*

**Description:** The piping plover is a small shorebird approximately 7 inches long with a wingspan of about 15 inches. Piping plovers have white underparts with a light beige back and crown. Breeding adults have a single black breast band, which is often incomplete, and a black bar across the forehead. The legs and bill are orange in summer, with a black tip on the bill. In winter, the birds lose the breast bands, the legs fade from orange to pale yellow, and the bill becomes mostly black. Piping plover adults and chicks feed on marine macro invertebrates such as worms, fly larvae, beetles, and crustaceans.



Females lay four eggs that hatch in about 25 days, and surviving chicks learn to fly (fledge) after about 25 to 35 days. The flightless chicks follow their parents to feeding areas, which include the intertidal zone of ocean beaches, ocean wash-over areas, mud flats, sand flats, wrack lines (organic ocean material left by high tide), and the shorelines of coastal ponds, lagoons, and salt marshes.

**Habitat:** Piping plovers are found on sandy beaches in southern Maine. They nest between the high tide line and toe of the dunes. They use sandy beaches, adjacent salt marshes, and intertidal sand flats for foraging during the nesting season and spring and fall migration. Piles of wrack (rockweed and other marine plants) at the high tide line are



important source of invertebrate food and nutrients to support a healthy the intertidal ecosystem.

**Occurrence in Maine:** Piping plovers nest on these Maine beaches: Ogunquit, Moody, Wells, Drakes Island, Laudholm, Crescent Surf, Parsons, Marshall Point, Goose Rocks, Fortunes Rocks, Hills, Ferry (Saco), Goosefare Brook, Ocean Park, Old Orchard, Pine Point, Western, Scarborough, Higgins, Ram Island, Crescent Beach State Park, Seawall, Popham, Hunnewell, and Reid State Park Beaches.