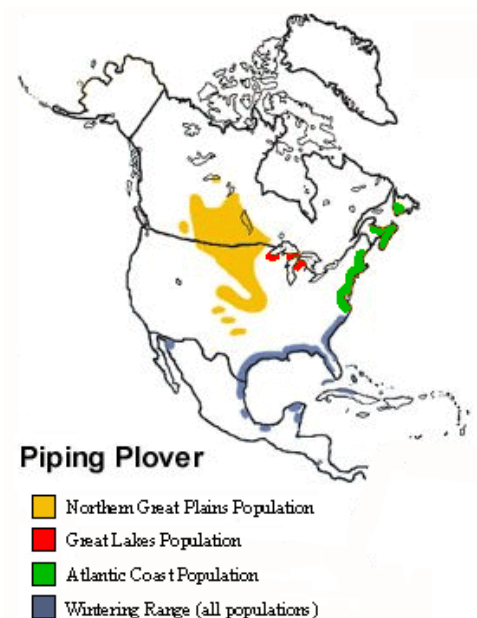


Piping Plover Fact Sheet

Piping plovers (*Charadrius melodus*) are small shorebirds approximately 7 inches long with sand-colored plumage on their backs and crown and white underparts. Breeding birds have a single black breastband, a black bar across the forehead, bright orange legs and bill, and a black tip on the bill. During winter, the birds lose the black bands, the legs fade to pale yellow, and the bill becomes mostly black.

Piping plovers breed only in North America in three geographic regions: the Atlantic Coast, the Northern Great Plains, and the Great Lakes. Atlantic Coast plovers nest on coastal beaches, sandflats at the ends of sand spits and barrier islands, gently sloped foredunes, sparsely vegetated dunes, and washover areas cut into or between dunes. Plovers in the Great Plains make their nests on open, sparsely vegetated sand or gravel beaches adjacent to alkali wetlands, and on beaches, sand bars, and dredged material islands of major river systems. Great Lakes piping plovers breed on sparsely vegetated beaches, cobble pans, or sand spits of sand dune ecosystems along the Great



Lakes shorelines. Piping plovers from all three breeding populations winter along South Atlantic, Gulf Coast, and Caribbean beaches and barrier islands, primarily on intertidal beaches with sand and/or mud flats with no or very sparse vegetation.

The piping plover was federally listed as threatened and endangered in 1986. The Northern Great Plains and Atlantic Coast populations are threatened, and the Great Lakes population is endangered. Piping plovers are considered threatened throughout their wintering range. On July 10, 2001, the Service designated 137 coastal areas in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi,

Louisiana, and Texas as critical habitat for the wintering population of the piping plover.

Plovers arrive on the breeding grounds during mid-March through mid-May and remain for 3 to 4 months per year. They lay 3 to 4 eggs in shallow scraped depressions lined with light colored pebbles and shell fragments. The eggs are well camouflaged and blend extremely well with their surroundings. Both sexes incubate the eggs which hatch within 30 days, and both sexes feed the young until they can fly, about 30 days after hatching. Plovers depart for the wintering grounds from mid-July through late October.

Breeding and wintering plovers feed on exposed wet sand in wash zones; intertidal ocean beach; wrack lines; washover passes; mud-, sand-, and algal flats; and shorelines of streams, ephemeral ponds, lagoons, and salt marshes by probing for invertebrates at or just below the surface. They use beaches adjacent to foraging areas for roosting and preening. Small sand dunes, debris, and sparse vegetation within adjacent beaches provides shelter from wind and extreme temperatures.

Threats to the populations on the breeding and wintering grounds are similar. Habitat loss and degradation due to coastal development, recreation, navigation, dredging, and shoreline stabilization and replenishment projects have been major contributors to this species' decline. Human activity on beaches, such as walking, jogging, walking pets, and operating vehicles may prevent birds from feeding, flush birds from roost sites, alter habitat conditions, and destroy camouflaged eggs and young. Human activities have aided range expansions and population increases of predators such as gulls and possums, and introduced non-native predators such as feral cats and Norway rats; these factors have resulted in increased predation pressure.