



Conservation efforts include surrounding Piping Plover nests with fencing to protect against predators such as dogs, coyotes, and raccoons. Photo by: Mary Bomberger-Brown, Tern & Plover Conservation Partnership.

Because there has been continued loss of suitable river sandbar habitat and increased availability of sandpit habitat, many piping plovers have transitioned from using sandbar habitat to sandpit habitat over much of their range in Nebraska.

Today, piping plovers are still facing threats of human disturbance, continued habitat loss, pollution and contaminants on their breeding and wintering grounds, disease and predation.

MANAGEMENT & OUTLOOK

Nesting birds continue to be monitored and protected in Nebraska. Conservation efforts include flagging nesting sites in sand and gravel mines to ensure the nests are not destroyed. Additionally,

fencing is occasionally placed around nests to protect against predators.

Other efforts to conserve piping plovers include educating the public about the species. Much effort has also been made to restore, create, protect and manage important river habitats. Biologists that study piping plovers use a technique called "capture, mark, release" in which they capture the birds, measure and weigh them, then mark them with a colored leg band. These leg bands are to help wildlife biologists better understand plover movements on both breeding and wintering grounds.

CONSERVATION HELP

Individuals can help conserve piping plovers by reporting nesting sites to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, as well as not disturbing a nest once it is found.

Additionally, people can help by donating to conservation organizations dedicated to protecting threatened and endangered species. These donations provide funding for needed research, habitat improvement projects and education.

REFERENCES

United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 1988. Great Lakes and Northern Great Plains Piping Plover recovery plan. Twin Cities, MN. 160 pp

Wilcox, L. 1959. A twenty year banding study of the Piping Plover. Auk 76:129-152.

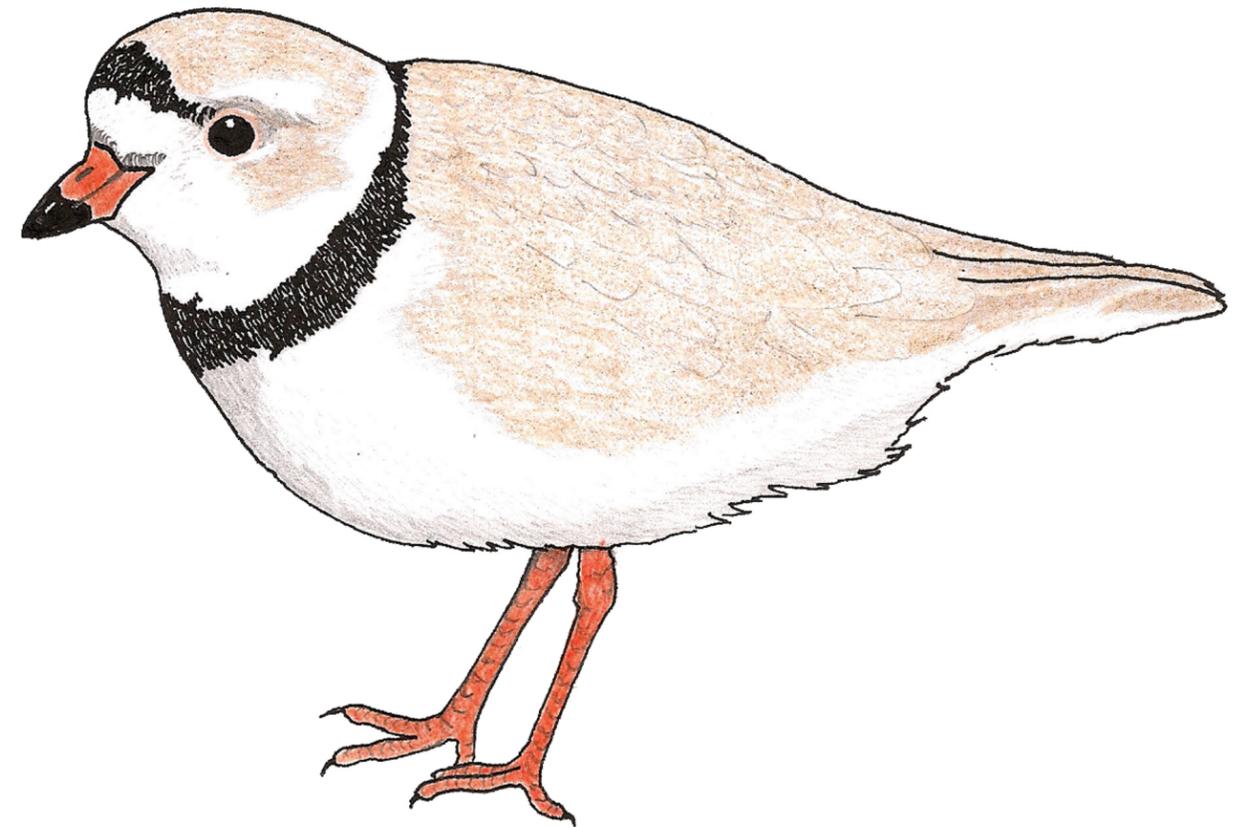
This pamphlet, "Nebraska's Threatened & Endangered Species: Piping Plover" is one of a series of pamphlets about Nebraska's rare species. To learn more about Nebraska's rare species, please visit rarspecies.nebraska.gov.

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NOTE: New data of the occurrence and distribution of this species are being collected constantly and some of the information in the pamphlet may be outdated. The information in this pamphlet should be used for a general understanding of the species and not as the sole source of range location for any report, project, regional or local planning, or for environmental impact assessments. For current information on this species, please contact the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission, Wildlife Division.

Nebraska's Threatened & Endangered Species



Piping Plover
Charadrius melodus



A Publication of the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission

Piping Plover

Charadrius melodus



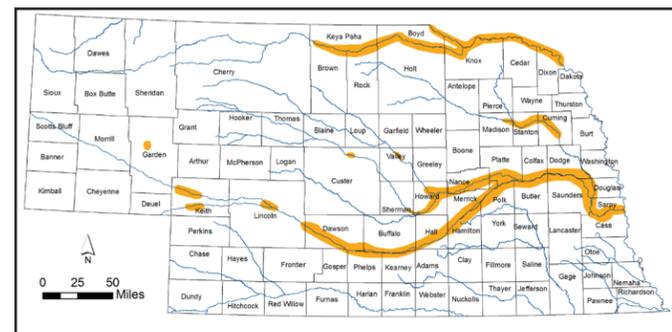
The Piping Plover is a migratory shorebird. They are found on shorelines, mud flats, and sand flats. Photo by: NEBRASKAland Magazine/NGPC.

DESCRIPTION

The piping plover is a migratory shorebird with a length of about 7¼ inches and a wingspan of about 19 inches. It can live to be 8-11 years old although, like most birds, many do not make it past the first year.

Piping plovers are found along shorelines, on mud flats and sand flats. In Nebraska, they can be found along the Platte River east of Lake McConaughy, and lower reaches of other major rivers.

Piping plovers are sand-colored birds with white undersides and orange legs. During the breeding



Piping Plover Range Map. Courtesy Nebraska Game & Parks Commission Natural Heritage Program, 2013.

season, adults develop an orange bill with a dark tip, and a single black forehead band and breast band. Non-breeding and immature plovers do not have the dark bands on their forehead or breast and instead have an all dark bill.

Piping plovers are often mistaken for killdeer (*Chadrius vociferus*). However, killdeer have two breast bands, a dark brown back and are larger than piping plovers.

RANGE

There are three separate populations of piping plovers in North America. The Great Lakes population breeds along sandy shores of the Great Lakes; the Atlantic coast population breeds along ocean beaches, sand pits and dredge spoil piles along the Atlantic shore; and the Northern Great Plains population nests along prairie rivers and wetlands from Alberta to Ontario and south to Nebraska. In Nebraska, piping plovers breed along the Missouri, Platte, Elkhorn, Loup and Niobrara rivers.

Piping plovers only spend three to four months on their breeding grounds; the other eight to nine months are spent on their wintering grounds along the Gulf of Mexico and southern Atlantic Coast.



A young and adult Piping Plover forage for food along a Platte River sandbar. Photo by: NEBRASKAland Magazine/NGPC.



This adult Piping Plover is feigning an injury to draw a predator away from the nest. Once the predator goes after the "injured" adult, the adult flies away. Photo by: NEBRASKAland Magazine/NGPC.

HABITAT

Historically, piping plovers nested mainly on sparsely vegetated river sandbars. Today, they nest on river sandbars, sand and gravel mine sandpits, lake shore housing developments and reservoir shorelines.

Although sand and gravel mines and lake shore housing developments offer nesting sites in years where river sandbars are limited, they may not be a suitable substitute for riverine nesting habitat.

DIET

Piping plovers forage on mud and sand substrates. Along the Platte River, their prey consists primarily of beetles and small soft-bodied invertebrates from the riverine waterline. In addition, they opportunistically take prey from drier sites at sandpits. The chicks learn to feed themselves and eat smaller versions adult food items.

REPRODUCTION

Piping plovers arrive in Nebraska in mid- to late-April. The males conduct elaborate courtship rituals, including aerial displays of circles and figure-eights, whistling songs, posturing with spread tail and wings and rapid drumming of feet.

Females place their eggs in simple depressions or scrapes in the sand that are often lined with small pebbles. The typical clutch size is four eggs. Both

adults share the responsibility of incubating the eggs throughout the 27- to 31-day incubation period. Typically, only one brood of eggs is produced each year.

Piping plover chicks leave the nest about two hours after hatching and are able to feed themselves within a few hours of being out of the nest. The chicks blend into their surroundings very effectively because of their camouflaged plumage.

Predators of piping plovers include Great Blue Herons, crows, gulls, skunks, raccoons, red foxes, coyotes and feral cats and dogs. When a predator approaches the nest, adult plovers will fake injury to draw intruders away from the nest or chicks. This defense behavior is continued until chicks can make sustainable flights.

Piping plovers fledge (are able to fly) at about 21 to 28 days. Adults usually leave their breeding grounds shortly after chicks fledge, by early August. Juvenile piping plovers depart a few weeks later.

POPULATION STATUS

Since the early 1900's, habitat loss and destruction from channelization, irrigation and the construction of reservoirs on our nation's large river systems (such as the Platte and Missouri) make up the primary reason for piping plover population decline. The piping plover was listed as a federally threatened species in 1986 and is currently a state and federally protected species.



Piping Plover chicks are extremely well camouflaged. Their speckled plumage blends in with the sand and gravel of the nest site. This chick, only one day old, is already able to walk and forage for itself. Photo by: NEBRASKAland Magazine/NGPC.