

*Charadrius melodus*

# Piping Plover

## Linking Communities

Listed as an Endangered Species in Canada, the piping plover is considered a "Trigger Species" for the Linking Communities project. Chaplin Lake, Reed Lake, and Old Wives Lake are of great importance to the survival of the Piping Plover. With over 450 Piping Plovers counted in these areas during the summers the lakes serve as nesting and feeding grounds. Therefore conservation of these areas is critical to conserving the Piping Plover population.

## Identification

The Piping Plover is a small shore bird with moderately long, orange legs, a short neck, and a short orange bill with a black tip. Its back is a pale tan and its belly, chest, and throat are white. It has a black band around the neck that is often broken in the middle and a black band across its forehead.



Photo: Randy Mc Culloch

## Habitat & Distribution

The Piping Plover breeds on the Great Plains and the Atlantic Coast, arriving around late-April to May. It favours wide, sparsely vegetated, gravel beaches adjacent to vast alkali lakes for nesting sites. Nest are located high above the water line and far from the tree line. Loss of habitat due to human use of beaches and consequently disturbance of the nesting site is a major threat to the survival of the Piping Plover. Garbage left by humans can also attract predators to the beaches creating a higher threat to the survival of adults and juveniles.

## Feeding

The Piping Plover forages in small groups or alone. It feeds mainly on aquatic invertebrates which are pecked from among the rocks on the beach. During feeding the Piping Plover extends one foot forward and vibrates it against the water-saturated sand to bring invertebrates to the surface.

## Nesting

Males begin nest-scraping and stone tossing as part of courtship display within a few days of arrival in the breeding grounds. Nests are lined by both males and females with stones or shells in a ritualized display that forms pair bonds. Four eggs are laid in a clutch and incubated by both parents. The female raises only one brood per year but may lay several clutches if the nest is destroyed. Young are born precocial and are able to walk and feed within hours of hatching. With many risks of predations the Piping Plover is known for its broken wing act to lure predators away from its nest.



Photo: Nick Saunders

