

PIPING PLOVER (*Charadrius melodus*)

Description

The piping plover resembles the killdeer, but is slightly smaller, lighter gray in color and has only one black neckband as compared with two for the killdeer. The main diet of piping plover is made up of small invertebrates.

Distribution

From mid May to late August piping plovers nest in Nebraska long the major rivers. They commonly breed along portions of the Loup, Missouri, Niobrara, and Platte rivers, as well as Lake McConaughy. They may also be found at sand and gravel pits adjacent to the Platte, Elkhorn and Loup rivers.

Habitat

Piping plovers make their nests in shallow scrapes on bare sandbars or on dredge spoils. They prefer nesting areas free from vegetation to allow them to see predators. Often they will return to the same nesting area year after year. For breeding, piping plovers prefer sandy upper beaches, especially where scattered- grass tufts are present, and sparsely vegetated shores and islands of shallow lakes, ponds, rivers, and impoundments. Nests may also be built on sandy open flats among shells or cobble behind fore dunes.

Status

Global: G3-Vulnerable. Federally Threatened. State Threatened. Nebraska: S2-Imperiled.

The piping plover has had major range wide declines followed by some recovery; some regional declines still occurring. Strong threats related primarily to human activity; disturbance by humans, predation, and development pressure are pervasive threats along the Atlantic coast; inappropriate water management a threat on the northern Great Plains. Low water levels have been a major cause of the decline of this species, allowing encroachment of woody vegetation and predators into nesting sites. The piping plover has highly variable annual reproductive success and current favorable population trends depend on intensive management.

Management

Annual surveys of population abundance, disturbance, and productivity are needed. Further research also required on wintering areas in the Bahamas, Greater Antilles, and Mexico. In many areas, population maintenance depends on intensive management. Nesting and foraging areas need to be protected from human disturbances. Habitat can be created with dredge material. Predator exclosures have been used to improve nest success. Continued population monitoring, and research on diet and feeding habits and on the effects of pesticides and pollutants, is advisable. Rapid recovery is possible with intensive protection. Full recovery of the Atlantic coast population is anticipated by the year 2010.

More Information

<http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?sPCODE=B079>

<http://www.fws.gov/mountain%2Dprairie/species/birds/pipingplover/>