

# Endangered Piping Plovers

## on Sandy Beaches in Nova Scotia



The Piping Plover is an endangered shorebird that needs sandy beaches to nest and raise young. Since 2023, the Piping Plover population in Nova Scotia has exceeded the provincial recovery target (60 pairs).

**Our conservation efforts are making a difference! Let's continue keeping beaches and dunes healthy for nature and our communities.**

**What do they look like?** Adults are about 18 cm long, weigh 43-64 grams (about 7 toonies) and have orange legs, sandy upperparts and a white belly. In spring-summer, adults have an orange beak with a black tip and black "necklace" and forehead stripe (see photo, above left). In late summer, adults lose their black feathers.

**Where are they found?** In spring-summer, Piping Plovers are found on sandy beaches from Newfoundland to South Carolina. Many historic breeding beaches have been lost due to natural and human-caused changes. In Nova Scotia, Piping Plovers breed on about 30 beaches. About three quarters breed in southwest NS (Kespukwitek) and the rest in northern mainland and Cape Breton Island (Unamaki). In fall-winter, plovers from Eastern Canada are found on the coasts of southeastern USA and Caribbean Islands.



**Where do plovers nest?** Piping Plovers return to NS beaches in April and May. Plovers do not like nesting in dense dune grass. Rather, they lay their eggs on open, dry sand between the grassy dunes and the high-tide mark (see illustration below). Their camouflaged feathers help them stay hidden from predators and people. Eggs and flightless chicks are very difficult to see, so people, dogs and vehicles can accidentally disturb and even crush them. You can help!



**What are we doing to help plovers?** Birds Canada works with a team of volunteers and partners around NS to monitor plovers and track threats, protect habitat using signs, and foster stewardship on beaches. We also work with partners to keep beach and dune ecosystems healthy for wildlife and communities.

### Six ways you can help:

1. **Walk on the wet sand May-August** (see illustration below) to avoid trampling eggs and chicks, or disturbing plover families. Watch for signs marking sensitive nesting areas and avoid the dry sand in these areas.
2. **Keep your dog on a leash.** Leashing pets protects wildlife and ensures safety of other beach goers.
3. **Pack food and waste out** when you leave the beach. Only organize beach clean-ups when plovers and other migratory birds are not breeding (e.g., September to April).
4. **Don't drive on beaches or dunes** because vehicles can crush eggs and chicks, disturb wildlife, and damage dune habitat. Our communities need healthy dunes to buffer impacts of sea level rise and storms.
5. **Report violations** to Province of NS hotline: **1-800-565-2224**.
6. **Get involved on the beach** with educational outreach, habitat protection and monitoring efforts (nsplovers@gmail.com).



## How and when do Piping Plovers use sandy beaches?

(Dark green= peak activity; yellow=off-peak activity)

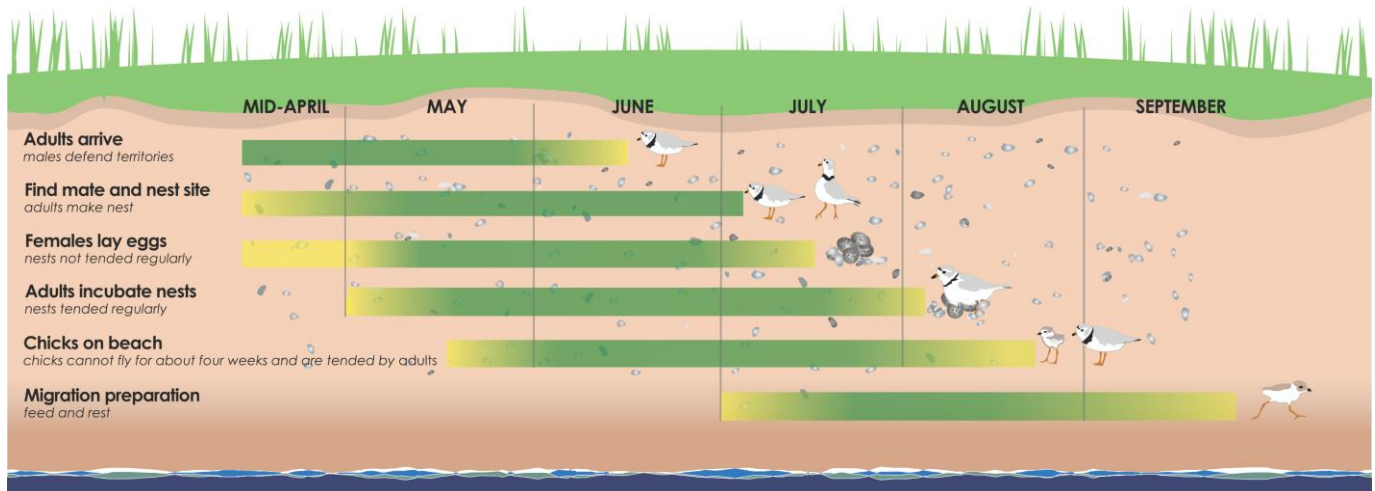


Illustration courtesy of Environment & Climate Change Canada

**What do they eat?** Plovers use their keen eyes to spot insects, marine worms and small crustaceans, and their beaks to quickly grab the prey.

**What can hurt them?** Piping Plovers are protected by federal and provincial laws, but our activities can harm coastal habitats and plovers:

**Habitat Loss:** Inappropriate placement of buildings and structures along the coast has destroyed and degraded important breeding habitat. Erosion control structures, like rock walls, alter natural processes that plovers and other wildlife need for healthy habitats.

**Predators:** Crows, ravens, falcons, foxes, and minks are among the predators of plover chicks, eggs or adults. Predator numbers can increase when they have easy access to human food, thus upsetting the balance between predators and prey.

**Human Disturbance:** Piping Plover adults, eggs and chicks are hard to see, so people are often unaware when they or their pet are disturbing plovers. Plovers may abandon nests if there is too much human activity near their nesting area. The following types of activities can harm plovers and beach habitat:

- People walking through sensitive nesting areas can crush plover eggs or chicks and cause plover parents to be separated from their chicks or abandon their eggs.
- Off-leash dogs can chase plovers, crush eggs, or kill flightless chicks.
- Off-highway vehicles, dirt bikes, and trucks can run over eggs, chicks and adults. Vehicle tracks can trap young chicks and cause plover families to be separated. Vehicles can crush dune plants and damage dunes (see right), which can lead to increased dune erosion.



### Interested in learning more or getting involved?

Contact us: Birds Canada - NS Piping Plover Conservation Program ([nsplovers@gmail.com](mailto:nsplovers@gmail.com)) or visit [www.birdscanada.org](http://www.birdscanada.org)