

Piping Plover (PIPL)

Charadrius melodus

Description

Piping Plovers are small, pale sandy-coloured shorebirds (~18 cm long) with white underparts, orange legs, and a short bill (1/2 length of head). They have a white wingstripe on the top of their wings extending from the wing tip to the rump that is visible when flying. During breeding season, they have a distinctive broken black collar around their neck, black forehead stripe, and an orange bill with a black tip. Females and males are similar in appearance, though females are typically paler with reduced dark areas. Juveniles match the white areas of the adults, but have a black bill and lack any black on the neck and face. Chicks are pale balls of fluff with long orange legs, white underparts, mottled sandy and brown upperparts, and a black bill. They are often difficult to spot due to their camouflage. Semipalmated Plovers look similar but are darker on their backs and have another dark stripe right above the bill that merges into dark areas around the eyes.

Known and potential breeding habitat

Piping Plovers breed in open, sparsely vegetated sand or gravel beaches. In Newfoundland, breeding evidence has been observed from 6 May to 26 August. Breeding Piping Plovers have been found on the sandy beaches of western (Stephenville and the Codroy) and southern (Port Aux Basques and Burgeo) Newfoundland.

Detection Tips

Habitat

During breeding season, Piping Plovers are typically found on wide sandy ocean beaches, as well as lakes, reservoirs, and sometimes the banks of rivers. Their habitats are often composed of a mixture of substrates (pebbles, sand, gravel, etc.) with <20% sparse vegetation.

Vocalization

Piping Plovers are quite vocal, making a variety of calls. Most often, they will be heard making a two-syllable “*pwee-doo.*” During breeding season, males can be heard pipping in high-pitched, quick, repetitive “*pipe pipe pipe pipe*” calls, which act as a courtship call. When threatened, they will make a series of rattling, throaty calls.

Photo By: Jenna McDermott



Coastal



COSEWIC Ranking:
Endangered

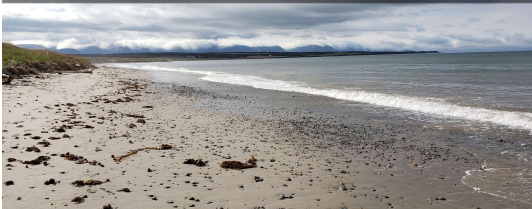


NL Designation:
Endangered



Shorebirds

Photo By: Darrian Washinger





Piping Plover bathing.
Photo By: Jenna McDermott

Behaviour

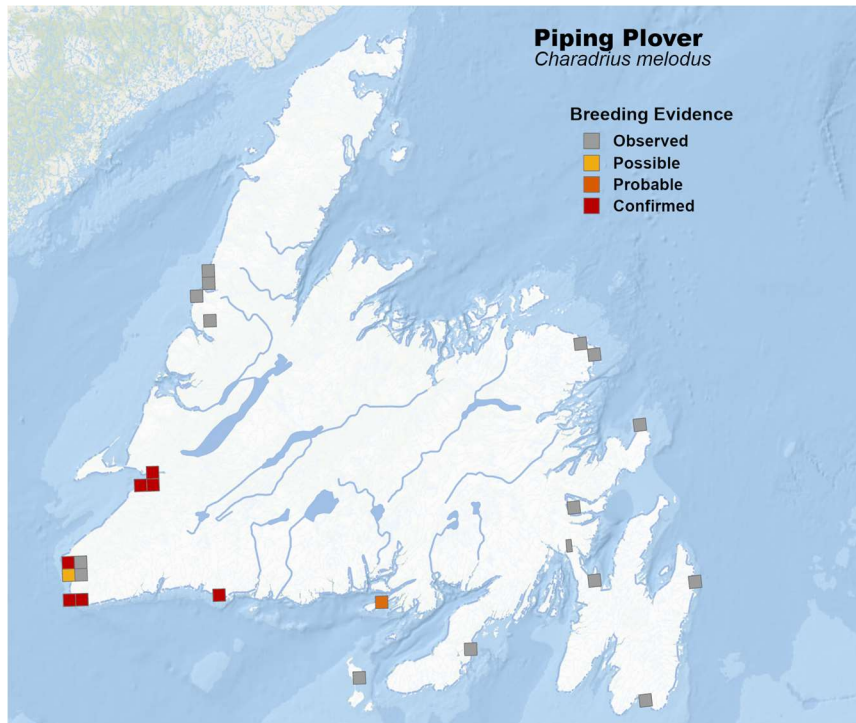
Piping Plovers can be difficult to spot until they begin foraging; they'll take a few quick steps, stop, and peck the ground for marine worms or insects. They are often found on higher parts of the shoreline (above the high tide line) and forage singly; they are rarely observed with more than a few individuals. A male performs a courtship dance by approaching a female with his head low, then as he gets closer, he leans back with neck extended upwards and begins kicking his legs high, increasingly more rapidly as he walks towards the female; this dance may last several minutes before copulation.

Nesting

Nests are typically created by males digging a shallow depression in the sand (called a "scrape"). The scrape is where females lay a clutch of up to 4 eggs. These nests are situated far enough from the ocean to afford protection from flooding.

Breeding Evidence

Most often, breeding evidence for Piping Plovers will be observations of vocalizing males (S), an individual in suitable nesting habitat (H), pair in a suitable nesting habitat (P), courtship display (D), a nest/scrape containing eggs (NE), adults in a nest site (AE), and fledged young (FY).



Piping Plovers (*Charadrius melodus*) were detected in 25 squares in Newfoundland in the last 10 years (2011-2021) although there are sightings in other locations that have not been mapped due to the privacy of the datasets. Breeding was confirmed in 7 squares during these years.