

# Manitoba's Species At Risk

Endangered



Any native Manitoba species threatened to disappear through all or most of its Manitoba range. Endangered species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

## Piping plover

*Charadrius melodus*

The Piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) is a provincially and nationally endangered bird, found in many provinces and states, including Manitoba. It is a stocky shorebird with a white breast, abdomen and rump and pale brown to grey back, head and wings. It is identifiable by a black stripe across the forehead from eye to eye, a long white eyestripe and a single black band across the chest. The Piping plover resembles both the Semipalmated plover (but is lighter in colour), and the Killdeer (but is smaller and has one band across its chest, not two).

During breeding season, the bird's colours become brighter. A black tipped orange bill, orange legs and a black band reaching from eye to eye across the forehead, vibrantly stand out on the breeding Piping plover.

### Habitat

The Piping plover can be found on lakeshores and river sandbars. It nests on gravel shores of shallow, saline lakes and on the sandy shores of larger prairie lakes. It tends to use only unvegetated or sparsely vegetated areas for nesting.

### Life History

The Piping plover arrives at its breeding grounds in Manitoba in late April or May. Once paired, the male scrapes a shallow nest in the sand or gravel, which he will present to the female for her inspection. The nest is often lined with shells or pebbles, which keeps the eggs off the wet sand, drains rainwater and acts as camouflage.

In May, the female lays two to four cream-coloured eggs covered with small dark spots.

In June, the chicks hatch and emerge fully feathered. Within hours they can run and feed on their own. They can fly between 20 and 25

days after hatching. Migration begins in early August when the birds leave for the wintering grounds.

Piping plovers feed on small insects and worms found on the surface of the sand along shorelines.

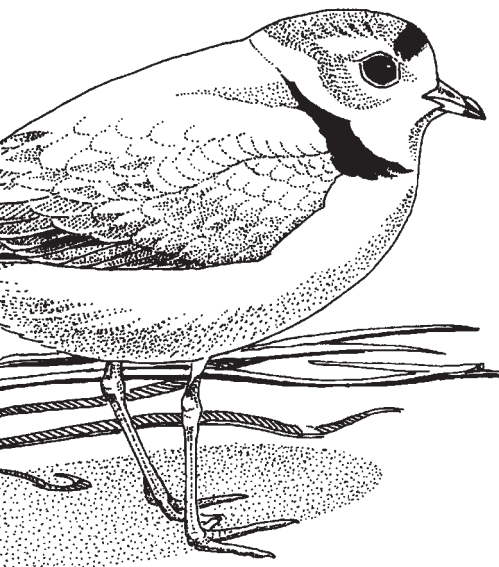
### Distribution

The Piping plover has three distinct locations of breeding in North America: the northern Great Plains, the Great Lakes region and the Atlantic coast. The wintering grounds include the southern Atlantic shore of the United States and the Gulf of Mexico coastline. In Canada, Piping plovers breed along the Atlantic shore, Lake of the Woods in northwestern Ontario, and along lakeshores and saline wetlands of southern Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. In Manitoba, Piping plovers are most consistently found nesting on broad beaches along Lake Winnipeg, Lake Manitoba, West Shoal Lake, and occasionally Oak Lake and Whitewater Lake.

### Status

The Piping plover is considered provincially rare by the Manitoba Conservation Data Centre, and globally uncommon by the Association for Biodiversity Information. Threats to the Piping plover include loss of habitat due to human use of beaches, all terrain vehicle traffic, and pets. High water levels can flood nests and reduce important feeding areas, while low water levels allow encroachment of vegetation and reduce the beach area. Piping plover predators include gulls, crows, Northern harriers, skunks, raccoons, foxes and coyotes.

The Piping plover is listed as Endangered by regulation 25/98 under the *Manitoba Endangered Species Act*. It has also been



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## Cool Facts

*When the eggs or young are threatened, adults attempt to lure the danger away by feigning a wing injury. The adult will fly away once the predator is a safe distance from the nest.*

*Most summers, Piping plovers share Grand Beach with thousands of sunseekers. To help protect the birds, Provincial Park staff fence off plover nesting areas.*

*The Great Plains population of Piping plovers is the largest, consisting of approximately 1,400 breeding pairs.*

*There have been no successful Piping plover nests recorded on the Great Lakes for over 20 years.*



assigned a status of Endangered by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). It is listed in the United States *Endangered Species Act*, and in many provincial and state endangered species acts. It is also protected in Canada under the federal *Migratory Birds Convention Act*.

Continent wide surveys in 1991 and 1996 suggest that there are approximately 2,700 pairs in North America with almost 900 pairs found to breed in Canada. In Manitoba, the numbers of Piping plovers have declined from over 100 pairs in the late 1980's to fewer than 20 pairs in recent years.

### Stewardship and Recovery

The Piping plover Recovery team has a goal of maintaining and increasing the prairie population. To make this goal a reality, more awareness and education about the Piping plover and its habitat are important.

To improve Piping plover breeding success, people must be willing to share beaches with these birds. This might require completely fencing off designated nesting areas and placing predator enclosures over nests to protect the eggs.

### Get Involved in Recovery

If you see a Piping plover on your property, congratulations. Your land management skills have helped to maintain the population of one of Canada's rarest birds. Contact the Wildlife Branch, or your nearest Manitoba Conservation office, if you would like more information on what you can do to further enhance your land for this and other native Manitoba plant and animal species.

You can help by learning to identify these birds and avoid disturbing nesting areas during June and July. Also, as a landowner, you can maintain natural habitat around wetlands and reduce disturbances by humans, pets and livestock.

If you see a Piping plover, contact Manitoba Conservation at one of the numbers listed below.

#### Manitoba Conservation Wildlife Branch

Box 24, 200 Saulteaux Crescent  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3J 3W3  
(204) 945-7764

[www.gov.mb.ca/natres/wildlife/index.htm](http://www.gov.mb.ca/natres/wildlife/index.htm)

#### Manitoba Conservation Regional Offices

Eastern Region  
Lac du Bonnet  
(204) 345-1427

Central Region  
Gimli  
(204) 642-6077

Western Region  
Brandon  
(204) 726-6450

**Partners in production of this fact sheet:**  
Manitoba Conservation, Wildlife Branch  
Environment Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service

#### Extirpated Species

Any species once native to Manitoba that has disappeared through all of its Manitoba range. Extirpated species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

#### Endangered Species

Any native Manitoba species threatened to disappear through all or most of its Manitoba range. Endangered species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

#### Threatened Species

Any native Manitoba species likely to become endangered or at risk due to low or declining numbers in Manitoba if the factors affecting it don't improve. Threatened species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

#### Vulnerable Species

Species not regulated under the *Endangered Species Act* but which could eventually be considered Endangered or Threatened if the factors affecting them do not improve.