



Time for Nature



Pitching in for the piping plover

Monitoring an endangered species in Prince Edward Island National Park of Canada

Jennifer's work monitoring piping plovers in Prince Edward Island National Park of Canada begins at eight in the morning. She stops at the office to collect her gear: field notes, binoculars, a viewing scope, food, water, sunscreen and a jacket, as the coastal weather can be unpredictable! After a thirty-minute walk, she arrives at the first nesting site.



This morning, she observes a piping plover foraging at the edge of the water. Its mate is sitting on the nest. This nest has four eggs and has been recently protected by an enclosure, which keeps predators out. Jennifer stays low to the ground and remains a safe distance away, keeping still to avoid disturbing the birds. All appears well at this site.

The piping plover is an endangered shorebird found in Prince Edward Island National Park. © Parks Canada.

A dedicated team of plover monitors

Jennifer is part of a team of plover monitors who work in Prince Edward Island National Park. Monitors begin their observations of this endangered species when the birds arrive around mid-April. They spend the next several months observing nesting sites and collecting information that becomes part of the plover recovery effort.



Recovery also involves public education and efforts to increase the survival of these birds. These efforts include closing areas, assessing the need for enclosures and conducting storm rescues as required.

Parks Canada installs enclosures to protect nesting sites from disturbance. © Parks Canada.

Just another day at the beach

Jennifer makes her next stop some twenty minutes away from the first nest. The situation is not good. The plovers are calling and running frantically on the beach. A couple is sunbathing in the closed area, which Parks Canada established to protect the plovers. Jennifer explains why they will have to leave the area.



Just as they are leaving, another couple approaches the closed area. They know about the plovers and had hoped to catch a glimpse of one. Jennifer asks them not to approach the birds to avoid further disturbance. With the danger passed, the birds calm down slightly and begin to feed at the water's edge.

There are many threats

This endangered bird faces many natural challenges. Seasonal storms and spring tides can destroy their nests. Rising sea levels due to global warming pose a similar threat, and predators are a danger to both the eggs and to young birds. The greatest threat to species' survival, however, is the loss of habitat, most often due to people on the beaches where the plovers nest. Their nests are so well camouflaged that people or their pets can trample them without knowing it.

Keeping an eye on the piping plover

In Prince Edward Island, Parks Canada's staff works closely with the Canadian Wildlife Service and the Island Nature Trust. Monitors have worked in the Park since 1982, but in recent years, more plovers are nesting on beaches outside the national park. The Island Nature Trust monitors these areas through an ambitious program of piping plover guardians.

You can act as a piping plover guardian, too. On beaches where plovers are nesting, respect closed areas and inform others about the plover and its plight.

For more information visit www.pc.gc.ca/pei



In Prince Edward Island National Park, signs inform park users about the need to avoid beach areas where plovers are nesting. © Parks Canada.