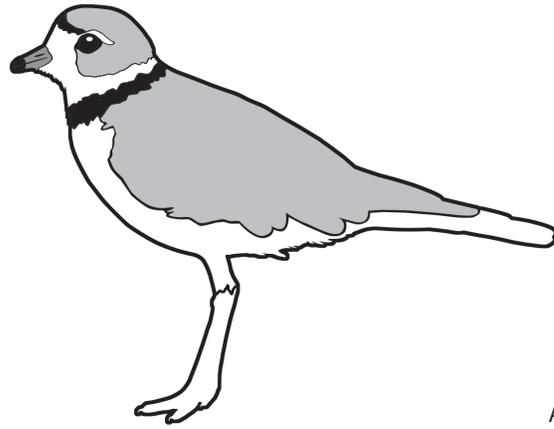




## Migratory Birds of the Bahamas



Artwork by Dominic Cant

### Piping Plover

#### SCIENTIFIC NAME

*Charadrius melodus*

#### DESCRIPTION

Piping plovers are small shorebirds approximately seven inches long with sand-colored plumage on their backs and crown and white underparts. Breeding birds have a single black breastband, a black bar across the forehead, bright orange legs and bill, and a black tip on the bill. During winter, the birds lose the black bands, the legs fade to pale yellow, and the bill becomes mostly black.

#### DIET

Piping Plovers have been found to consume only animals. This includes marine worms, fly larvae, beetles, crustaceans, molluscs and other small marine animals.

#### REPRODUCTION

Pairing formations occur in early spring in the northern sites during the first few days of arrival and they remain there for 3-4 months of the year. Males perform elaborate flights over the breeding territory advertising their availability. Females may lay 3-4 eggs in shallow scraped depressions lined with light coloured pebbles and shell fragments. The eggs are well camouflaged and blend extremely well with their surroundings. Both sexes incubate the eggs which hatch within 30 days, and both sexes feed the young until they can fly, about 30 days after hatching.

#### HABITAT AND RANGE

The Piping Plover is a threatened and endangered shorebird that inhabits open sandy beaches, alkali flats, sandflats and wetlands. Most of the year, Piping Plovers are found along rivers, wetlands of the Northern Great Plains from Nebraska to the southern Prairie Provinces and breed primarily along the Atlantic coast from North Carolina to southern Canada.

In winter, they migrate to coastal beaches and wetlands in the West Indies, the Carolinas and Yucatan. In addition, they are uncommon in the northern Bahamas and rare in the southern islands. They have been found regularly Central Andros, New Providence, the western end of Grand Bahama, Abaco and Warderick Wells in Exuma.

## STATUS

The last breeding census in 1996 showed the Northern Great Plains population as being the largest of the three breeding populations, numbering approximately 1398 breeding pairs. The Atlantic Coast population consists of 1372 breeding pairs, and the Great Lakes population has only 32 breeding pairs. The highest concentration of birds reported in winter censuses are found in Texas, Louisiana, and Florida. However, only 63 percent of the breeding birds counted in 1991 were reported during the winter census, suggesting that important wintering areas are still unknown.

## THREATS

In recent decades, Piping Plover populations have drastically declined, and have become uncommon winter residents in the Bahamas. Breeding habitat has been replaced with shoreline development and recreation. Availability of quality foraging and roosting habitat in the wintering grounds is necessary in order to ensure that an adequate number of adults survive to migrate back to breeding sites and successfully nest.

## CONSERVATION

International efforts are concentrated on the management of the breeding sites of Piping Plovers such as fencing nests, restricting off-road vehicle access and predator control. The designation of specific beaches in the Bahamas as protected areas also provides the birds with safe feeding areas.

## INTERESTING FACTS

Piping Plovers are more often heard than seen: their colouring allows them to blend in perfectly with dry sand and they move along the beach by walking and then stopping for a few moments.

If a predator or a careless human comes too close to Piping Plover chicks or a nest with eggs in it, the adult bird will try to draw the intruder away by pretending to have an injured wing.