

## Platte River Recovery Implementation Program

Adaptive Management & Collaboration on the Platte



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### The Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*)

**Status:** Federal Threatened

**Description:** The piping plover is a sandy-gray, robin-sized (7 inch, 17 cm) shorebird with one dark breast band stripe across the crown during the breeding season. Other characteristics include a white wing stripe and a white visible in flight. A common relative, the killdeer, is larger, more darkly colored and has two dark breast bands.

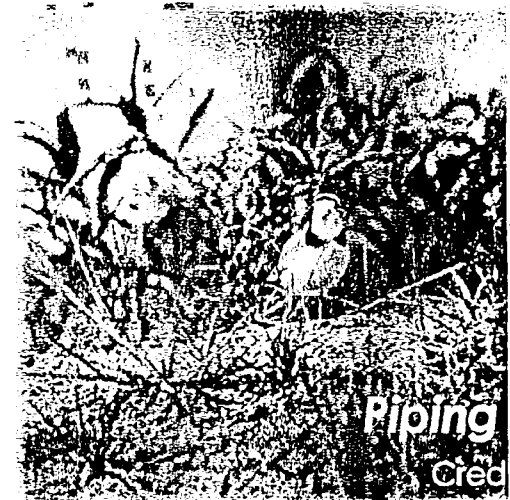
**Habitat and Habits:** The piping plover is present on breeding grounds from late March through August. It nests on sandbars and sand and gravel beaches with short, sparse vegetation along inland lakes, on natural and dredge islands in rivers, in gravel pits along rivers and on salt-encrusted bare areas of sand, gravel or pebbly mud on interior alkali ponds and lakes. Nests are shallow, scraped depressions, occasionally lined with small pebbles, shells or other material. A clutch of four eggs is usually laid in late May or early June, with hatching in 27-31 days. Both eggs and young are tended by both parents. Piping plovers feed along the water's edge on small insects, crustaceans and mollusks. In South Dakota, the piping plover is a common breeding associate of the endangered interior least tern.

**Distribution:** Three North American breeding populations of piping plovers are recognized and have the following distributions: the Atlantic Coast from Newfoundland to Virginia; the Great Lakes, excluding the rocky north shores of Lakes Superior and Huron; and the northern Great Plains. The greatest number of piping plovers breed in the northern Great Plains. This breeding population occurs in scattered alkaline wetlands of the northern Great Plains and on the Missouri River tributaries in the Dakotas and Nebraska.

In South Dakota, nesting occurs primarily on the natural stretches of the Missouri River below the Gavins Point and Randall Dams, although some nesting may occur on tributaries. Piping plovers have also been reported from Big Lake and Waubay Lakes in Day County and Horseshoe Lake in Codington County in northeastern South Dakota. This species overwinters along the Atlantic coast from North Carolina to Florida, along the Gulf coast and in the Bahamas and the Caribbean.

**Conservation Measures:** Although the piping plover is a state and federally threatened species in South Dakota, the Missouri River population is federally endangered. Listed in 1985, the piping plover faces several threats, including habitat loss, disturbance and destruction, and disturbance of nesting adults and chicks. Management techniques continue to be developed, such as the use of plover-permeable fencing to restrict human and predator access to nesting sites.

The piping plover recovery plans stress the need for understanding overwintering ecology as well as ensuring successful breeding. Intensive management and recovery strategies continue to be improved to deal with specific problems: the approximately 300 piping plovers nesting along the Missouri River and on the alkaline wetlands of northeastern South Dakota. South Dakotans can aid in the recovery of both the piping plover and interior least tern by learning to identify nesting sites, by avoiding any disturbance of nesting birds and reporting disturbance by others to the appropriate state or federal authorities.



Interior Least Terns (*Sternula antillarum athalassos*) are listed by both the state of Nebraska and the federal government as an endangered species. Piping Plovers (*Charadrius melodius*) are listed by both the state of Nebraska and the federal government as a threatened species. These birds nest on bare or sparsely vegetated expanses of sand and gravel. They frequently nest on river sandbars, sand spoil piles at sand and gravel mines, and at lakeshore housing developments. The birds are in Nebraska from 15 April to 15 August. The destruction of nests, eggs, chicks, or adults, and the harassment or disturbance of the birds in any way are violations of the Federal Endangered Species Act (87 Stat.884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) and the Nebraska Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act (§37-811).

Property owners need to be aware that if Interior Least Terns and/or Piping Plovers nest on their property, the birds and their nests cannot be approached or disturbed. Property owners also need to be aware that they have the ability to employ management practices that will make their property unsuitable as a nesting site for these protected species. The Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership, in coordination with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will, at the request of property owners, offer advice and assist with management actions. It is the goal of the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to work cooperatively with property owners to proactively prevent all bird-human conflicts and allow property owners to use and develop their property as they choose. For more information, contact us at [ternsandplovers@unl.edu](mailto:ternsandplovers@unl.edu), [mbrown9@unl.edu](mailto:mbrown9@unl.edu), or 402-472-8878.

## Threatened and Endangered Species Concerns at Mallard Landing

Egg laying  
late May - Early Aug  
eggs hatch today  
fledge in 30 days

Two bird species of special conservation concern have nested at this location for a number of years, beginning at the time when it was an active mine operated by the Mallard Sand and Gravel Company.

Interior Least Terns (*Sterna antillarum athalassos*) are a state and federally listed endangered species. Piping Plovers (*Charadrius melodus*) are a state and federally listed threatened species. These birds nest on bare or sparsely vegetated expanses of sand. Historically, terns and plovers nested on midstream river sandbars, but for the last 50 – 75 years, they have commonly been found nesting on the sand spoil piles at sand and gravel mines and on the beaches at lakeshore housing developments, such as this one. Terns and plovers are in Nebraska from approximately 15 April to 30 August.

The destruction of nests, eggs, chicks, or adults, and the harassment or disturbance of these birds in any way, are violations of the Federal Endangered Species Act (87 Stat. 884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) and the Nebraska Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act (§37-811). Property owners need to be aware that if Interior Least Terns and/or Piping Plovers nest on their property, the birds and their nests are protected by state and federal law. Property owners also need to be aware that they have the ability to employ management practices that will make their property inappropriate as nesting habitat for these two legally protected species.

The Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership is available to offer advice and assist with management practices which will help property owners remain in compliance with state and federal law. The Partnership, which is based at the University of Nebraska, works with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, property owners, business, industry, and local governments to proactively address Nebraska's threatened and endangered species concerns.

For more information contact:

Mary Bomberger Brown  
Program Coordinator  
Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership  
153C Hardin Hall  
3310 Holdrege Street  
Lincoln, NE 68583-0931  
402-472-8878  
mbrown9@unl.edu  
<http://ternandplover.unl.edu>