



Piping Plover chicks hatching

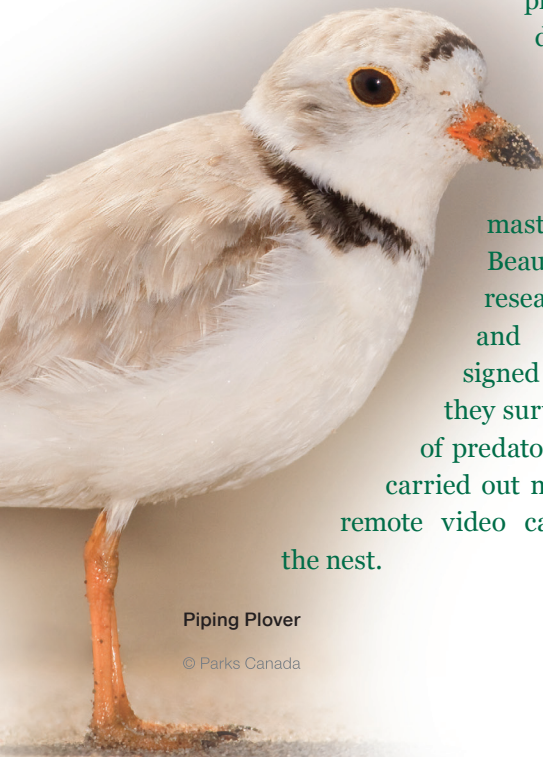
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Piping Up for the Piping Plover

Rallying Canadians to help an endangered shorebird

On a secluded beach in Kouchibouguac National Park, three people peeked through the dune grass to observe endangered Piping Plovers.

Theirs was the only human presence on that summer day in 2009. The park's beach was closed to the general public to protect the plovers' sensitive nesting areas. But master's student Gabrielle Beaulieu was conducting research on plover predation, and two park visitors had signed up to help. Together, they surveyed the beach for signs of predatory foxes and crows, then carried out maintenance work on the remote video camera used to monitor the nest.



Piping Plover

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Giving visitors this kind of hands-on chance at wildlife protection is part of Parks Canada's bold new strategy, entitled "*Involving Canadians to recover the Piping Plover*." "*For years we've protected plovers in our parks by saying: 'there are plovers nesting on this beach, we're closing the beach, you can't go near them',*" said Dr. Deborah Austin, Species at Risk Coordinator with Parks Canada's Atlantic Service Centre in Halifax. "*But that means people never get that sense of ownership, or responsibility, or even awe, that comes with seeing an endangered species.*"

Nests disappear, numbers dwindle

Piping Plovers are small shorebirds that lay their eggs directly on sandy and pebbly beaches. The *melodus* subspecies, which nests along the Atlantic coast, was identified as endangered by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada in 1985, and listed under the *Species at Risk Act* in 2003. The breeding population in Atlantic Canada is estimated at 250 pairs, far fewer than the 310 pairs deemed necessary by the recovery strategy for a healthy population.



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Nova Scotia's Kejimikujik National Park once had more than 20 nesting pairs; now, only three pairs remain. Kouchibouguac in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island National Park each have about 15 pairs, down from 30 in the past. One pair nested in 2009 in Newfoundland's Gros Morne National Park for the first time in 30 years.

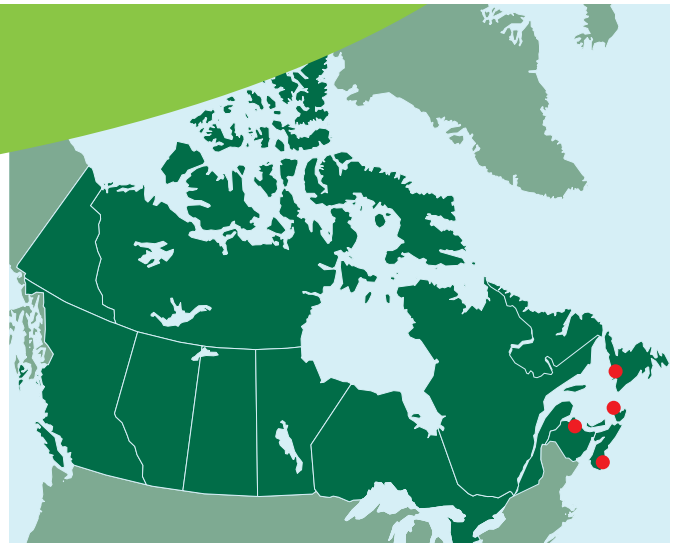
Besides predation, human activity is an important threat to plovers: inappropriate beach-front developments, ATV use, off-leash dogs, and large numbers of people may disrupt the nesting birds. Despite 20+ years of conservation efforts, the Piping Plover population has not increased significantly in Atlantic Canada. That's why, in 2008, Parks Canada decided to reach out to conservation groups, park visitors, and residents of Atlantic Canada in a region-wide effort to help the birds.

Volunteers take plovers under their wings

Organizations to protect Piping Plovers exist across the Maritime provinces: Bird Studies Canada in Nova Scotia; Island Nature Trust in PEI; and Nature New Brunswick and the Irving Eco-Centre in New Brunswick. Through these organizations, volunteers protect plovers by roping off the areas around their nests and erecting signs asking the public not to disturb the birds. They monitor nests to record the numbers of eggs hatched and chicks fledged and sometimes build enclosures to protect eggs from predators.

Now, Parks Canada is working with these groups to develop similar programs in Kouchibouguac, Kejimikujik, and Prince Edward Island National Parks. With a goal of logging 10,000 volunteer hours by 2013, Parks Canada aims to involve visitors in plover stewardship. It's hoped that once visitors have the chance to observe and help Piping Plovers in the parks, they'll tread more carefully on beaches outside of parks as well. They'll be encouraged to volunteer in their own communities, and spread the ethic of plover conservation among friends and neighbours.

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Gros Morne, Kouchibouguac, Prince Edward Island and Kejimikujik National Parks of Canada

Bringing plovers to the people

Since not everyone can visit Piping Plovers up close, Parks Canada will also bring plovers to the people – using highlights from the 1500 hours of remote-camera footage gathered by Beaulieu for her research. At visitor centres and on park websites,



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Staff and Visitors

the public will be able to view video of plovers nesting, incubating their eggs, and taking care of their fuzzy chicks.

While human actions threaten the survival of Piping Plovers, human help is necessary for their recovery. Whether through remote video, or up-close field work, Parks Canada aims to connect people with plovers in a way that is helpful, not harmful – and to make the bird a symbol of conservation across Atlantic Canada.

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