

PIPING PLOVER

Endangered Species

Quick Stats:

Adult Length - 6 to 8 inches

Adult Wingspan - 14 to 16 inches

Identification: The Piping Plover is a short bird with long legs. Its back is a pale brown-grey, and its underside is white. One black band circles its neck and one black band stretches between its eyes. Its beak and legs are yellow.

Habitat: This bird can be found along the Missouri River from Nebraska north through South Dakota, North Dakota, and Montana. Their habitat along the Missouri River includes sandbars, reservoir shorelines, and alkali flats with mostly open space. The Piping Plover can also be found along the Atlantic Coast and among the Great Lakes.

Reproduction: The Piping Plover builds nests in shallow depressions in the sand in open, un-vegetated areas. Breeding season lasts about four months, starting with breeding partners pairing off and ending with the birds migrating for winter. The birds normally lay four eggs and incubate them for 26 to 28 days.

Diet: Various insects and aquatic invertebrates make up a Piping Plover's diet.

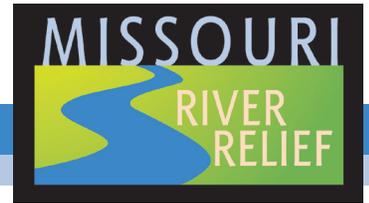
Adaptation: If a predator approaches a Piping Plover nest while the parents are around, they will try to draw its attention by doing what is known as a broken wing display. During this display, one bird pretends to have an injured wing so the predator will follow the adult and not eat the young Plovers.

Reason for Endangered Status: The Piping Plover's largest vulnerability comes from its nesting habits. Large, open sandy areas are the first places cities look when developing beaches. Unfortunately, Piping Plovers are also looking for this exact habitat to lay their eggs. They are a skittish species and will abandon their nests if they sense too much disturbance. The development of U.S. shorelines around the Great Lakes and the



A Piping Plover standing on a sand bar, a place where it might build its nest along the Missouri River.

CONT. PIPING PLOVER



Missouri River has drastically diminished the choice of suitably secluded locations for breeding pairs and has led to a huge reduction in the amount of young that are hatched.

Along with shoreline land development, Piping Plovers have also been affected by other human activities, like dams that regulate Missouri River flows. Before dams regulated the flow of the Missouri River, frequent flooding would clear sandbars of vegetation and create new habitats for Piping Plovers to build their nests. Now that there is less flooding, many sandbars along the Missouri River are overcome with vegetation, thus diminishing the available habitat for the Piping Plover. Agricultural land-use practices that stabilize river banks also reduce shallow water and sand shorelines critical for Piping Plover nesting.

While Piping Plovers struggle in their Missouri River habitat, they are in the most danger in the Great Lakes region. A 2009 review of the Piping Plover population by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that the Atlantic Coast and Northern Great Plains (Missouri River) populations should maintain their threatened status and the Great Lakes population should maintain its endangered status.

Sources:

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For More Information: This is issue number 3 in volume I of issues all related to the Missouri River. To access the rest of the collection, visit the Missouri River Relief Education page at riverrelief.org. This issue was published in June 2018.