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Life Science
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Earth & Human Activity

River Quest 2017

Bringing Back the Piping Plover

Synopsis

The Great Lakes Piping Plover is a migratory shorebird. It is one of three populations of piping plover that occur in the United States. The Atlantic Coast population of piping plovers is currently threatened along with the Great Plains population. The Great Lakes population of piping plover is endangered. The piping plover was federally listed as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act in 1985 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Historically the piping plover nested along the beaches of the Great Lakes, but due to hunting, habitat loss and human disturbances the plover is currently only found nesting along the shores of Michigan and Wisconsin and none in Minnesota. A recovery plan has been developed to restore the piping plover to its historical nesting areas. This plan includes restoring beach habitat, education and community outreach.

Piping Plover migrate from their wintering grounds in the southern coastal United States (Georgia through Florida and beaches along the Gulf Coast) to the shores of the Great Lakes in late spring and summer to nest and rear its young.

The Great Lakes Piping Plover is a small shorebird about 6 ¼ "in size (about the size of a robin). The upper body is sand colored, while the underside is white. During the breeding season adults have orange legs and a distinct black forehead band and a black chest band, along with an orange and black bill.

During the breeding season piping plovers select areas of wide open sandy beaches with some cobble and sparse vegetation to build their nests. Using his legs and feet the male piping plover digs out several shallow depressions in the sand, called scrapes. Once a female approves of the scrape she will then choose to lay her eggs, up to four, in the scrape which is now called a nest. Each nesting pair of plovers needs about 300 feet of beach to successfully establish a nest and to find adequate food to rear their young.

Reference Links

USFWS: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/pipingplover/pipingpl.html>

Cornell Lab: http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/piping_plover/id

National Park Service: <http://www.nps.gov/slbe/forteachers/upload/GLPloverdoc.pdf>

University of Minnesota: http://www.waterbirds.umn.edu/Piping_Plovers

Vocabulary List

Endangered Species – a species whose numbers are so few, or are declining so quickly, that the animal, plant, or other organism may soon become extinct.

Enclosure - an area fenced in to keep out animals or intruders.

Habitat - the natural conditions and environment in which a plant or animal lives

Migration – a group of people, birds, or other animals that are moving together from one region to another.

Scrape – a shallow depression in the sand created by a male plover.

Shorebird – a bird that lives and feeds near the shores of coastal or inland waters.

Population – all the plants or animals of a particular species present in a place.

Predator – a carnivorous animal that hunts, kills, and eats other animals in order to survive.

Prey – an animal or animals caught, killed, and eaten by another animal as food.