

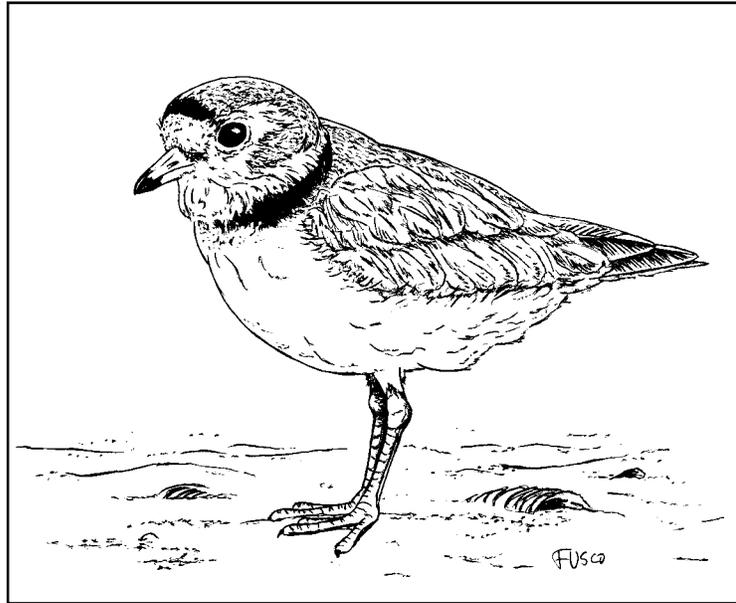
# WILDLIFE IN CONNECTICUT

## ENDANGERED AND THREATENED SPECIES SERIES

### PIPING PLOVER

*Charadrius melodus*

THREATENED



**Habitat:** Along seacoasts, on isolated, sandy beaches with little vegetation and access to mudflats for feeding.

**Weight:** 1.5-2.25 ounces.

**Length:** 6-7 inches.

**Wingspan:** 14-15.25 inches.

**Life Expectancy:** 8-14 years of age.

**Food:** Marine worms, fly larvae, beetles, crustaceans, mollusks, and other small marine animals and their eggs.

**Status:** Federally and state threatened.

**Identification:** Piping plovers are white below and creamy brown above, the color of dry sand. During the breeding season, they have a single black neck band that is sometimes incomplete and a black bar above the white forehead. This black neck band is completely lacking in winter. Their primary feathers are dark brown. The rump is white, contrasting with the brown back and tail, which are very conspicuous in the bird's distraction display. The bill is orange with a black tip; the feet are also orange. The voice is a clear "peep-lo"; often only the "peep" is given. The piping plover is often confused with another member of its family, the killdeer, which has 2 black bands across its chest and is larger than the plover.

**Range:** Piping plovers nest from Nova Scotia south to North Carolina, with a population in the Great Lakes

region north into Alberta, Canada. They winter along the southern coast from North Carolina to Texas and into the Caribbean.

**Reproduction:** Piping plovers arrive in Connecticut to nest in late March. The first eggs are laid by late April in a shallow depression often lined with shells and placed near vegetation. The 3 to 4 eggs are cream-colored with dark brown flecks evenly distributed over the surface. Both the male and female incubate the eggs. The eggs hatch in 27 days, with the young leaving the nest within hours of hatching. The young fledge in 28 days but continue to stay with the adults through migration. Birds that lose their nests and young will re-nest into early July. Plovers are able to breed in their first year.

**Reason for Decline:** The development of the shoreline for recreation has limited the number of available piping plover nest sites. Beach stabilization projects have reduced the quality of the remaining sites, forcing the birds to nest in areas with greater vegetation and increased human disturbances. Vegetation provides cover for, and human activities encourage the presence of, predators such as dogs, cats, rats, raccoons and skunks. In addition, human disturbances affect productivity by keeping birds off nests, thus preventing them from attending eggs and young; outright destruction of nests is also a factor.

**History in Connecticut:** In the late 1800s, unrestricted market hunting for the millinery trade devastated the piping plover population on the Atlantic coast. Not only were the feathers used to adorn women's hats, but the birds were also used for human consumption. With protection, the species later recovered, only to decline again over the past 40 years as human development and recreational use greatly intensified on coastal habitats.

**Interesting Facts:** When humans or enemies come too close to a plover nest, the adults will try to distract

them by flapping around like a wounded bird. This is sometimes referred to as a "broken wing" display. Plovers have a defined beachfront territory. Beachgoers are met at the beginning of the territory by the plover and escorted along by the walking bird until the territory ends. Unlike their nesting neighbors, the least terns, that fly and dive at enemies, adult plovers walk and stop, walk and stop to avoid detection by visually blending into the background.

**Protective Legislation:** *Federal* - Endangered Species Act of 1973, Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. *State* - Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 26-311.

**What You Can Do:** Respect all plover nesting areas that are fenced or posted for the birds' protection. Do not approach or linger near piping plovers or their nests. If pets are permitted on beaches used by plovers, keep pets on a leash. Keep housecats in the house, especially at night, during the nesting season. Don't leave or bury trash or food scraps on beaches. Garbage attracts predators which may prey upon piping plover eggs and chicks.

## CONNECTICUT RANGE

