



“Seashore Science”

[www.nps.gov/caco](http://www.nps.gov/caco)

# The Piping Plover



Piping plovers (*Charadrius melodus*) are small shorebirds that winter along the southeast coast of the United States. Each spring, they return to Cape Cod to establish territories and form pairs.

Starting in April and extending into summer, plovers build their nests and lay eggs above the high tide line, usually in front of the dunes. Their nests, called “scrapes,” are little more than shallow depressions scraped directly into the sand.

The female typically lays four eggs that the male and female take turns incubating. The eggs hatch in about 25 days, and within hours of hatching the tiny, downy chicks begin learning how to search for food.

Plovers feed by running and darting to catch insects, amphipods, and other invertebrates found on the surface of the sand and mudflats or living amidst the wrack deposited at the high tide line. Wrack (washed up seaweed and marshgrass) is rich in these invertebrates and is an important feature of natural beaches.

Piping plover adults, nests, and chicks all blend into their surroundings to avoid detection by predators. When predators (real or perceived) approach too closely, an adult will run down the beach dragging its wing, as if injured, or call loudly as a distraction. Although this behavior may prevent chicks from being eaten, it leaves the eggs and chicks vulnerable to cold or over-heating. For chicks, the stress of running for cover burns calories needed for growth and maturation.

## Sharing the Beach with Plovers is Easy if You Know How

At Cape Cod National Seashore, our goals are to protect the park's resources while providing visitors an opportunity to experience and enjoy them in a manner that leaves them unimpaired.

- ❖ Pay attention to signs and follow the instructions.
- ❖ Don't feed wildlife or leave food scraps or trash on the beach; this attracts predators to nesting areas.
- ❖ Keep your dog on a leash no more than 6' long at all times and comply with dog restrictions.
- ❖ You might see pedestrian detours or be requested to move quickly through areas to minimize disturbance.

Please follow the instructions and in most cases you'll be able to continue your walk without harm to plovers or their young.

- ❖ Set up your beach blanket far from posts and strings which are used as symbolic fencing to identify



where nests are. This fencing minimizes disturbance to nesting plovers from people walking by, but not from the prolonged presence of people. Set up several meters away, or choose an area without symbolic fencing.

- ❖ Be aware of park rules and regulations regarding boat landing, kite flying, and dogs. If you are uncertain, check at a park visitor center or the Oversand Office at Race Point Ranger Station.

- ❖ Plovers are fascinating! Check out the plover slide show at: <http://www.nps.gov/caco/naturescience/the-piping-plover.htm>

- ❖ Learn more about piping plovers and their conservation at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/pipingplover/recplan/index.html>

- ❖ Bring your binoculars and field guide on your next beach walk to observe and enjoy these birds from a distance.

*photos courtesy of Kevin Klasman© (www.kevinklasman.com)  
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