



Status: **Endangered in Maine**

Least Terns

The smallest North American tern, at only nine inches tall, the Least Tern is gray above and white below, with a yellow bill that distinguishes it from other terns in Maine. Look for the white wedge on its forehead that makes it look like it's wearing a mask.

Least Terns nest in colonies on sandy beaches along North America's Atlantic coast; Maine is as far north as they go. They arrive here by mid-May to begin their courtship rituals, then migrate by early fall to their wintering grounds in Brazil.

In early summer, females lay a clutch of two to three eggs into small scrapes in the sand dug above the high tide line. Incubation takes 21 days. Once hatched, the chicks are completely dependent on their parents for food, though they can move around the colony for shelter. Least Terns protect their colony by "dive bombing" intruders and pelting them with droppings. Chicks are capable of flight three weeks after hatching.

Other birds: Many shorebirds stop on Maine beaches during their long migrations between breeding grounds in the Arctic and wintering grounds along the southeastern U.S. coast to South America. It's crucial these birds are not disturbed while they are feeding—they need to conserve all the energy they can, in order to make those long migrations.

What you can do to help.

Be a responsible pet owner: From April to September, keep dogs leashed and cats indoors. *Visit: petsforplovers.org*

Respect fenced areas: Walk along the water line to avoid nesting areas in the upper dry sand and dune edge, and also be aware that plovers do use the entire beach.

Share the shore: During fall migration, avoid disrupting large flocks of mixed shorebirds foraging in the wet sand.

Dig safe: Fill in any holes to prevent chicks from becoming trapped.

Leave no trace: Take all and any trash off the beach with you. Trash attracts predators!

Keep skies clear: Fly kites and drones away from nesting areas. Plovers mistake them for predators and leave their nest or chicks unattended.

Volunteer: Be a monitor at a local beach to help protect these endangered species.

Keep in touch: Notify Maine Audubon of any disturbances to nesting areas. Call 207-245-2353.



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Maine's Endangered Piping Plovers & Least Terns

Status: **Endangered in Maine; Threatened Federally**

Piping Plovers

Piping Plovers are one of Maine's most endearing and vulnerable shorebirds. A pale sand color, they have a white belly, black bands on the forehead and neck, bright orange legs, and a bright orange beak with a black tip. Adults grow to seven inches tall. Piping Plovers and their chicks blend into their sandy beach surroundings and can be quite difficult to spot. Their best defense is camouflage, and chicks freeze when threatened.

Piping Plovers winter as far south as the Bahamas and the West Indies up to North Carolina. They arrive in Maine to breed in mid-March. Male Piping Plovers begin by making "scrapes" in the sand. Then the female chooses a scrape and lays one egg every day or so, beginning incubation after a fourth egg is laid. Both the male and female share incubation duties for a 28-day period.

Piping Plover chicks hatch covered in downy feathers. Within hours they are moving around the beach, foraging for themselves. Chicks are capable of flight within 25-30 days. The male and female both raise the chicks although the female typically leaves early for migration and the male finishes the job of chick rearing. Piping Plovers stay in Maine until late August.



CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Since 1981, Maine Audubon, in partnership with Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and United States Fish and Wildlife Service, has been monitoring and protecting nesting sites for Piping Plovers and Least Terns

in Maine. From the time plovers arrive in mid-March until they migrate south in the fall, biologists are on the beaches protecting nesting sites, educating the public, and tracking the population. The plover population has grown from a

mere 10 nesting pairs in 1981 at 6 beaches to a whopping 157 pairs at 27 beaches in 2023. Least Tern numbers have increased significantly as well, since our monitoring began in 1977.

Threats to these birds

HABITAT LOSS



Increased shoreline development (such as buildings at the edge of the beach, seawalls, jetties, piers, and parking lots), worsening winter storms, and recreational beach use by humans all result in loss of suitable habitat for birds.

PREDATORS



Many predators target plovers, their chicks, and their eggs. Raptors, foxes, and domestic dogs and cats can predate adults. Raccoons, skunks, gulls, crows, and foxes can predate eggs and chicks. Trash on or near the beach attracts more predators.

HUMAN DISTURBANCE



People can disturb nesting birds by walking through feeding areas thus causing the birds to move or fly off. Setting up recreational activities too close to a nest or vandalizing fencing that protects nesting areas can negatively affect the plovers.

DOGS AND CATS



When dogs harass and chase plovers it pulls the adults away from protecting their nests, and they can maim or kill chicks who are not yet able to fly. Also, roaming outdoor cats prey on adult plovers and can cause extreme losses.