



Piping Plovers in the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore

Introduction

In the mid-1970s piping plovers started nesting on Long Island, the southernmost one in the park. These shorebirds have buffy backs, pale underparts, and black head and neck bands. On males, like the one to the right, the bands are more complete. The Great Lakes population is a federally endangered species.

When plovers started nesting on Long Island there were long stretches of wide beach habitat with ample sand and cobble. These features allowed adult pairs to set up individual territories and camouflage fragile eggs. A full clutch has 4 eggs and both parents take turns tending them for 25 to 31 days. Chicks fledge 29 to 35 days later.



Can you find the eggs?



Adult male piping plover (R. Brady photo)

Threats

In recent years high water levels and more storm events have reduced the width of the beach habitat on Long Island, prompting birds to use other islands. In 2019, birds were reported on Cat and Michigan Islands early in the spring but they ended up nesting on Long, Stockton, and Outer Islands. In 2020, they explored Stockton early but ended up nesting on Long, Michigan, and Outer.

Unleashed dogs pose a great threat to piping plover nesting success and chick survival. Dogs are required to be on a 6' or shorter leash at all times at Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

What Can You Do?

- Stay away from nesting enclosures and obey all closed area postings. Walk close to the water when nesting sites are observed.
- Always keep your dog on 6-foot leash. Dogs can chase nesting birds and cause nest abandonment.
- Leave vegetation and driftwood on beaches. These provide food and shelter for plover chicks.
- Learn more about piping plovers by visiting GreatLakesPipingPlover.org.

Partners and Funding

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