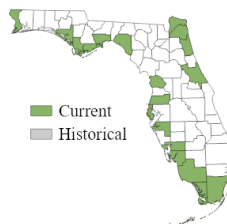


PIPING PLOVER

Charadrius melodus



Order: Charadriiformes

Family: Charadriidae

FNAI Ranks: G3/S2

U.S. Status: Threatened

FL Status: Threatened

Description: Small plover with a short, stout, black bill, yellow to greenish-olive legs, and very pale upperparts. In Florida, usually encountered in winter plumage. Black band across forehead and dark ring partly around neck, present in breeding birds, fade in winter birds and are not present in juveniles.

Similar Species: May be confused with snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*; see species account), which is similarly colored, but has a longer, slenderer black bill and darker legs. In winter, adult and juvenile piping plovers also have a dark bill, but bill is shorter and thicker, and legs are lighter than those of the snowy plover. In flight, piping plovers show a white rump.

Habitat: Found on open, sandy beaches and on tidal mudflats and sandflats along both coasts.

Seasonal Occurrence: Very rare to uncommon winter resident, although may appear locally early July - May.

Florida Distribution: Winters on both Gulf and Atlantic coasts, although much more common on Gulf coast. Of 582 plovers sighted in Florida during the 1991 International Winter Census, 88 percent were recorded on the Gulf coast. Found along beaches from Perdido Key (Escambia County) to Dog Island and Lanark Reef (Franklin County), and from Anclote Key (Pasco County) to Marco Island and vicinity (Collier County). Small numbers overwinter in the Keys. Atlantic coast birds number much fewer (20 - 30 birds) and are scattered from Duval County south to Brevard, St. Lucie, and Miami-Dade counties. No longer believed to overwinter in Broward, Indian River, Nassau, or Palm Beach counties.

Range-wide Distribution: Mostly breeds locally in the northern Great Plains region of southern Canada, south to Nebraska; formerly throughout much of Great Lakes

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region, now locally only in northern Michigan and one locality in northern Wisconsin; and on Atlantic coast from Newfoundland south to North Carolina. Most birds winter from North Carolina south to Florida, Gulf coast states, Mexico, and sporadically in the Caribbean, although winter distribution is not completely known.

Conservation Status: Surveys conducted during the 1991 winter census resulted in 582 plovers sighted, of which 511 were on the Gulf coast and 71 on the Atlantic coast (including the Keys). Destruction and degradation of summer and winter habitat, shoreline erosion, human disturbance, and predators (including domestic animals) all contribute to low reproductive success and declines in numbers over much of the plover's range. Although Florida's conservation lands provide considerable suitable habitat, increasing recreational demands result in increased harassment of foraging and roosting birds. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is currently reviewing wintering areas to be designated as Critical Habitat.

Protection and Management: Maintain habitat in a natural state.

References: Poole and Gill (eds.) 1992, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.



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