

The Piping Plover, Least Tern, and Black Skimmer are New Jersey's endangered beach nesting birds. Each of these species make their summer home on our sandy barrier islands, nesting on the open beach and sometimes in the dunes. These birds spend their winters from North Carolina to South America and nest on beaches all along the Atlantic Coast. New Jersey's beach nesting birds comprise a significant portion of the entire breeding population, so their fate in our state has worldwide significance.

Without active protection these birds would probably disappear from our beaches. The Division of Fish and Wildlife's Endangered and Nongame Species Program, as well as other government agencies and conservation organizations, protect beach nesting birds in a variety of ways. Biologists locate nesting areas that are then protected with fence and posted with signs to alert people of the birds' presence. Individual Piping Plover nests are sometimes protected with predator "exclosures", wire cages that help keep predators away from eggs and just-hatched chicks. Employees and dedicated volunteers patrol the beaches to monitor nesting areas and speak with beachgoers about what they can do to help protect the birds.

If you ignore signs or enter fenced areas, you may accidentally step on the camouflaged eggs or chicks. If disturbed, parent birds will leave their nests, exposing eggs or chicks to deadly heat or predators. Exposed eggs or chicks can die in minutes on a hot summer day. Dogs may chase or harass adults and chicks, sometimes even eating or stepping on chicks and eggs. Prolonged disturbance of young chicks can interrupt their feeding and lead to starvation or increase the likelihood of predation.



New Jersey's beach nesting birds require only a very small portion of our beaches to survive. To "share the shore" and help protect these birds:

- Respect all areas fenced or posted for the protection of wildlife.
- Do not approach or linger near birds or their nesting areas.
- Control dogs. Dogs are not permitted on most beaches during the nesting season. If dogs are allowed on the beach, keep them leashed and well away from nesting areas.
- Keep cats indoors. Cats kill millions of birds each year, including our beachnesters.
- Do not leave or bury trash or food scraps on the beach. Garbage attracts predators, such as gulls, crows, raccoons, foxes, skunks and feral cats, which may prey upon eggs or chicks. Please don't feed any of these predators.



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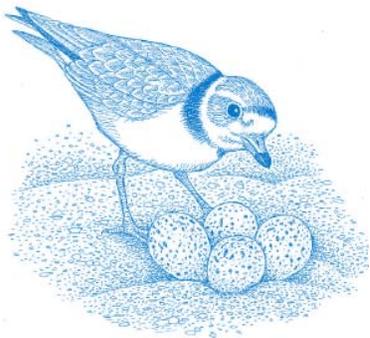
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New Jersey's Endangered Beach Nesting Birds





Piping Plover

STATUS: State – Endangered, Federal – Threatened

DESCRIPTION: Piping Plovers are about the size of a Starling (7 1/2"). They are a pale, sand-colored bird with a black-tipped orange bill and orange legs, and a distinct black neckband and "eyebrow".

NEST: A shallow scrape in the sand frequently lined with clamshell fragments. The nest is often located near small clumps of vegetation such as beach grass.

WHERE THEY NEST: Directly on the sand of the open upper beach and sandy overwash areas, or in sparsely vegetated dunes.

EGGS: Usually four eggs. Cream or sand colored with small brown speckles or spots. The small ends of the eggs all point toward the center of the nest.

WHEN THEY NEST: Piping Plovers arrive in New Jersey in March and April. They lay eggs from mid-April to late June, often re-nesting if the first nest or brood of chicks fails. Small vulnerable chicks are still present on the beach until mid-August.

HOW THEY NEST: Piping Plovers are territorial and usually nest 50-100 yards from other Piping Plover nests. However, they often nest in or near Least Tern colonies.

NESTING DEFENSE: The pale sand coloration of Piping Plover eggs, adults and chicks helps camouflage them from predators. When disturbed, adults walk or fly away from their nests, often acting as if they are injured or have a "broken wing". If a bird behaves this way, leave the area since you are probably near a nest.



Least Tern

STATUS: State – Endangered

DESCRIPTION: Least Terns are about the size of a Robin (9"). They are white with long slender gray wings, a black cap and eye line, and a bright yellow bill.

NEST: A shallow depression in the sand.

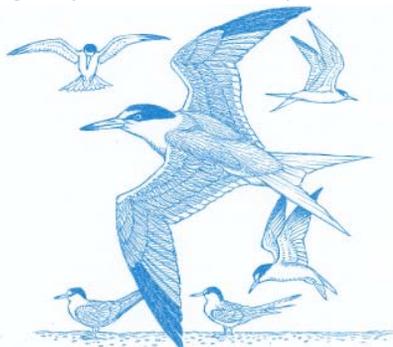
WHERE THEY NEST: On the ground on sandy beaches, sandy dredge material or gravel mines.

EGGS: Usually two, sometimes three. Pale olive-buff to cream colored with variable brown spots or splotches.

WHEN THEY NEST: Least Terns arrive in New Jersey in early May, and lay eggs from late May until early July. Small vulnerable chicks are still present on the beach through late July, often into August.

HOW THEY NEST: Least Terns nest in colonies of just a few pairs to over 500 pairs. Nests may be as close as several yards or as far apart as 50 yards. They often nest near Piping Plovers and sometimes near Black Skimmer colonies.

NESTING DEFENSE: Least Terns leave their nests when predators or people come too close. They fly over, dive at, and sometimes defecate on the intruder. If a number of terns are flying over and diving at you, leave the area since you are probably in, or too close to, a colony.



Black Skimmer

STATUS: State – Endangered

DESCRIPTION: Black Skimmers are about the size of a Crow (16" to 20"). They have a black upper side and a white breast and belly. They are easily identified by their distinct long black-tipped red bill, which has a noticeably longer lower mandible.

NEST: A shallow depression in the sand.

WHERE THEY NEST: On the ground on sandy beaches or dunes, usually close to an inlet. Will also nest on eelgrass wracks or sand patches on salt marsh islands.

EGGS: Three to six (chicken egg size). Off-white with variable black blotches.

WHEN THEY NEST: Black Skimmers arrive in New Jersey in early May, and begin egg laying in late May to late July. If their nests are flooded out they will sometimes lay eggs as late as August, with chicks fledging as late as mid-September.

HOW THEY NEST: Black Skimmers nest in colonies of just a few pairs to over 800 pairs. Nests may be as close as one or two yards from each other, or as far apart as 50 yards. They nest in close association with Common Terns and sometimes near Least Terns.

NESTING DEFENSE: When disturbed, Black Skimmers (sometimes the entire colony) leave their nests and circle away calling. They may fly back toward the disturbance, but more frequently they land and sit nearby. They rely on the aggressive behavior of terns for some protection.