

Once again, Prince Edward Island is a hot spot for Piping Plover conservation. There are three programs planned to help conserve this endangered species: the Management Program at the P.E.I. National Park, the Guardianship Program, and the Research Program. We can think of these as the continuing, the new, and the future of Piping Plover conservation in Atlantic Canada.

As a consequence of the Piping Plover Management Program at P.E.I. National Park, a mean of 1.73 chicks per pair have fledged over the past decade. This rate is three times higher than that achieved in nesting areas outside the National Park. We must continue to support the Park's efforts, and applaud the dedication shown by the staff of Parks and People.

The Piping Plover Guardianship Program is being implemented in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia in 1992. This program seeks to reduce human disturbance to the birds at sites that currently have no protection. Beach activities, camping, motor vehicles, and beach combing can all disrupt the normal behaviors of Piping Plovers, and can result in the loss of nests and chicks. Through the volunteer efforts of people like yourself, the program will clearly post Piping Plover nesting areas with information signs, maintain the signs in good order, and enhance public awareness of the Piping Plover. Guardians will speak with the public while standing at the posted boundary line of the plover breeding area. People respond very positively to being politely asked to stay out of plover breeding areas. After all, plovers only use a very small portion of the beach. Surely there is room for both people and plovers to share our beaches. If you are interested in becoming a Piping Plover Guardian, we can provide you with a T-shirt, jacket, and ball cap all bearing the Guardianship logo to help identify you to the public. We can also provide training. In P.E.I., this program is being administered by the Island Nature Trust, in cooperation with the Department of Environment.

Little is known about the species' habitat requirements or the mechanisms by which it is sensitive to human disturbance. It seems likely that some habitats are more important to plovers than others. A method is needed to rank habitat quality throughout Atlantic Canada so that we can secure the protection of the most important sites. Further, it is vital that we determine how much or what types of human disturbance can be tolerated by plovers. This information is vital if we are to protect the most important habitat for Piping Plovers, and if we are to ensure that volunteer initiatives like the Guardianship Program are to have a maximum impact. The Natural History Society is sponsoring this research through grants obtained through the Endangered Species Recovery Fund and Environment Week 1992. The Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the Canadian Parks Service and Canadian Wildlife Service are also supporting this work.

Government, scientists, and most importantly you, the concerned citizen, can work together to retrieve the Piping Plover from the brink of extinction. It is our heritage and responsibility. The Piping Plover is the original beach bum. It needs our help.