

Duxbury Beach Guide For all Town of Duxbury ORV and Parking Lot Permit Holders - 2021

Piping Plover Photos

Introduction

In 1986, Piping Plovers (*Charadrius melodus*) were listed as a threatened species under both the U.S. Endangered Species Act and the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. Since 1991 Piping Plovers have nested on Duxbury Beach. Though the nesting population of Piping Plovers has continued to grow in Massachusetts and over two dozen pairs nest annually on Duxbury Beach, the Atlantic Coast population of Plovers as-a-whole is still in crisis.

In order to allow vehicles to travel on the beach roadway, use parking lots, and have over-sand vehicle (ORV) access on the beach, Duxbury Beach Reservation, Inc., the owner of Duxbury Beach, successfully obtained a permit for increased management flexibility from MassWildlife under its Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). Among other provisions, this Plan allows vehicles to travel in the vicinity of unfledged (non-flying) piping plover chicks on Duxbury Beach, but only under specified rules and conditions designed to protect the birds.

Piping plover parents return to Duxbury Beach in late March and chicks begin to hatch in mid-May. Typically, the last chicks will begin flying in late August-early September. Piping plover chicks leave the nest about two hours after hatching and are able to feed themselves. Piping plovers eat a variety of marine and terrestrial invertebrates such as worms and amphipods. They move from one tidal area to another, multiple times per day, crossing the roadway and foraging along both the oceanside and bayside beaches. Chicks blend into their surroundings very effectively because of their camouflaged plumage. They are highly mobile, very fast, and feed over large areas. When disturbed, they may run in spurts, stop, and hide in dune grass or small depressions in the sand.

Access

Recreational vehicles with a valid Duxbury Beach sticker are allowed access onto the property during the Plover season. Access may vary depending on when chicks hatch and where nests are and where chicks move. Nesting locations and chick movements change each season and so it is impossible to predict where and when closures may occur. Over-sand vehicles must have an ORV sticker and drivers must respect restricted areas and adhere to the Duxbury Beach Motor Vehicle Beach Regulations (listed in the Duxbury Beach Guide & Rules), bird monitor and beach operations instructions, and information on signs.

What to Look For

Piping plover broods (parents and chicks) exhibit several behaviors to look out for while driving along the roadway, beach, or through a parking lot. The plovers are spread throughout Duxbury Beach – north to south and east to west. Looking out for certain behaviors can help make sure that we keep them safe.

Flying: Be on the lookout for parent plovers flying in and out of the roadway. Typically, they will be calling or “peeping” while doing this, and it is a sign that the parents and chicks are going to cross the road. **Stop your vehicle and scan the road for other birds on the edge of the road or in the road if you see a plover fly in or out of the roadway.** Keep in mind that you may not hear them calling over the sound of the vehicle engine.

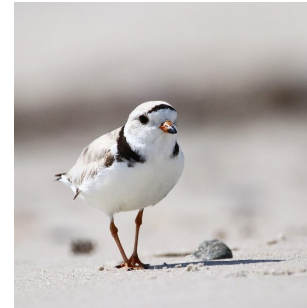
Chick Movement: At the start of crossing the road, the parents will lead the chicks into the road. Plover broods do not travel in a tight group, so entry into the roadway may be staggered. **If you see one or two chicks in the road, be on the lookout for more entering from either side of the roadway.** Plover parents will typically dart back and forth along the road to guide their chicks and keep an eye out for danger.

Camouflage: Chicks rely heavily on their camouflage to keep themselves safe. When faced with danger, such as a vehicle near them, their instinct is to freeze and crouch down where they are rather than run away. They may also take shelter in potholes, tire tracks, and other depressions, as well as vegetation growing along the side of the road. **Check the roadway thoroughly to make sure the chicks aren't hiding before you move your vehicle.**

Brooding: Chicks can also take shelter under one of the parents in a behavior called “brooding.” One or more chicks will push themselves under their parent to hide. It is very difficult to tell how many chicks are under the parent, even with binoculars. You can tell a parent is brooding chicks because they will stand still and looked fluffed up. Chicks can brood like this for several minutes at a time. **Do not attempt to pass the birds while they are brooding.** Brooding also helps chicks maintain their body temperatures and disrupting this behavior could cause them to die from being too cold or hot.

Movement Along the Road: The parents and chicks may go straight across the road and into the vegetation on the other side, but they may also travel up or down the roadway to access a more suitable exit point. **If the birds start traveling away from you, do not follow them. Following the brood as they are trying to find an exit point can make the crossing take longer.**

Hiding Under Vehicles: **If the birds start traveling toward you, do not move your vehicle.** Plover chicks have been known to take shelter under stationary vehicles and crouch under tires for safety. If no Shorebird Monitors are around, one person inside the vehicle should carefully get out to check if there are birds under the vehicle. If they are still there, do not attempt to move the birds. Get back in the vehicle and wait for them to move on their own. Lingering in the road can make the crossing take longer.



At left, a Piping Plover parent on Duxbury Beach. The adults are roughly the size of a tennis ball and they blend in with the sand and cobble very well. Look carefully for movement, distinctive black bands, and listen for peeping. At right, Piping Plover chicks are perfectly suited to blend in with Duxbury Beach. They grow quickly from the size of a cotton ball to adult size in about a month. They must find food for themselves and spend much of their time feeding and moving. (Photo credit: Stewart Ting Chong)

Additional photos and videos may be found at www.duxburybeachreservation.org/hcp

Driving Procedures

When driving on the back roadway, in parking lots, and in ORV areas on the beach, observe posted speed limits and look for Plovers. The maximum speed limit is typically 15 mph, but it is reduced to 5 mph within known Plover crossing areas. Headlight use is required during evening/nighttime hours. Adhere to all closures indicated by roped-off areas, barrels and cones. Orange fencing twine denotes areas where vehicles are prohibited.

Pullouts and sections of the back road may have limited access during the Plover nesting season. Drivers are responsible for adhering to any closures, including limited access down the back road. Drivers will be notified of such restrictions when entering the beach and are responsible for limiting travel on the back road to open areas.

During portions of the day, monitors will be on site to manage Plover crossings. When a crossing closure occurs, vehicles must follow instructions from bird monitors and must stop when a monitor has raised the stop sign or has signaled a driver to stop. Closures can last from a few minutes to two hours. Drivers are requested to stay in vehicle and avoid harassing the birds or the staff. Anyone traveling on Duxbury Beach should be prepared for such an extended stay and travel with any medications, water, and other necessities. In the event of a medical emergency, DBR staff will call 911 so that you may be taken off the beach safely.

While driving, keep your attention and eyes on the road. Use your peripheral vision to look for chicks near the edge of the roadway or travel corridor that may dart out. Chicks may also hide in small depressions in the sand, including in tire ruts, or in dune grass. They are tiny when newly hatched and rely on blending in with their surroundings. When chicks are close to people, the parent plover will often get excited, peep loudly (a rapidly repeated “peep-peep”) and stand in the road. Adults may also pretend to have a broken wing; they may flap their wing on the ground while moving away from you. This biological defense behavior is commonly referred to as the “broken wing display.” If you see this, be aware the adults are attempting to draw attention to themselves and away from chicks.

If you observe a Plover adult or chick in the roadway or parking lot and there is no staff present, stop your vehicle (do NOT drive around the bird) and wait until the Plover has left the roadway or parking lot. Scan the area very carefully to check for any other chicks or parents. Oftentimes the chicks do not move as a group. Do not attempt to keep driving if you see another chick on the side of the road or in the parking lot. Do not harass or frighten the bird or attempt to herd the bird out of the way.

Once the birds have made it safely out of the area, scan the area one last time to ensure there are no crouching chicks or stragglers just entering the area. Once you are confident there are no birds left in the area, you may move your vehicle. Proceed slowly until you are out of the area.

Due to varying high tides, changing beach condition, plover related closures and other reasons, portions of Duxbury Beach may be closed to traffic. Therefore, such closures should be anticipated and expected and are a reflection of the dynamic and healthy coastal landscape that we all love and rely on.

IMPORTANT! In the event of an emergency, and beach personnel are not present, please dial 911.

VIOLATIONS: Any violations of the aforementioned protocol will not be tolerated. Violators of the Duxbury Beach Guide & Rules shall be subject to sticker revocation, and their rights to operate a vehicle on Duxbury Beach will be suspended immediately for a period of one year from the date of the violation. A ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY WILL BE IN EFFECT AT ALL TIMES on all rules that compromise plover safety. Your cooperation in complying with these conditions and requirements is critical in determining future vehicle access on Duxbury Beach. You are active stakeholders in successful implementation of activities covered under Duxbury Beach Reservation’s HCP permit. Thank you for helping to keep Duxbury Beach a safe and enjoyable place.