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Piping Plover

The adult breeding Piping Plover is a small sandy-gray colored bird with a white breast and one distinctive dark band around its throat. Smaller than a robin, the Piping Plover has orange legs and an orange bill with a black tip. The Piping Plover searches the shorelines for insects to eat.



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For further information about Piping Plovers and Least Terns, please contact:

Colorado Division of Wildlife

Lamar Area Office
1204 East Olive
Lamar, CO 81052
719-336-6600



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

John Martin Reservoir
29955 County Road 25.75
Hasty, CO 81044
719-336-3476



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

755 Parfet Street, Suite 361
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Piping Plover and Interior Least Tern © D. Robert Franz

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Sharing the Shoreline

Help us conserve
the Least Terns
and Piping Plovers

Interior Least Tern



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The Least Tern is a small swallow-like bird with black outer wing feathers and a slightly forked tail. The black head, white forehead with black eye stripes, yellow legs, and yellow bill contrast with its pale gray body and white belly. Least Terns eat mainly small fishes and catch them by diving into shallow water areas.



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Adult Interior Least Terns. © Duane Nelson

The Interior Least Tern and the Piping Plover share the shorelines of John Martin, Adobe Creek (Blue Lake),

Great Plains, Timber Lake, and many other reservoirs of southeast Colorado with a growing number of campers, fishermen, and other outdoor enthusiasts. These two species of birds are also threatened with extinction.

The Least Tern was federally listed as endangered in 1985 under the Endangered Species Act and listed by Colorado as endangered in 1996. Piping Plovers were federally listed as threatened in January of 1986 and added to Colorado's threatened list in 1996.

Outdoor enthusiasts enjoy a variety of recreation activities at John Martin Reservoir. Unfortunately, the shoreline areas that people use for recreation are often the same areas used by terns and

plovers for nesting. Both birds nest in small, shallow depressions that they excavate and raise their young along the shorelines and on man-made islands. The nests are very hard to see.

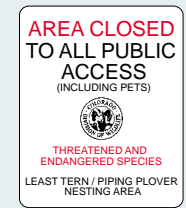
Nesting success varies from year to year depending upon water levels, vegetative encroachment, local weather conditions, predators, and human disturbance. While considerable research still needs to be done, nest and chick loss appear to be a major factor limiting the growth of both species. At John Martin Reservoir, predation and human disturbance are major causes of nest and chick loss.

Of these causes, human disturbance is the most manageable. In addition to public education efforts such as this brochure, **portions of the shoreline are closed to all public access (including pets) during the nesting and brooding season. This action is necessary to prevent disturbance to or destruction of nests, adult birds, or hatchlings.**

These closures are posted with signs and/or simple fencing, alerting people on shore to the presence of active bird nesting sites. Buoys with signs warn boaters and swimmers to the presence of nesting sites.



An Interior Least Tern nest. © Duane Nelson



It is impossible to mark all of the nesting sites. Regardless of whether or not the areas are marked with signs, **harassment or harm of either terns or plovers (including adults, young, eggs, or nests) is a violation of both state and federal law.** Violations are punishable by fines up to \$100,000, up to three years in jail, suspension of hunting and fishing privileges, and/or forfeiture of any vehicles/vessels used in the disturbance. **Any trespass into a closure area by people or pets is viewed as harassment and/or harm of an endangered species.**

The best action to take upon observing a closure or an unmarked nest site is to avoid it completely!

Both birds will lay creamy white to tan colored, speckled eggs in the nest. Terns typically lay up to three eggs and plovers up to four eggs. They often share the same nesting areas but the Piping Plover usually nests singly and Least Terns typically nest in colonies. Terns defend their nesting colonies by calling and diving at intruders and dropping excrement on those that get too close to the nests.

Piping Plovers typically arrive in Colorado in mid-April and Least Terns arrive in mid-May. The adult

birds and their young may reside at John Martin Reservoir until late September before they begin their migration south.

With continued public education and research, as well as habitat protection and restoration, progress is being made towards securing a future for these birds, but much remains to be done. Please help us conserve these endangered species by avoiding active nesting areas and not disturbing the birds.



An adult Piping Plover on the shoreline. © Duane Nelson



A Piping Plover nest and new hatchlings. © Duane Nelson