





**Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*)**

**Age/plumage:** adult breeding

**Date:** Apr. 26, 2005, ~ 7:00-8:30 PM; Apr. 27, 2005, ~7:00-8:15 PM; Apr. 28, 2005, 6:45-8:00 PM

**Location:** Special Management Area, Gull Point, Presque Isle State Park, Erie County

**Observer:** Ben Coulter  
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**Other observers:** Jerry McWilliams (4/28)

**Habitat:** The plover has been observed on flat cobblestone sandflats, on sandspits and sandbars, and foraging on mudflats and along the edge of the water.

**Distance to bird:** On the first day, the bird walked to under 40 ft. of me while foraging in the rain.

**Conditions:** Over the last several evenings, conditions have ranged from cloudy with heavy rain (4/26), to partly cloudy (4/27), to completely clear (4/28).

**Optics:** Swarovski 8.5x42 binoculars, Leica 77mm APO scope w/ 20-60x eyepiece, Nikon Coolpix 995

**Description:** The Piping Plover is a small shorebird, similar in size and shape to Semipalmated Plover. The bird is extremely pale on the upperparts, with a short, stubby, bill, orange legs, and in breeding plumage, a black frontal bar on the forehead and a black breastband. The rump is very pale, while the tail itself is much darker.

The crown and auriculars were very pale brown, extending to beneath the eyes, while the lores were even paler brown. The feathers immediately surrounding the base of the upper mandible were blackish, not noticed in the field, but evident in some photographs. The forehead was white, followed by a narrow blackish frontal band, connecting the eyes. There was also a diffusely bordered whitish supercilium, continuing and expanding behind the eyes. The throat and malar were white, and there was a complete white collar at the rear of the neck, thus isolating the crown from the rest of the upperparts. The mantle, scapulars, and rump were pale sandy brown, similar in color to the crown.

The plover had a complete blackish breastband, fairly thin at the rear, expanding to prominent blackish patches at the sides of the breast, and connected across the breast by a thin black line. The rest of the underparts were white.

The lesser and median coverts of the wing were sandy brown, the same shade as the upperparts. The primaries were blackish, with white on the middle of the outer webs of the primaries, becoming larger on the middle and inner primaries. The secondaries bore similar white marks, plus white tips, largest on the innermost. The greater coverts were white-tipped, and in combination with the flight feather markings, created a wingbar. The primary coverts and alula were blackish. The underwing coverts were white. The tertials were sand brown, but darker than the upperparts. The uppertail coverts and tail base were white, while the central several pairs of rectrices were mostly dark brown, in noticeable contrast to the white base. This combination of pale tail base and dark tail is very conspicuous in flight.

The eye was dark, while the orbital ring was yellowish-orange. The stubby, peg-like bill was still mostly blackish, with orange on the basal third, becoming dusky and finally blurring into black. Apparently, the bill had not yet attained full breeding coloration. The tomium was fairly straight, but angling downwards slightly near the base. The nostril was about a sixth of the bill length, and slightly bent upwards. The legs were bright orange.

**Behavior:** The plover would feed actively on mudflats or sandflats, and would characteristically run rapidly, and then pause to scan the ground. It especially favored the edge of the water. It was not very wary, and several times, it actually flew to within a few dozen yards of me, then fed nearby, oblivious to my (partially concealed) presence. The bird appeared to shy away from the roosting gulls at Gull Point, and was only seen occasionally near the edges, but never in the center of the gull flock. It liked to roost on the outer beach of Gull Point, and was seen sleeping in the shelter of large pieces of driftwood. The bird seems extremely pale in flight, and brings to mind a basic-plumaged Sanderling.

**Vocalizations:** The bird was heard rarely making single peep calls.

**Supporting Evidence:** see photographs by Ben Coulter.

**Similar species:** Semipalmated Plover is similar in shape to Piping, but is much darker brown on the upperparts, and shows an extensive black mask and frontal bar, and a dark rump. Compared to Piping, Snowy Plover is similarly pale, but differs in shape and habits. The bill of a Snowy is blackish and finely tipped, and the proportionately long legs are also never bright orange. Snowy has an incomplete breastband, and the rump is always dark. Snowy has a frenetic, active way of feeding, in contrast to the comparatively languid Piping.

**Discussion:** This Piping Plover was discovered on April 26, and remained until the evening of April 28. The bird was not seen following that date. The April bird showed no bands of any kind. A second Piping Plover was discovered at Gull Point on May 10, but this proved to be a different individual, as this one possessed color bands on the right tarsus.

**Prior experience:** I have seen this species before in the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

**Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee**

**Voting Tabulation – Round One**

Species: Piping Plover (Charadrius melodus)

Date of Sighting: 26 April 2005 to 28 April 2005

Location: PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK

County : ERIE

Observer(s): Ben Coulter, Jerry McWilliams et al.

Date of Submission: 2005

Submitted by: Ben Coulter

Written Description: Yes

Photo: Yes

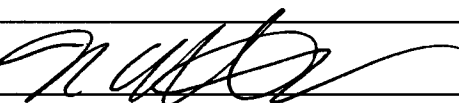
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut	X							
<del>D. Heathcote</del> <i>Guarante</i>	X							
P. Guris	X							
J. Stanlev	X							
E. Witmer	X							
<del>R. Leberman</del> <i>Heller</i>	X							
M. Sharp	X							
TOTALS	X							
DECISION	<i>7</i>							

Comments: *7/10*

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

*6/10/06*