

The Story of Our Piping Plover

Our 2021 FeatherFest featured bird is a Piping Plover. It is a migratory bird, meaning that it travels from one part of the world to another according to the season. Flocks of Piping Plovers spend the winter months in the Galveston area, many at Houston Audubon's Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary.

Every spring, this plover and many others leave Bolivar Flats and fly over 1,300 miles to their breeding grounds in the Northern Great Plains of the US and Canada, nesting on river or interior lake shorelines. (This little plover nested in Western South Dakota.) After completing their breeding season, they return to Galveston and Bolivar Flats to spend nearly two-thirds of their annual life cycle, feeding and resting on sandflats and beaches.

You will notice that our Piping Plover wears a unique combination of color bands on its legs. Bird banding is the process of attaching a small metal or plastic band or tag, each with a unique number or color, around a bird's leg in order to identify individual birds. Ornithologists watch for these birds as they travel and gather information that is useful for understanding the behavior of birds and important for bird conservation.



Photo by Joseph Kennedy

Because of its unique combination of color bands on its legs, our FeatherFest Piping Plover is a special bird to our Galveston Coast. It was banded as an adult in November 2012 at Houston Audubon's Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary. Local ornithologists watch for this bird and it has been seen at that location every year since it was banded, including in the fall of 2020, making it at least nine years old! It is one of several Piping Plovers that were banded with red flags and bands along the Texas coast in 2012 by the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, as part of a project to collect information necessary to inform conservation efforts for the species.

The Piping Plover is federally listed as a *threatened species throughout its wintering range. Census results have shown that approximately 50% of the Piping Plover population winters along the Texas coast, making our coastline very important for their conservation.

We hope you have the opportunity to see our featured bird or other red-flagged Piping Plovers along the Texas coast. A birder had such luck in July 2020, resighting one of the red-flagged Piping Plovers banded in Texas. However, it was way off-course – on a dairy farm in Georgia! It is believed weather patterns from Hurricane Hanna may have pushed it far to the east of its normal route.

While out enjoying birds at a safe distance, scan their legs for flags or color bands, report the sighting to the [Bird Banding Laboratory](#), and learn fascinating facts about the journeys that different bird species make!

* A "threatened species" is any species of bird or any other organism that is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future.