

Piping Plover

Pluvier siffleur

Charadrius melodus

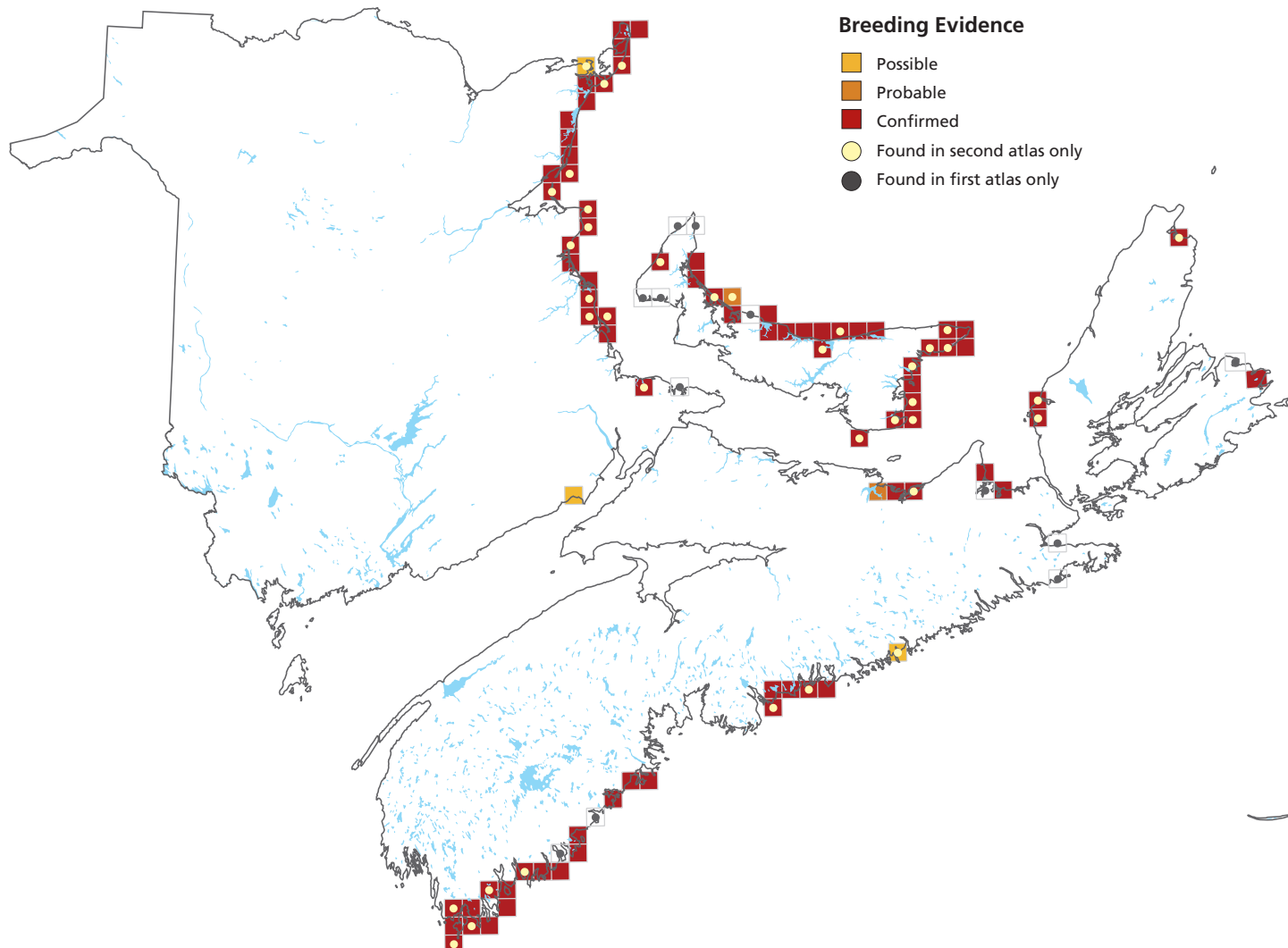


John Chardine

The Piping Plover is a flagship species for coastal ecosystems across the Maritimes. Organized efforts to recover this species here have intensified since the first atlas, as non-profit organizations, government agencies, community groups, and hundreds of volunteers survey beaches, monitor plovers, and protect nesting habitat in each province.

The Piping Plover comprises two subspecies, one found on the Great Plains and along the Great Lakes, and the other found along the Atlantic coast from Newfoundland to North Carolina. The latter population breeds in open or sparsely vegetated areas on coastal beaches, especially wide, dune-backed beaches.

The plover's Maritime breeding range extends along the coast from southernmost NS to the Acadian Peninsula. The second atlas shows no overall change in distribution but does reveal new breeding occurrences in eastern PEI, eastern NB, and western Cape Breton. The only range loss, in western PEI, has unknown causes, although all-terrain vehicle use and severe beach erosion may be factors.





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Despite the positive changes in breeding occurrences documented here, the International Piping Plover Census shows a 32% decline in the Maritime population between 1991 and 2011. The causes of the population decline are largely unknown, although a low survival rate of juvenile plovers may be a key factor. Primary threats include habitat loss and degradation from coastal development, motorized vehicles, and human disturbance, along with predator pressure. Shoreline alteration, which disrupts natural sand transport processes, is an emerging threat. Piping Plovers were first assessed as Endangered by COSEWIC in 2001 and again in 2013.

—Sue Abbott