



Piping Plovers

Sharing Our Shores

Shorebirds get the best of two worlds—the land and the sea.

What's better than a day at the beach? Besides the sun, sand, and waves, the shore has plenty of interesting and entertaining wildlife to watch! Up ahead, dozens of small leggy birds skitter back and forth like speeded-up dancers in the foamy surf. They share the sandy stage with other shorebirds, as well as with side-walking crabs, half-buried clams, and bristly beach worms.

The coast is where the land and sea come together. Shorebirds belong to both. They nest on land—often right on the beach—and depend on the ocean or other large body of water for their food. Keep reading to find out more about shorebirds and what makes a beach so much more than a wet sandbox.



CHICK AND EGG HIDE AND SEEK

Can you find the eggs and chicks in the close-up photos below?



Shorebirds nest on the ground, not in trees. Their nests are called scrapes—scratched out shallow places in the sand or gravel. Some shorebirds line their scrapes with dried seaweed, leaves, twigs, pebbles, or shell bits. Others lay their eggs right on the bare sand. The chicks are able to walk within hours of hatching. Camouflage helps protect the eggs and chicks. They blend in with the ground around them.



Shorebirds: What's on the Menu?

Any place where land and sea meet offers a full menu for hungry birds. Shorebirds' bills are adapted for finding and eating specific foods.

Black Oystercatcher



SNOWY PLOVERS

search the sand for beach hoppers and other small crustaceans, as well as tiny insects and worms. Most live west of the Rocky Mountains, along the Pacific coast, around Utah's Great Salt Lake, as well as other sandy inland places. They are also found along the Gulf of Mexico.



RED KNOTS

migrate long distances between breeding and wintering habitats. They get energy for their marathon journey by stopping to feed where food is plentiful along the ocean coasts of North America. Their stout straight bill is perfect for probing for snails, other mollusks, and horseshoe crab eggs.



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scout for worms and bugs on the surface of sand just at the waterline. These small shorebirds run, stop, look, peck, and repeat. Piping Plovers live along the Atlantic coast, the Gulf of Mexico coast, the Great Lakes, major rivers, and other bodies of water east of the Rocky Mountains.



BLACK OYSTERCATCHERS

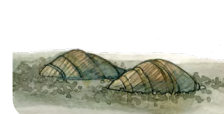
eat mollusks such as limpets and mussels. These West Coast birds search the rocky shores and tidepools for their supper. The oystercatcher's strong red bill is the perfect tool for prying its prey off rocks and opening up their shells.



LIMPETS



WORMS



SNAILS



BEACH HOPPERS

A Big Job for Young Volunteers



A young beach steward observes nesting shorebirds from a safe distance.

The United States has almost 90,000 miles of coastline along the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and the Gulf of Mexico. And there are thousands more miles of freshwater shoreline along the country's lakes and rivers. Protecting those habitats for wildlife and for people is a big job, and a lot of young people are volunteering as beach stewards to help out. Beach stewards make signs, patrol beaches, and answer questions about birds and other wildlife. When nesting season begins, the work of beach stewards becomes even more important. They help rope off nesting areas and talk with beachgoers about how to enjoy the sun, surf, and sand while sharing the shore with birds that lay their eggs and raise their young right there on the beach.



KEEPING THE BEACH WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY

The shore is home to birds, turtles, and other critters. Here are some things we all can do to protect shoreline habitat and wildlife.

Dispose of trash properly, never litter, and don't feed birds or other wildlife. Eggs and young of birds and turtles can be destroyed by trash-seeking animals.

Watch where you play! Nests and chicks are hard to see and can be trampled by people, bikes, and 4-wheelers.

Leave the birds alone. Feeding and chasing birds harms them.

Dunes are an important part of the beach habitat. Walking on them can break them down and harm the plants that hold them in place.



Find Your Flyway

Even if you've never seen the sea, shorebirds are in your area sometime during the year. They can be seen in all 50 states because many migrate between breeding and wintering grounds. Some shorebirds breed in prairie marshes or Arctic tundra far from any ocean. Audubon uses a map like this to divide the United States into flyways. These are the general routes taken by migratory birds—many of them shorebirds—as they fly between the places where they spend the winter and the places where they raise their young.

**Which flyway do you live in?
Write your answer on the line below.**

Do some research to discover which coastal birds you might see. Audubon's Online Bird Guide is a great place to start:
audubon.org/bird-guide

Distraction Action Heroes

When a predator zeroes in on a nest, many ground-nesting birds try a trick called distraction. The parent puts on a show to move the predator's attention onto itself instead of the nest. Then, when the trick has worked and the predator gets too close, the adult stops pretending and flies off to safety.

Here are some of the tricks protective parent birds play to protect their chicks and eggs:



KILLDEER

"My wing is broken, so I'm easy prey." The adult walks away from the nest dragging one wing on the ground.

"Hey, the nest is really over here." Parent bird moves away from the real nest, then crouches on the ground as if it were sitting on a nest.



PIPING PLOVER

"Wouldn't you rather eat a juicy mouse?" The adult bird hunches low to the ground and runs, making noise and zigzagging like a scurrying mouse.



PIPING PLOVER

Step Up to Share Our Shores

Here are three examples of how individuals of all ages can take action to protect shorebirds, other coastal wildlife, and the habitat they depend on for their survival.

STEP UP TO CLEAN UP!



There's a lot of work to be done to keep trash out of coastal waters and off beaches.

Take a look at what volunteers collected during the 2017 International Coastal Cleanup in the U.S.

345,241

Food wrappers

286,678

Plastic bottle caps

242,534

Plastic bottles

144,464

Straws, stirrers

96,815

Plastic grocery bags

1 DESIGN A SIGN

Signs made by kids have become an important way to educate coastal visitors about sharing our shores. What message would you use to alert beachgoers to nearby nesting birds or sea turtles, or to encourage good beach stewardship in other ways?

2 SHARE WHAT YOU KNOW

Volunteers for Audubon's "Be a Good Egg" program set up tables on beaches to answer questions and spread the word about how beachgoers can have fun without disturbing or harming nesting birds, their eggs, chicks, and the beach habitat.

3 CLEAN THE BEACH

The International Coastal Cleanup is organized by the Ocean Conservancy. One day every year, people all over the world pitch in to clean up ocean waters. And you can too, no matter where you live. That's because a lot of the polluting trash in the sea comes from far inland. It travels to the ocean down storm drains, rivers, and other waterways.

So participants in the annual event clean up trash along seashores, but also along lakes, streams, and rivers, too. How many participants and how much trash? In 2017, 800,000 volunteers removed more than 20 million pieces of trash from beaches and waterways around the world!



Young people all around the U.S. are sharing what they know to protect coastal critters and habitats.

BY: _____ AGE: _____



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