

A Piping Plover Story  
By Celeste Silling

This fall, GCBO Coastal Biologist Taylor Bennett was out on Matagorda Beach monitoring shorebirds when she spotted a Piping Plover. The Piping Plover is an undeniably cute shorebird species, but that is not what excited Taylor. This bird was sporting a leg band with an orange colored flag, marking it as a plover from the Great Lakes region. This was the first orange-flagged plover she'd seen here.

One of the best parts of bird monitoring is when you see a banded bird that you don't recognize. Banded birds always have unique combinations of colors and/or letters on their bands. The bands, which were placed around their legs by biologists, are lightweight and don't hurt the birds. Researchers band birds to keep track of them as they travel around their territories and across the country.

When we see a banded bird, we always report it. Taylor took a picture of the orange-tagged Piping Plover and sent it over to the Great Lakes Piping Plover Conservation Team, letting them know that their bird had made it to Texas. Alice Van Zoeren from GLPPCT got back to us with this Piping Plover's interesting origin story.

The plover, called Of,G/OB:X,G (this is code for his specific band combination), was actually a captive-raised bird. He was born in the wild in 2011 on North Manitou Island in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, MI. Unfortunately, his mother was predated by a Merlin (her leg bands were found in a Merlin pellet) and his father was forced to abandon the nest out of fear of the Merlins. The hatchling chicks were too young to fend for themselves, so Of,G/OB:X,G and his sibling were collected to be raised in captivity at The University of Michigan Biological Station near Pellston MI. When he was old enough, he was released back on the mainland of Sleeping Bear Dunes.

Thanks to the monitors who kept track of Of,G/OB:X,G in the wild for these 9 years, we know quite a bit about him. "He has nested many times, and interestingly, in many locations. Most plovers are more tied to their nesting locations," says Alice Van Zoeren from GLPPCT. Of,G/OB:X,G has spent summers in Sleeping Bear, Stearns, and Muskegon State Park and has found a female to nest with during 4 nesting seasons. Plovers fly South for the winter and Of,G/OB:X,G was reported before at Matagorda, TX in 2012-13, 2018-19 and now 2020.

Piping Plovers are the subject of many conservation efforts across the U.S. because their populations are struggling. Habitat loss, predation and human disturbance among other things hinder their nesting success. Because this species is migratory, monitoring them has to be a team effort! It is always interesting to talk with researchers and conservationists across the country about a bird that you have both monitored. Thanks to all of the Great Lakes researchers, rescuers, and conservationists for helping these birds and sharing your data. We hope you'll tell more of your birds to come our way!

If you'd like learn more about Great Lakes Piping Plovers and their recovery project, you can visit their website: [www.greatlakespipingplover.org](http://www.greatlakespipingplover.org) or their Facebook page. If you see an orange-flagged Piping Plover, you can email [plover@umn.edu](mailto:plover@umn.edu) to report it. They would really appreciate it!



Photo Caption 1: Of,G/OB:X,G when he was a chick, just after he was released near Glen Haven, MI in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in 2011. Photo by Alice Van Zoeren



Photo Caption 2: Of,G/OB:X,G on Matagorda Beach, TX nine years later. Photo by Taylor Bennett