

THE MONTCLAIR BIRD CLUB

YOUR WEEKLY BIRD 17

December 31, 2023

Pictures by Hillary Leonard



My relationship with the piping plover began in the mid-1990s after I had become a bird watcher and was actually aware of them. Prior to that time, I was completely unaware of what was on my local beach in Avalon, NJ, aside from, of course, the laughing gull. While sitting on the 50th Street beach in Avalon I would be treated to seeing many piping plovers foraging and rearing their young. Oftentimes the nests would be enclosed in wire fencing to protect the birds and their young from predators. We already knew survival for this species was precarious at best. I treasured each sighting of these birds but especially the recent hatchlings. I'm still not sure there is anything cuter than seeing these tiny fluff-balls running down to the shoreline to forage.

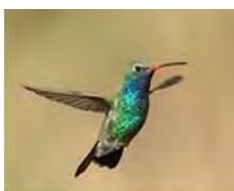
In 2004 my parents sold their house in Avalon, so I lost track of the birds that chose to breed on those beaches. In 2022 I had the benefit of corresponding with Todd Pover, senior wildlife biologist with Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey, who told me piping plovers had abandoned nesting in Avalon around the early 2000s. I'm sure there are a multitude of reasons why however I was surprised nonetheless because there are still reasonably good stretches of wide beaches and robust dune areas in those 'middle streets' of Avalon from about 40th Street to 58th Street. But the birds know best.

Fast forward to the summer of 2023 when I had a rare opportunity to reacquaint myself with this lovely bird. I spent a July day at Barnegat Light and while walking along the sand by the rock jetty with my brand-new Cannon R7 and 100–400 zoom lens, I heard the tell-tale, plaintive, melodious whistle of the piping plover. I looked around and saw three of them coming out of the protected dune area where I understand a number of birds have been breeding successfully. Mind you I was much closer to the rock jetty than the dunes and there was maybe one other person walking at the time. I stopped to watch them and take some photos. After watching these birds forage and engage in maintenance behaviors I proceeded on to the open beach area to sit on the sand and rest. While I sat there on the beach several more birds came out of the dune area and made their way to the shoreline.

After speaking recently with Rick Wright, I learned that the piping plover was first described after being sighted in New Jersey. I did a little research and found that the bird was first described by George Ord, Jr. in 1824.



If you would like to see your photographs highlighted here, send one or two pictures with a short paragraph to: [Sandy Sorkin & Rick Wright at MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com](mailto:SandySorkin&RickWright@MontclairBirdClub100@gmail.com).



Southwest Wings

