



For Immediate Release

Contacts:

Audubon of Florida: Monique Borboen, Northeast Florida Policy Associate, (904) 813-5115, Mborboen@audubon.org

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): Billy Brooks, Wildlife Biologist, (904) 731-3136, billy_brooks@fws.gov

Audubon and its Partners to Survey Wintering Shorebirds on Florida's Beaches

February 3, 2009, Marineland—Audubon of Florida and its partners will use boats, vehicles, and walk along 170 miles of Florida's beaches from the border of Georgia to Cape Canaveral on Friday, February 6, to survey the birds that spend their winters on our beaches.

“With so much ground to cover and considering the difficulty of identifying wintering shorebirds, the survey can only be successfully achieved through a tight partnership,” said Monique Borboen, Audubon's Northeast Florida Policy Associate. “Volunteers from various Audubon chapters, who are expert bird watchers, will team up with professionals.”

Partners include: the US Fish and Wildlife Service ([USFWS](#)), the [Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission](#), counties, the [City of Jacksonville](#), State and National Parks, Amelia Island Plantation, and [Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve](#) (GTM NERR). The USFWS will be collecting the data and Friday's systematic survey will allow USFWS to better assess where the birds are and over several years can provide population trend information.

“The survey's data will help the Service on its current bird conservation projects,” said Billy Brooks, a wildlife biologist with the USFWS. “Such data complements the Piping Plover census the Service conducts every five years and helps us better support land managers' efforts to protect imperiled shorebirds.”

During a shorebird identification practice session in preparation of the survey, Sanderling #1731-06114, was spotted in the cove of [Huguenot Memorial Park](#) where he is spending the winter. [Sanderlings](#) are tiny sandpipers, very light colored, often described as “chasing the waves” at the water's edge. This specific bird can be identified thanks to the “flag” he is wearing on his upper left leg. The “flag” is lime green and has the code XM1.

That bird was banded in May 2007 in [Reeds Beach, New Jersey](#) and has been seen in the same area of Huguenot for over a month.

Sanderlings, like [Dunlins](#), [Semipalmated Plovers](#), [Short-billed Dowitchers](#) and some other species, use Florida beaches for up to eight months a year, while they are not nesting in the far north. They feed at the water's edge at low tide and rest on the upper beach at high tide. Fewer or even elusive among them are [Red Knots](#), in dramatic decline, and [Piping Plovers](#), federally listed. "Red Knots and Piping Plovers are our target species for this survey, as they are the species of wintering shorebirds the most of conservation concern" says Billy Brooks with USFWS.

[Piping Plovers are federally listed](#) as threatened on their wintering habitat. The total species population is estimated at about 8000 birds. The [Great Lakes population](#), the rarest, is about 60 pairs and, thanks to important conservation efforts, is recovering from a low of 17 pairs! Piping Plovers are known to often come back to the same wintering grounds. In the NE region of Florida, several Piping Plovers winter in Nassau Sound, [Little Talbot State Park](#) and Fort George Inlet. More sporadic reports mention Piping Plovers at Matanzas and Ponce Inlets and in [Anastasia State Park](#).

--30--

Audubon is also asking the public to help by:

- **Walking around birds:** As all of us, shorebirds need to feed and rest in peace. Please avoid flushing birds when you walk/bike/drive on the beach. Every time they fly up, birds expend precious energy and burn their fat reserves. These reserves are essential fuel for them during their migration back to their nesting grounds.
- **Keeping dogs away from the birds:** birds see dogs as predators and will be disturbed by dogs at further distance than by people
- **Avoiding disturbance, such as kite flying and kite surfing:** birds see kites as gigantic aerial predators; please stay a good distance away from birds when you fly kites or do kite surfing or similar activities.