

SUMMER 2020

\$6



POEMS
FOR

PLOVERS

CAT DOSSETT, EDITOR

A HAWK & WHIPPOORWILL POETRY CHAPBOOK

From the editor...

In bursts of energy, on spindly legs, piping plovers scurry along the beaches of Massachusetts. Tiny, fluffy things, they have migrated to New England from southern states to mate and raise chicks. But they live perilous lives. Busy beaches and strong weather pose dangers to nests, not to mention threats of unleashed pets and wildlife lured by beach trash. Nonetheless, piping plovers represent the success of conservation policies and intervention. Since gaining protection under the Endangered Species Act in 1984, the number of breeding pairs has more than doubled! But the work is far from over. According to the US Fish & Wildlife Service: Northeast Region, efforts must continue to reduce disturbances from human activity and animal predators if we want to maintain and increase plover populations to their levels prior to the twentieth century. The poems on the following pages express gratitude for these efforts, and appreciation for the plovers that populate beaches along the Massachusetts coast and elsewhere.

- CLD



Blake Campbell

Crane Beach

On the beach the sandy wind
Falls and rises in the thinned
Ranks of grass that crown the dunes
Where the piping plover croons,
And its efforts, inexact,
Fashioning a ventifact
From this cloudy shard of quartz,
Billowing our shirts and shorts
As it blows in from the sea,
Mime your putting up with me
And my putting up with you:
Though the wind may chill us through,
Edges soften in its surge
Where the sea and sand converge
And the sand's corrosive sting
Leaves behind a polished thing.

Elizabeth Kuelbs

West Coast Plover Power

You snowy little sand puffs
little seize the days charging
beaks open through swarming
kelp flies, broken-winging
crows and skunks away from
your bare buff eggs, or your
thumb-big chick puffs hiding flat until
you win and snug them
under your warm bellies
until the sun says dance up
shrimp from the wave lips
to skim the foam to outlast
the dogs and the joggers
and the slicks and the cats—
dance on you plucky little
toothpick-legged mamas and papas,
we see you at Coal Oil Point,
at Bolsa Chica, in Monterey,
we can see you, please
dance the hell and the love on.

Heather Martin

Bird Song

Flash of silver on the surface flicks
soft bellies upward in the morning sun.

A different kind of belly flop, different risk—
a school of fish aimed at staying one.

With woven grasses from the shore I crafted
a primitive line, looped and tangled,
its end, around a slippery shrimp, fast,
and by a child designed to dangle

slowly low between the rocks and bait
unsuspecting crabs or darting fish's bite.

But it's the gulls who, sharp or greedy enough to wait
out a child's struggle, without a fight

claim victory; after the child casts aside
the whole warped line, the seagull steals his prize:
his flesh to devour while minnows hide.
His twitchy yellow eyes reflect my eyes.

The gull looks alone for his next meal,
lands crudely on the quiet beach
causing a fluttering wave, top sheet peeled
of the brownish, downy sand. As one, each

Piping Plover is moved to flight, lightly
lands not ten yards down the way, shifting weight
on yellow, toothpick legs—snowballs brightly

died in a muddy, restrained splatter paint.

This smattering of plovers clustered densely
pattern the beach with elevated balls.

Suddenly, at some indication I can't sense,
the entire party scurries at the call.

The Piping Plovers sing *peep-lo, peep-lo*.

Their birdie sense now and now directed by
the smell of worms, larvae, nourishing bite
to seek out dinner at the edge of lapping sky,
scour the dirt for dirt, boon of imagined sight.

The Piping Plovers sing *peep-lo, peep-lo*.

An area of conservation that's hemmed in
by skinny wooden posts and twine
circles the inmost grassy beach, keeping kin
of plovers with a few government-issued signs:

blight of unnatural white on our oasis
as the Coke cans, Coors pile up, fill in erosion
born of our new storms, dawning stasis
of the plovers's perpetual runway. An omen:
the Piping Plovers sing *peep-lo, peep-lo*.

This scurrying clan crosses the shore and back
moved by the gull, by our shadows, the narrowing
beach, and by the silent birdie radar that tracks
buried worms. The plover unmoved is made, harrowingly, to sing

Peep-lo, peep-lo, peep-lo, peep-lo.

Agnes Marton

Broken Wing Display

Wings clivering,
fooling away raccoons and crows,
I run in shurts and stops,
hardly look back at the chicks.
The nest blends well with the shoal.
Sprint—and freeze, I forage for worms
around the high tide wreck zone.
Ruffling my back feathers
in stubby patience,
I catch mollusks
coming from the splash-surface.
My false brooding, my alarmed *pee-werp*
confuses off-leash pets.
Storms still sweep away my nook.
In mid-March I leave for south,
to the Bahamas to toss stones,
to stomp my legs, to march
with puffed cloak,
to collect shells for the way back.

Men rope off areas for us, piping plovers
and ask if you spot one of us, banded,
please report date and location of sighting.

Susan Edwards Richmond

Piping Plover

Solitary ghost, nearly erased
by sand, wanders so close

to the beachcombers' path,
we are told, beware

the right-of-way of all endangered
creatures. Spindly legs impress

the shore, picking up the light
body, scuttling in the halting

manner of characters from old
cartoons who tiptoe in barrels,

behind cactus. It wears its own
disguise, rubbed out at the horizon

when concentration wavers, then
awakes in each new movement,

markings so clear, the throat ring
catches and pulls, the wind's collar.

Friendship is not a flock of birds
rising as a single phrase,

but the one who stays, moving
when the wind

moves, materializing
out of the shapeless shore, running

parallel, sometimes crossing, no,
blessing, the path, no matter

how close you come, not standing
still, not flying away.

Paulette Turco

Threatened

Last winter's storms have stolen sacred dunes
a year ago held nests of only three
who lived to fly the coast one afternoon.

Last winter's storms have stolen sacred dunes.
What to do? Won't force them all to flee,
not build their shell-rimmed nests, trill tunes?

Last winter's storms have stolen sacred dunes
a year ago held nests of only three.

Diana Adams

Finder's Keepers

I'll wait in the garden
& complain for awhile
get it all out
otherwise I'll wind up
doing nothing again

I asked what he was doing
then realized he wasn't here yet
that's okay there's time
he's still out walking
on the edge of some moon
looking for jokes

I found a few jokes myself
in that book he wrote about plovers
he knows his birds
he acts like one too

foraging garbage.

Zachary Bos

Plum Island

Which are you going to do, small plovers?
Run for cover, or take the plunge? Neither;
you just hover at the shoreline, where waves
smooth and resmooth the sand, til it's as raw
as scraped calfskin. Little poem makers...
What are you writing, plovers? With your feet
stamping cuneiform into the beach:
malisons against seals, paeans to great
birds of bygone years. "These are our stories,"
you peep. "May they never be forgotten."
Until the next tide. Where are your lovers,
plovers? Where are your children, your parents?
Do you write to them, of them, for them? Your
white pages are punctuated by spoor.

Contributors

Diana **ADAMS** is an Alberta writer with work published in *Fence*, *Boston Review*, *Drunken Boat*, *Fogged Clarity*, *The Laurel Review*, *Perihelion*, *Bayou*, *Spire*, and *Best American Experimental Poetry 2016*. Her books include the *Lights on the Way Out* and *To The River*. // Zachary **BOS** edits *New England Review of Books*. // Blake **CAMPBELL** lives in Boston and works as an editor. At Emerson College, he received the Aliko Perroti and Seth Frank Award from the Academy of American Poets. His work has appeared on poets.org, *The Emerson Review*, and *The Road Not Taken*. // Elizabeth **KUELBS** writes and mothers at the edge of a Los Angeles canyon. She holds an MFA from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her work appears in *The Timberline Review*, *The Poeming Pigeon*, *Minerva Rising*, *Cricket*, *Poets Reading the News*, and elsewhere. She is a Pushcart nominee, and the author of the forthcoming chapbook *How to Clean Your Eyes* (Dancing Girl Press). // Heather **MARTIN** is a poet and ESOL teacher. A graduate of Boston University and the University of Chicago, she is currently studying poetry in Buffalo, New York, focusing on eco-poetics. Her writing has appeared in *Clarion*, *Adanna*, and *Working Document*. // Agnes **MARTON** is a poet, writer, librettist, Reviews Editor of The Ofi Press, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Recent publications include her collection *Captain Fly's Bucket List* and four chapbooks with Moria Books. She won the National Poetry Day Competition in the UK, and her fiction was called 'exceptional' in the Disquiet Literary Contest. // Susan Edwards **RICHMOND** is the author of the collections *Before We Were Birds*, *Purgatory Chasm*, and *Boto* (all by Adastra

Press); *Increase* (FootHills Publishing); and *Birding in Winter* (Finishing Line Press). Her poems have appeared in anthologies and journals, including *Appalachia*, *Blueline*, and *The Iowa Review*. She is poet-in-residence at Old Frog Pond Farm & Studio in Harvard, MA, and teaches in Mass Audubon's Drumlin Farm Community Preschool. Her children's picture book debut, *Bird Count*, illustrated by Stephanie Fizer Coleman, is published by Peachtree. // Paulette Demers **TURCO** studied writing in the graduate program at Lesley University, where she received the MFA in Writing President's Award. Her poetry has appeared in *The Lyric*, *Ibbetson Street*, and the *Merrimac Mic Anthology*, and in a Finishing Line Press chapbook, *In Silence*. She is an active member of the Powow River Poets.

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CRITICAL PRAISE

(FOR PLOVERS)

"THE LENS ENCIRCLES / A BIRD WITH A SURPRISING
COLLAR OF WHITE / ABOVE A GREY BREAST."

- MYRA SCHNEIDER

"THE PLOVERS COME DOWN HARD, THEN CLEAR AGAIN."

- PAUL MULDOON

"I WILL WALK WHERE THE PLOVER WALKS."

- BARRY MACSWEENEY

"THE QUICK RING-PLOVER SHIFTS AND DISAPPEARS /
LIKE A PUDDLE IN THE SUN."

- NORMAN NICHOLSON



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