

TEMPLATE #1 – UP TO 250 WORD COUNT

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Imagine a world where we all learn about animals through pictures from the past, never being able to see them in person. With some parks and nature centers closing for safety reasons, currently, children have to learn about animals second-hand. Audubon New York is trying to make sure that does not happen to species like our native beach-nesting Piping Plover.

COVID-19 has affected everyone's life to some degree. It's also affecting nature: some local natural areas like Stehli Beach in Bayville, a nesting area for species of concern like the Piping Plover and Least Tern, are experiencing overcrowding. This has resulted in a problem for beach-nesting birds, since some of these visitors are unaware of rules which prohibit dangerous behavior that could hurt or even kill vulnerable chicks. We are seeing off-leash dogs running through nesting areas, people getting too close to nests inside protective string fencing, and trash, which can attract predators who then prey on eggs and tiny chicks.

We all need to do our part to protect these natural havens, so we can continue to enjoy them safely—and enjoy the native bird species that also call these their home. Audubon has called on us to “Share the Love, #ShareTheShore” and extend social distancing practices to nesting birds as well. As someone who loves watching those little cotton balls on sticks racing down to the wrack line and back, I ask everyone to keep your hearts open to helping our birds and their chicks.

Sincerely,

Name

Location, NY

TEMPLATE #2 – UP TO 300 WORD COUNT

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In many positive ways, COVID-19 has brought people closer to nature. We have been given the gift of social distancing in spring, when migratory birds are returning and gardens are being planted. But there are some negatives that need to be urgently addressed.

Piping Plovers, American Oystercatchers, and other vulnerable shorebirds have always practiced social distancing—from people and pets, that is. Unfortunately, our beaches are currently seeing increased foot traffic and off-leash animals in areas where pets (dogs in particular) are not allowed.

Each spring, Audubon New York and partners across Long Island post symbolic fencing and signage on the beach to protect nesting habitat and frequently monitor beach-nesting birds and

their young to ensure that all nests are protected and track nesting success. But, due to current restrictions, stewardship and monitoring activities are slowed, limited, or on hold (depending on the site), so birds may nest in areas that haven't been posted or fenced.

Even if they nest within protected areas, adult birds are easily scared off their nests and away from chicks by humans and dogs who get too close. And, Piping Plover chicks actually leave their nests within a few hours of hatching and feed themselves; these tiny "cotton balls on sticks" and their parents need safe access to bayside intertidal areas, shallow pools, and the ocean's edge, where they forage for small marine invertebrates. We need to share the love and share the shore.

Piping Plover chicks weigh less than single scoop of ice cream. They don't ask for much from us... just room to grow up. Let's give birds space to nest and rest.

Sincerely,

Name

Location, NY