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Ghost crab preys on a Piping Plover chick.—East Coast Piping Plovers (*Charadrius melodus*) were listed as threatened because of declining populations (Fed. Register 1985) due to loss of habitat and human disturbance. Predation of nests and young has been cited as one cause of the decline (Fed. Register 1985, Dyer et al. 1988, Melvin et al. 1991, Haig 1992). Here we describe predation of a Piping Plover chick by a ghost crab (*Ocypode quadrata*) on Assateague Island National Seashore, Maryland.

On 7 July 1988, 08:45 EDT, JPL and LLL approached a brood of two 8-day-old Piping Plover chicks and two adults to complete behavioral observations (Loegering 1992). From >70 m, we observed the birds moving along the beach. Both chicks appeared healthy. One adult alarm-called when we initially approached; however, after we sat and remained motionless (<2 min.) it appeared undisturbed. As the brood moved along the beach, the adults suddenly became alarmed and ran down the beach. We observed the brood for 13–15 min. but only saw one chick. We then walked toward our vehicle on the ocean tidal zone. As we crossed the path previously taken by the brood, we discovered a freshly killed plover chick 0.1 m from a ghost crab burrow. The chick had a laceration from the sternum to the pelvis, and much of the viscera was displaced or missing. The blood present was very wet and bright red. It weighed 9 g (partially eviscerated). We retreated 25 m and a ghost crab emerged from its burrow after approximately 3 min. We photographed the crab feeding on the chick. We dug the ghost crab out of its burrow, measured it, and released it unharmed (weight = 42.5 g, dorsal carapace width = 41 mm, dorsal carapace length = 32 mm).

We did not directly observe the ghost crab attack the chick; however, we feel very confident that this chick was the second from the brood we observed minutes earlier. We intensively searched for and monitored nests and broods daily (Loegering 1992). The closest adjacent plover brood was >500 m away, and contained two chicks that were accounted for before and after our observations. Additionally, we color-banded the remaining chick

from this brood the following day, and relocated this chick daily until it fledged. We never observed an additional chick.

To our knowledge, this is the only report of ghost crab depredation of a Piping Plover chick. In a similar instance, Patterson (1988) reported adults repelling a ghost crab that "seized a recently hatched chick." Since 1988, other researchers have expressed concern that ghost crabs may be affecting plover nest site selection and/or productivity as far north as New Jersey (U.S. Fish and Wildl. Serv. 1995). In 1994, a preliminary study to assess the extent of ghost crab predation on plover eggs and chicks was conducted on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Virginia; however, the results indicated that ghost crabs were not as important at that site as previously thought (T. Wolcott, pers. comm.). While our observation confirms that ghost crabs will prey upon Piping Plover chicks, further study is needed to determine if our observation was an isolated incident or if crabs are frequent predators of plover chicks.

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