

[From Spring 2002]

## **Piping Plover Monitoring Begins**

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (CNWR) staff is making plans to continue monitoring piping plover production on the Refuge. Last year, an estimated 74 pairs of plovers nested on the refuge. Of the 152 chicks hatched, 134 survived to 25 days old, for a productivity ratio of 1.81 fledglings per nesting pair.

Like last year, the biology staff will conduct intensive monitoring of nesting plovers in the Overwash area adjacent to the Off Road Vehicle Zone (ORV). Six interns will be brought on board to help monitor the Overwash area for around sixteen hours each day. The nesting area will be posted with informational signs and roped off to help prevent disturbance to the nesting birds, with this year's closure to be implemented, as in past years, on March 15.

A significant portion of the ORV zone will be closed just prior to the first plover nest hatch. Like last year, if plover chicks cross into the ORV zone, the ORV zone will be closed to pedestrians as well as vehicles for two days. It may sound a little confusing, but this effort will allow the continued use of the area by the public while protecting the plover chicks. The results of this year's monitoring effort may have a significant impact on public use and management of piping plovers here at CNWR.

It is often difficult to strike a balance between public use and protection of a threatened species like the piping plover. But with this plan in place, we feel we can accomplish both.

As part of an effort to improve communications within the southern Piping Plover Recovery Units, Anne Hecht, Endangered Species Biologist and Recovery Team Leader, held a two day meeting on February 26th and 27th. The meeting was attended by 34 biologists from five states to discuss reasons for declining numbers of plovers and plover production. The meeting also highlighted the CNWR piping plover management efforts over the last three years and passed along ideas to other agencies to aid in piping plover recovery.

Habitat enhancement was a major issue, for the group, and there was much interest in CNWR's increased plover production since the inception of the avian habitat enhancement program in 1999. Chincoteague Refuge produces 55% of the plover chicks fledged in the Southern Recovery Unit -and 46% of the four-state total was produced on just Assateague and Assawoman Islands. Chincoteague's example provides a lot of hope to people from other areas where the birds are barely hanging on.

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