

[From Spring 2007]

Spring at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge

The first signs of spring have been spotted at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. The return of migratory birds to the area marks a new season of birth and growth. Soon piping plover, a migratory shorebird protected under the Endangered Species Act, will return to the Hook of Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. "Piping plovers return from the wintering grounds in early spring to prepare for breeding," said Refuge Manager Louis Hinds. "However, piping plovers aren't the only birds out there. Oystercatchers, terns, and black skimmers regularly use the beaches of Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge to breed and raise their young."

Migratory bird populations can thrive if they find suitable wintering and breeding habitat. In addition, they need places to rest and refuel for their long journeys. The National Wildlife Refuge System was established to protect these very special places that migratory birds and other wildlife rely on to survive. As part of this larger system, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge does its part to protect the habitats needed by migratory birds and has become a world renowned birding hot spot.

"To ensure a successful nesting season, the traditional beach closures will be in effect from March 15 through August 31," said Hinds. "As in previous years, the lower 2.5 miles of Assateague Island, known as the Hook, will be closed to all public access. Additionally, the beach over-wash area adjacent to the Off Road Vehicle (ORV) zone and the northern Wild Beach nesting areas will be closed again this year. Additional ORV closures may go into effect for vehicles and pedestrians depending on the presence of nests or chicks in the over-wash area or the ORV zone. "The refuge has a responsibility to provide undisturbed habitat for the beach nesting birds and their chicks to feed. These seasonal ORV closures will allow for their safe movement and help ensure their survival," said Hinds.

Hinds also stated that due to the presence of beach nesting birds, a portion of Assawoman Island is open to fishing by permit only. The permit is free of charge and is available at the administrative office during business hours Monday through Friday.