

[From Summer 2000]

## **Refuge Staff Launches Plan for Piping Plovers**

Refuge Manager John D. Schroer announced today that the first piping plover nests of 2000 should be hatching sometime during the week of May 22nd. As a result, refuge staff have been busily preparing for this year's plover season which will include, among other management techniques, intensive monitoring and temporary off-road vehicle (ORV) Zone closures, similar to the 1999 program. And like the 1999 program, Schroer fully anticipates that the community and refuge visitors will be just as cooperative with helping refuge staff manage the threatened shorebird as they were last year.

"Refuge staff continues to do everything possible to provide the public with an opportunity to use the ORV Zone," said Schroer. "However, the needs of wildlife come first on national wildlife refuges...and on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, the needs of the piping plover dictate that we immediately put a policy into effect that protects these threatened shorebirds during the nesting and brooding seasons."

According to Schroer, the following guidelines, which are essentially the same as those in 1999, will be implemented to ensure successful nesting of piping plovers while still allowing public use in the ORV Zone:

- 1) Refuge staff will monitor all nests daily and predict hatch dates for plovers that nest in the area adjacent to the ORV Zone.
- 2) Refuge staff and volunteers will monitor plover chicks from hatching until they fledge from 5 a.m. until 9 p.m. daily.
- 3) Off-road vehicles and pedestrians will be allowed on the overwash portion of the beach as long as piping plover chicks are along Toms Cove Beach from 6 a.m. until 9 p.m.
- 4) If piping plover chicks move within 100 meters of the closed area rope, refuge staff and volunteers will constantly monitor these individuals and will notify National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service personnel that an area closure is possible.
- 5) If piping plover chicks move within 50 meters of the closed area rope, the area from the closure of the hook to 200 meters north of the plovers will be closed to off-road vehicles. Pedestrians will still be allowed on the intertidal zone of the beach. However, vehicles will be escorted off.
- 6) If piping plover chicks actually cross the closed area rope, the off-road vehicle zone will be closed to both vehicles and pedestrians. The closure will remain in effect as long as the plovers are within 50 meters of the rope and for two additional days thereafter.
- 7) During the brood rearing season, night fishing will be excluded from the ORV Zone.

"We believe that these measures, coupled with the continued cooperation of the community and our visitors, will ensure the future success of piping plovers in Virginia and will help achieve the goal of increasing the southern population. Perhaps most importantly, these measures should allow for continued public use of this area," said Schroer.

However, Schroer added that it is likely that the entire ORV Zone could be closed during future piping plover brooding seasons. "The season normally lasts for 6 to 8 weeks from late May to mid to late July. We plan to hold a public meeting to discuss the future of piping plover management at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in early June."

CNWR Staff