

[From Summer 2003]

Piping Plover Monitoring Begins

The piping plovers are back! This year, the first piping plover seen on the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge was observed feeding in the Off Road Vehicle (ORV) zone on March 4 and the first nest was found on May 8. Unfortunately, the unusually large amount of rain and high tides have washed over five plover nests on the Hook. This is only a temporary setback, however, as piping plovers will renest several times during the nesting season in an attempt to successfully hatch chicks.

The biology staff will continue to conduct intensive monitoring of nesting plovers on the Refuge. Six interns are monitoring the Overwash area adjacent to the ORV zone for sixteen hours each day. The nesting area is posted with informational signs and roped off to help prevent disturbance to the nesting birds.

As in previous years, a significant portion of the ORV zone will be closed just prior to the first plover nest hatch. This area consists of a section from 200 meters north of the plover nest, south to the Old Coast Guard station. The refuge will maintain a 200 meter buffer between the northern most unfledged piping plover brood and the off road vehicles. Also, if plover chicks cross into this closed section of the ORV zone, the ORV zone will be closed to pedestrians as well until the chicks cross back into the nesting area and for an additional two days after that.

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 plover management.

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