

[From Summer 1996]

Piping Plovers Return

Piping plovers have again returned to the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge to nest and raise their young. The first arrivals of the season were spotted on March 11th on Tom's Cove Hook, over a week later than the 1995 sighting on March 3rd.



Piping plovers were not sighted on the Wash Flats and Wild Beach until April. A peak of 40 plovers occurred on April 17, with most of these birds concentrated in a small tidal area of the Hook.

The plovers have now dispersed within the nesting areas, claiming territories where they have already begun to make nest scrapes and lay their eggs. The first nest of the year was found May 2nd on the Wild Beach and contained two eggs. Unfortunately, the nest was predated before the clutch was completed. Plovers are often unsuccessful at their first nesting attempt, due to predation and spring high tides. This is only a temporary setback, however, as piping plovers will renest several times during the season in an attempt to successfully hatch chicks.

Most nests are initiated in May. The plovers do not begin incubating the eggs until the clutch is complete, insuring that the eggs will hatch at about the same time. The eggs hatch after an incubation period of about 28 days. The majority of chicks will hatch in June, later if many pairs are forced to renest. The chicks are able to fly about 26 days after hatching.

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