

[From Summer 1998]

Piping Plover Nesting Season Begins

Piping plovers have begun to actively nest on the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. After a later than normal start this year, the nesting season is now in full force. The first nest of the year was found May 4 on the Hook. Nests this season have been found in all previous years' nesting areas which include the Hook, the Hook over-wash zone, Wild Beach, and North Wash Flats impoundment. The over-wash zone on the Hook has a record high of six nests this year. The previous high was three nests for the 1996 and 1997 seasons. As of June 5, a total of 25 estimated pairs has produced 25 nests. Of these nests, 19 are currently active, and six have been lost to various causes. Most of the nesting activity for the Refuge occurs on the Hook, which has been the most productive area the past 10 years.

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 nesting 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, usually four, 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 or later if many pairs are forced to renest. The chicks are able to fly about 26 days after hatching.

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