

[From Fall 2001]

Piping Plover Season Best Ever!

A total of 74 chicks fledged from the Virginia portion of Assateague Island this year, representing an enormous improvement from the 53 fledglings produced in the 2000 season. Even though the number of plover pairs nesting on the island decreased by one pair, the number of chicks fledged this year was the best on record with 2.31 chicks fledged per nesting pair. For the Atlantic plover population to remain stable, productivity needs to reach 1.5 chicks fledged per nesting pair. This year's production of 2.31 chicks/pair on Assateague was significantly above the minimum goal for productivity of nesting plovers, marking the second year in a row the refuge has surpassed the goal of 1.5.

It is anticipated that the refuge will again have the highest productivity for nesting plovers of any refuge on the Atlantic Coast!

The North Wash Flats continued to have excellent success with three pairs of plovers nesting in that area, producing 9 fledged chicks for an outstanding 3.0 chicks fledged per nesting pair. The Hook nesting area was also very successful this year, with 45 chicks fledged, or 2.37 chicks fledged/nesting pair. These figures were also the highest ever recorded on the Hook.

The Overwash area adjacent to the Off Road Vehicle Zone continued to have excellent success. A total of nine pairs of plovers produced 19 fledged chicks for a total of 2.11 chicks/pair. Interns and staff monitored adult plovers and chicks for approximately 14 hours each day. The data collected on these broods will hopefully go a long way toward the recovery of the piping plover.

The Wild Beach, an area north of the public beach, was less successful than in the 2000 season. This area is known for being unproductive compared to other nesting areas on the refuge. Only one pair of plovers attempted to nest on the Wild Beach this year. This year no chicks fledged from the nest which was located just south of the Virginia/Maryland border.

Complete data on the nesting success of the Southern Islands portion of the refuge is not in yet. However, Assawoman Island had another good year. The number of nesting-pairs was 23, up from 16 last year. The 23 pairs produced 37 fledglings, or 1.61 chicks fledged/pair. Since 1998 the number of nesting pairs on Assawoman Island has increased each year, from eight pairs in 1998 to 23 pairs in 2001. Wallops Island had one nesting pair of plovers this year for the first time in several years. Unfortunately, none of the three chicks survived.

Overall, the 2001 piping plover nesting season was a great success. While some losses are inevitable, the knowledge gained each season helps us to improve our ability to protect this threatened species. With your help, and good productivity, the piping plover can continue to share refuge beaches for many generations to enjoy.

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