

[From Fall 1994]

## **Piping Plovers Successful**

The 1994 nesting season was a good one. More chicks fledged, or reached flight stage, than in any previous year since intensive monitoring began in 1988. The total number of chicks fledged for Assateague Island was 53, compared to 29 in 1993. The Lower Island units of Wallops, Assawoman and north Metompkin Islands fledged 2, 13 and 5 chicks, respectively. This is much lower than in 1993 when a total of 31 chicks fledged in these areas. The overall refuge fledgling success for the 1994 season was 1.66 chicks fledged/nesting pair. The total number of nesting pairs remained at 44; however, with this year's success on Assateague Island, the fledgling success increased 22%.

The Hook and Wash Flats were areas of great success. The 15 nesting pairs of plovers on the Hook produced 45 chicks, of which 41 survived to fledgling stage. The three pairs of plovers nesting on the Wash Flats fledged 10 chicks, with only one loss recorded. A goal of at least two chicks fledged/nesting pair was achieved due to the productivity in these areas. This is the number felt to be needed to actually increase the population.

Once again the Wild Beach proved to be a disappointment. Of the 22 chicks hatched, only two survived to fledge. The majority of chicks were lost within a few days of hatching. A study was conducted to determine if chicks were falling prey to the many ghost crabs in the area. Unfortunately, the study provided no conclusive evidence as to the cause of high mortality in this area.

A line of crushed seashells added to the Wash Flats prior to the 1994 nesting season proved to be a popular nesting place. All four plover nests and several least tern nests were contained in this three foot wide, one half mile long shell line. The plovers nesting there were not subjected to the problems of high tides, ghost crabs and numerous mammalian predators present on the Wild Beach, just over the dune line. It is hoped that by making the Wash Flats more attractive to nesting plovers, they will use this area rather than the Wild Beach. With a little luck and some help from refuge staff, maybe the 1995 nesting season can be even better!

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