

[From Fall 1996]

Plover Nesting a Success

A total of 35 chicks fledged from the Virginia portion of Assateague Island this year. That was a marked improvement from the 25 fledglings produced in the 1995 season. Even though the number of plover pairs nesting on the island is decreasing, the number of chicks fledged this year is one of the best. Only in 1994 and 1989 were more chicks fledged. The number of chicks fledged/nesting pair was the second highest on record, with 1.46 chicks/pair.

Due to the frequent heavy rains during the spring and early summer, one of the usual nesting areas, the North Wash Flats, contained no nests. Plovers were seen in this area during the spring, but repeated flooding kept the birds from nesting at this site.

The Wild Beach, an area north of the public beach, was much more successful than in the 1995 season. This area has become known for being very unproductive compared to other nesting areas on the refuge. Last year there were no chicks fledged from the Wild Beach. This year seven chicks were fledged, or 0.88 chicks/nesting pair - the highest fledge rate ever recorded from this area. One possible reason for the improved success of the Wild Beach was the sparse ghost crab population early in the nesting season, due to a cool spring.

The Hook nesting area was also very successful this year, with 28 chicks fledged, or 1.75 chicks/nesting pair. These figures were the second highest recorded on the Hook. This area also includes the overwash adjacent to the ORV zone. Volunteers and staff monitored the overwash closely, resulting in six chicks being fledged from three nests.

Overall, the 1996 piping plover nesting season was a success. While some losses are inevitable, the knowledge gained each season helps us to improve our ability to protect this threatened species. With our help and a little luck, the piping plover can continue to share our beaches for many generations to enjoy.

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