

[From Fall 1997]

### **Piping Plover Nesting Season a Success**

A total of 28 chicks fledged from the Virginia portion of Assateague Island this year. That was below last year's total of 35 chicks and three more than the 1995 season. Total nesting pairs (25) increased by one over last year. The number of chicks fledged per nesting pair was the third highest on record, with 1.22 chicks per pair.

Due to the drier than normal conditions during the early summer, the North Wash Flats nesting area once again contained nesting plovers. This season, two pair produced three chicks, or 2.50 chicks per nesting pair.

The Wild Beach, an area north of the public beach, was much less successful than in the 1996 season. This area has become known for being very unproductive compared to other nesting areas on the refuge. Last year there were seven chicks fledged from the Wild Beach. This year only two chicks were fledged, or 0.28 chicks per nesting pair.

The Hook nesting area was the most successful this year, with 23 chicks fledged, or 1.50 chicks per nesting pair. These figures were the third 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 two chicks being fledged from three nests.

Plover nesting success on the lower islands portion of the refuge was not as productive as in past years. On Assawoman Island, 12 pairs produced five chicks (0.42 chicks per nesting pair), and on Metompkin Island, four pair produced five chicks (1.25 chicks per nesting pair). No production occurred on Cedar Island this year due to adverse weather conditions.

Overall, the 1997 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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