

# **NORTH BEACH CHATHAM**

## **Piping Plover Nesting Executive Summary**

In mid April, Chatham's barrier beach was breached. Eighty percent (80%) of the town managed beach became accessible only by boat. This posed a set of management issues that had not been confronted in prior years. The area was redefined and became known as "the island" and "the driving side". In spite of this change, both areas were visited six times a week (on average) by two different monitors from mid April through mid August.

Arriving in late March, this year's nesting population of Piping Plovers preferred "the island" over "the driving side". One (1) adult plover was present throughout the entire nesting season on "the driving side". Although it scaped, and displayed, no partner was ever observed and therefore no nest was ever located.

Thirteen (13) confirmed pairs made twenty-four (24) attempts at nesting. It was originally thought that there were twenty-six (26) attempts (CNB 013A and CNB 014A), but both monitors concluded that those specific nests were likely Least Tern eggs. The eggs were lost quickly and the date did not coincide with any of our nesting pairs]. A total of eighty-one (81) eggs (+/- the 3 mentioned above) were laid.

Twenty-seven (27) eggs making up nine (9) nests were lost to predation from mammals (Skunks/Foxes). Eight (8) eggs making up two (2) nests were lost to avian predation (Crow/Sea Gulls). Weather factors, specifically high winds claimed seventeen (17) eggs making up six (6) nests, in addition to one Mid-June storm in combination with astronomic high tides, which destroyed twenty-two (22) eggs, making up six (6) nests. Miraculously, one of the two nests that did hatch only did so because a log diverted the astronomic high tides away from the nest.

Seven (7) eggs were successfully incubated. Four (4) hatched in late June and three (3) hatched in late July. The four (4) which hatched in June were observed every day until the thirteenth (13) day. They were never seen again. Extensive searches were done of the entire island over the course of several days (sometimes several times a day). The monitors consulted the Coastal Water Bird Program and were advised that the chicks may have been predated by owls which had been observed by a camp owner.

Three (3) other eggs hatched in late July. One monitor witnessed two of the three hatchlings in the bowl moments after they hatched. The third egg was still in the bowl when the monitors left for the day. The bowl was empty within twenty-two (22) hours. Initially the chicks and adults disappeared. They were located over a half of a mile away from the nesting site thirty-six (36) hours later. They made a radical move from the ocean side to the bayside through high grass and steep dunes.

One chick was lost within seventy-two (72) hours. It was assumed to be predated or it could have failed to thrive if it was the one that was late hatch. One day after their anticipated fledge date, the two chicks disappeared. They were never seen again. Both monitors searched the entire island over the course of several days. The enormous populations of migrating birds complicated the search. The one adult that remained with the chick also disappeared. Remembering that these are the same birds that radically relocated after hatching, the monitors both concluded the birds fledged and more than likely relocated again in light of the enormous population of migrating birds which seemed to increase daily around the chicks and adult as they were feeding. The adult was often seen chasing off sanderlings and other peeps that got "too close". For this reason and considering their age when we lost track of them, the monitors are concluding them to have fledged.

Had there not been two significant storms, (one of which hosting astronomic high tides) the success rate would have been higher. If the mammal population is reduced over the winter (due to starvation, as predicted) next year could be extremely promising for the nesting population of Piping Plovers. As of September 7, 2007 there were no Piping Plovers observed on "the island" or "the driving side".