

The Piping Plover in Delaware

2001 Status Report

Background

Monitoring and management of the Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) in Delaware is carried out in accordance with the 1990 Delaware Piping Plover Management Plan developed by three divisions of the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC): the Division of Fish and Wildlife, Division of Parks and Recreation, and Division of Soil and Water. The Nongame and Endangered Species Program of the Division of Fish and Wildlife has primary responsibility for monitoring and managing the state's breeding population of Piping Plovers. Monitoring and management activities include fencing off Piping Plover nesting habitat, regular surveys for nesting activity during the breeding season, protection of nests with predator exclosures, and interactions with beach users. Division of Parks and Recreation staff also contribute considerably to protection and enforcement efforts.

The number of Piping Plovers nesting in Delaware has been low since the Nongame and Endangered Species Program began conducting surveys in the late 1980's. The breeding population in the state has ranged from two to six nesting pairs each year since 1989. During that period nests have only been found on state park beaches along Delaware's Atlantic Ocean coastline. Over the last few years nests have been found only at Cape Henlopen State Park in Sussex County.

2001 Nesting Season

The Nongame and Endangered Species Program documented a total of eight nesting attempts by six Piping Plover pairs in Delaware in 2001 (Table 1). Two pairs re-nested when their first broods disappeared soon after hatching. All nests were located in Cape Henlopen State Park; seven out of eight were protected with predator exclosures. One nesting attempt was not detected until after the chicks had hatched. Twenty-eight chicks were known or presumed to have hatched. Nine chicks survived to fledging, for a mean productivity of 1.5 chicks fledged per nesting pair.

Table 1. Total number of Piping Plovers and nests in Delaware by site, 2001.

Location	# Nesting pairs	# Nests	# Chicks hatched	# Chicks fledged
Cape Henlopen State Park—Gordons Pond	3	4	14	6
Cape Henlopen State Park—Point of Cape Henlopen	3	4	14	3
Total	6	8	28	9

Future for Piping Plovers in Delaware

Due to the development of oceanfront property and beach management practices along much of Delaware's ocean coast, it is likely that the Piping Plover nesting activity will continue to be limited to the remaining available habitat on state park beaches. The two primary nesting areas, Gordons Pond and the Point of Cape Henlopen at Cape Henlopen State Park, are managed primarily for Piping Plover use during the breeding season, and efforts are made year-round to avoid interfering with the natural processes that shape the landscape at these sites. The park's strong beach closure policy effectively eliminates human disturbance and vehicular traffic in plover nesting and foraging areas during the breeding season.

Depredation of chicks is probably the greatest threat to Piping Plover reproductive success in Delaware. Although depredation has not been directly observed, red fox (*Vulpes fulva*) and Fish Crows (*Corvus ossifragus*) are regularly seen in close proximity to nesting and brood foraging areas.

For more information, contact Alice Doolittle at adoolittle@state.de.us

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