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ISSUE 3

# MONOMOY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



Biweekly Newsletter

AnnaFaith Jorgensen/USFWS



Ivan Kureav/USFWS

The night sky above tern camp on South Monomoy

## FIND REFUGE FROM THE HEAT

The weather has certainly been heating up the past few weeks! As the sun shines down on all of us on the Cape this summer, we remind everyone to drink water and take a break when walking along the beach and trails. Sunscreen is always a must, too (look for "reef safe" varieties)!

If you're seeking shade on the refuge, there is no better place than the visitor center! We will be happy to answer any of your questions while you beat the heat in our climate-controlled exhibit room.

## VOLUNTEER SHOUT OUT

This week, we're sending our thanks to volunteer Sam Pepper! Sam is working from May to September on the refuge through the Massachusetts Audubon Society. He spends most of his week observing nesting birds on South Beach, near the connection to South Monomoy. Along with Mass Audubon technician Michael Ferrara, Sam helps to monitor 10 pairs of piping plovers, 5 pairs of American oystercatchers, and 150 pairs of least terns.

In his free time, Sam is an avid birder and rock climber. Refuge staff are glad to have him on the team for the summer.



Michael Ferrara

Sam Pepper with a common tern

# NEWS FROM THE FIELD



*Adam Ells/USFWS*

*Tern fledglings in bucket*

## ***Fledglings***

Just weeks ago, many of the young chicks in the tern colony were the size of a golf ball. Since then, most of these chicks have started growing adult feathers and fledged, or taken their first flight. Although Common terns will fledge after about 22-28 days of age, they will rely on their parents for food for several more weeks.

In the photo on the left, staff collected tern chicks from a plot to monitor their development and survival rates. They're placed in a bucket for just a few minutes so staff can make an accurate count.

## ***Plovers all Over***

Staff continue to diligently monitor nesting piping plovers. Five pairs currently have chicks, with a total of 11 young, while two pairs are still incubating eggs. In previous years, there have been higher numbers of this federally threatened species on the refuge. Piping plovers typically return to the same nesting sites each year. This year numbers are low and it could be due to the hurricanes that passed through the Caribbean and the Bahamas in 2016. Hurricane Matthew hit the Bahamas hard and may have affected some of the refuge's breeding pairs that winter there. Unlike adults, young plovers are less experienced and more vulnerable to storms and may not have survived, possibly leading to the low numbers we have seen this year.



*USFWS*

*Three newly hatched plover chicks*

## ***Snowy Still Soaking up the Sun***

Some readers may recall from our June 17th issue that a snowy owl has remained on the refuge much later than usual for the species. It was seen by refuge staff and partners throughout June, and most recently on July 19th. The owl is an adult female, with flecks of black in her white plumage. Males are almost completely white. Experts are uncertain why this owl has remained here for so long, as snowy owls breed in the Arctic tundra. Additional owls are still being observed in Nantucket and Duxbury among other locations.



*Michael Ferrara*

*The snowy owl on South Monomoy*

# COMMUNITY NEWS

## *Americorps Beach Cleanup*



*Americorps members on the boat with the beach debris they collected*

*Matt Hillman/USFWS*

On July 12th, nine Americorps members participated in a beach cleanup on South Monomoy Island. Along with two refuge staff members, they spent the day picking up maritime debris that had washed ashore. Despite hot sun, rampant poison ivy, and abundant greenhead flies, the determined group collected enough trash to fill two boats to capacity. They covered three miles of beach as well as 30 acres of Powder Hole Marshlands. The most common items found included derelict fishing gear, plastic bags, balloons, and plastic bottles.

Although there are no permanent human residents on South Monomoy, plenty of trash still washes ashore. Animals can become entangled in trash or mistake it for food, so it is imperative to limit the amount of human debris in the natural world. The refuge holds several annual cleanups to preserve the wilderness area. The only thing better than removing trash from a beach is preventing it from entering the ecosystem. You can do your part by reducing the use of single-use plastic, recycling, and disposing of garbage in proper containers.

## *Dr. Wendy Puryear's Seal Talk*

Each January, when the weather is below freezing and the sun sets at 4:30pm, Dr. Wendy Puryear leads a research crew on South Monomoy Island to study the population and health dynamics of seals. Her team takes biological samples, such as blood and hair, from the growing pups. They process the samples into the night, wearing headlamps to work because there is no electricity in the Monomoy Point Light Keeper's Station.

On July 5th, Dr. Puryear gave a talk on her research for the Friends of Monomoy Summer Series. The talk focused on the relationship between seals and influenza, because her research examines the health of the species as an indicator of environmental health. She provided an excellent overview of her work and made the science easy to understand.



*USFWS*

*The seal research team in action*

## Island Tours



Chelsi Burns/USFWS

*The sunrise on South Monomoy Island*

View the beauty of South Monomoy Island in person on an island tour led by refuge staff. The tour involves a 30 minute boat ride, 2.5 mile hike, and wet beach landings. Only 4 spaces available. Reservations required. Contact [alyssa\\_pool@fws.gov](mailto:alyssa_pool@fws.gov) for available dates and additional information.

## July 26th Marsh Critters Workshop

Enjoy an afternoon of fun and outdoor education with Ocean Protection Advocacy Kids at the refuge! Participants will learn all about the ecology of Cape Cod marshes. This event is open to families and includes a bus ride to and from Chatham Community Center. Use the code MONOMOY18 to receive 18% off of the \$20 registration fee. Sponsored by Ocean Protection Advocacy Kids. 2:00-6:30 PM, register at [opakedu.org/summer-2018](http://opakedu.org/summer-2018)

## August 2nd Lecture Series



Cape Cod Museum of Natural History

*Marjorie Williams displaying a butterfly*

Marjorie Williams, Senior Aquarist and Butterfly House Lead at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History, will be discussing the museum's butterfly garden, the role of pollinators in the environment, and her recent work with raising horseshoe crabs at her talk in the Chatham Community Center. Sponsored by the Friends of Monomoy. 7pm, free of charge

## The Fish Go Marching One by One



Steve Keenan/Friends of Monomoy

*A jellyfish, horseshoe crab, crab, and shark walking downtown*  
On July 4th, the Friends of Monomoy marched in the Chatham 4th of July Parade and received the award for 3rd Overall Best Float. This is quite an achievement, as there were 96 floats participating in the parade! Volunteers and staff marched down Main Street in shark, crab, jellyfish, and horseshoe crab costumes with the theme of "Families are hooked on Chatham." The sea creatures pushed strollers with stuffed-animal versions of their babies inside. Congratulations to the Friends of Monomoy! The Chatham Board of Selectmen presented the award to the Friends.

## Weekly Nature Walks



Alyssa Pool/USFWS

*Gulls on the Morris Island Trail*

Friday-Sunday at 9am and 3pm. Join us outside the doors of the visitor center to learn about the refuge's flora and fauna as well as the cultural history of the area. Wear sunscreen, bugspray, and comfortable shoes to walk on sand. Binoculars available to borrow on request. Each tour lasts 1-1.5 hours, but shorter walks are available by request on weekends.



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