

Protecting Habitat on Sandy Point Island

Striking a Balance Between Public Use and Wildlife

History

Sandy Point Island (Island) is an ecologically fragile, barrier island in Little Narragansett Bay. Most of the thirty-nine acre Island is in Westerly, RI, but the northern-most five acres are in Stonington, CT. The Island was given to Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. (ALC) by the Gildersleeve family in 1982 to be protected and managed as a nature preserve. The Island provides important nesting and feeding areas for a variety of migratory birds.

The Island has long been a popular destination for recreationists. Unfortunately, the period of high recreational use coincides with bird migration and nesting. In an effort to meet the wishes of the donors and achieve a balance between public access and the needs of wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex will oversee management of the island in partnership with ALC, and Southern New England Coastal Program.

Wildlife

Islands such as Sandy Point provide very important habitat for wildlife, especially migratory birds. Species such as the least tern, roseate tern, and the piping plover use the Island to nest, rear young, feed, and stage during migration. Terns and plovers were once common along



The eggs of terns and plovers are difficult to spot as they blend into the sandy beach areas that are used by visitors

the New England coast. Increased development and recreational use of the remaining barrier beach and island habitat have contributed toward the decline of shorebird populations. Some species, such as the roseate tern and piping plover, have dwindled to dangerously low numbers.



Sandy Point Island provides important habitat for the American Oystercatchers

Recreation

The following recreation activities are permitted in designated areas from sunrise to sunset: wildlife observation, fishing, photography, environmental education, and interpretation. Other forms of permissible recreation are: swimming, sunbathing, walking, and small self-contained (e.g. in a grill) cooking fires. "Take nothing but your experience, pictures and trash and leave nothing but your tracks."

Important Public Use Guidelines for Sandy Point Island

All visitors must obtain a Sandy Point Island Pass from the Stonington Community Center, 28 Cutler Street (PO 286), Stonington, CT 06378. They may be reached via telephone at 860/535-2476 and on line at www.thecommo.org. Passes are required from Memorial Day through Labor Day for visitors age 18 and older. Daily passes are \$10.00, season passes are \$25.00, and discounted season senior (age 62) passes are \$15.00. Visitors are expected to stay out of all vegetated, fenced, and posted areas. They may not approach or linger near shorebird nests, fly kites, possess or use fireworks, ignite or tend open fires, camp, or bring pets.



For additional regulations please refer to applicable local government, state, and federal laws and the information kiosks located on the island.

Reporting a Violation

For more information or to report a violation please call the Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge at 401/364-9124.

The Partners

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides the federal leadership to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitat for the continuing benefit of the American people. Visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website at www.fws.gov. Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. is a land trust dedicated to the acquisition and conservation of natural areas for the benefit of wildlife, for present and future generations. Visit Avalonia on the web at www.avalonialandconservancy.org.

For additional information contact:

Charlie Vandemoer, Refuge Manager
Rhode Island NWR Complex
Charlestown, RI 02813
401/364-9124
401/364-0170 (fax)
<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/ninigret/>

Federal Relay Service
For the deaf and hard-of-hearing
1 800/877-8339

May 2016

Shorebirds at Sandy Point Island

Sandy Point Island

Sandy Point Island is a private island owned by the Avalonia Conservancy, Inc. Sandy Point was donated at Avalonia for the purposes of balancing conservation and human recreation. In 2015, a lease agreement with the Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex shifted management of the island to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Sandy Point is a unique barrier island habitat within the larger little Narragansett Bay watershed and provides habitat to many protected animals including horseshoe crabs, plants, seabirds and shorebirds.

Migration and Nesting

March

Spring Migration

Adults return to Sandy Point from their wintering sites along the Gulf of Mexico and South America

April – June

Courtship and Nesting

Following territorial displays, pairs mate and establish nests. Nests are well camouflaged on the sand or under the dune grass.

May – August

Chick Rearing Period

A crucial time, chicks are very vulnerable once they hatch until they are able to fly. It can take weeks for flight feathers to develop during which time some species feed their young (altricial) and some species protect their chicks while the chicks feed themselves (precocial).

September

Fall Migration

The adults and their chicks, which are now called juveniles, begin their long journey south to their wintering sites along the southern coast of the United States and South America.

Shorebird Species



Photo by Brian Harris

Federally threatened piping plovers nest at Sandy Point. These solitary nesters are tiny and sand colored. They were named for their soft pipe-like call. Their eggs are well camouflaged on the sand. Piping plover chicks are precocial and may be seen feeding off invertebrates in the intertidal zone. Piping plover adults defend their nest and chicks through a broken wing display.



Photo by Brian Harris

A state species of concern, American Oystercatchers also nest on Sandy Point. They are a striking black bird with an orange bill and a loud “kwerk” call. American oystercatcher chicks are altricial and may hide in the grass to wait for their parent to bring them food.



Photo by Brian Harris

The smallest of the terns, state threatened least terns have yellow bills. Terns nest in colonies and may be seen diving in shallow waters for small fish. Tern chicks are altricial and are fed by the adults. You may also notice larger terns in the area. The common tern and the federally endangered roseate tern can also be seen on Sandy Point.

What you can do to help

- Obtain and possess a Sandy Point Island Beach Pass
- Stay out of vegetated, fenced, and posted areas
- No pets are allowed on Sandy Point
- Do not approach or linger near shorebird nests
- No overnight camping, open fires, or kite flying
- Possessing or using fireworks is not allowed
- Do not feed the gulls
- No littering, take all trash with you

