



# Piping plovers hatch on Seabrook Beach

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SEABROOK | The population at Seabrook Beach just increased by four, and it's not necessarily because the Seacoast area's vacation season is in full swing.

According to biologists with the NH Fish and Game Department's Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program, a clutch of piping plover chicks hatched on the town's sandy beach on Monday, July 3.

Biologist Emily Brunkhurst called the event "an exciting development," and with good reason: the little tan seashore bird with the black bands and orange legs is an endangered species and under federal protection.

To ensure their safety and ultimate survival, the newly-hatched chicks are being carefully and consistently monitored by volunteers, whose valuable assistance helps to assure the future of the species.

"These birds have come back from the brink because of the efforts of monitors and beachgoers," says Brunkhurst. "Helping to protect these chicks

is a rare opportunity for people to do something that can actually help save a threatened species."

There have been other nesting pairs of plovers at Hampton Beach State Park this season, bringing the total to three pairs. In recent weeks, fencing and signs have been utilized to alert the public of the birds' presence.

Both the NH Division of Parks and Recreation and the Fish and Game Department issued a statement prohibiting pets from the Hampton Beach RV Park.

"It's important for people to be aware that these birds and chicks are on our beaches," says Nongame Program Piping Plover Monitor Kristen Murphy. "We just want them to be respectful of signs and marked areas for the plovers' protection."

According to NH Fish and Game, this type of predator

closure protects the nest, allowing the piping plovers to move freely while at the same time keeping possible predators such as seagulls and raccoons out.

In addition, beach raking as well as cleaning the beach by mechanical means have been temporarily interrupted, as the chicks feed off small invertebrates that they find where marine vegetation washes up on the shore (also known as the wrack line).

Because they lay their egg clutches on the sand, piping plovers are radically vulnerable to predators as well as disturbances caused by humans (beachgoers both on foot and on motorized vehicles) and nature (ranging from domesticated dogs and feral cats to high tide).

This season, the first pair of plovers that nested at Hampton's state beach had laid four eggs in early May, although by

the end of the month three of the eggs were discovered missing. The remaining egg hatched as mid-June approached, but that chick also ended up missing. Experts don't believe this pair will nest again this year.

After the success of this latest hatch at Seabrook Beach, though, biologists are hoping the final plover pair — now in its third nesting attempt this season at Hampton Beach State Park — will produce chicks by mid-July. (Their first nesting attempt failed when the single egg was crushed; a second clutch of four eggs was unfortunately buried by storm activity.)

Murphy is calling for support from the community in the efforts to keep the piping plovers and their nesting areas safe and undisturbed.

"Even with full support from volunteers and a full-time monitor, we can't watch the plovers and nests at all times," she says. "We need support from the public to help them survive." (See sidebar for ways to help out.)

Protection efforts will continue long after this season's piping plover chicks have hatched; in fact, the Fish and



A young piping plover chick

## HOW THE PUBLIC CAN HELP

Below is a list of recommendations for assisting with piping plover protection efforts.

1. Respect signs and fences around nesting areas.
2. Be a responsible pet owner. Walk dogs in areas where piping plovers are not present and keep cats indoors. Dogs can chase plovers and step on eggs and chicks, killing them. Cats — even well fed ones — are a major predator of many types of birds, including piping plovers.
3. Fill in holes on the beach. Piping plover chicks can fall in and become trapped.
4. Fly kites a safe distance away from plovers.
5. Don't approach or linger near piping plovers or their nests.
6. Teach children safe viewing and respect for wildlife.
7. Obey local fireworks laws. Fireworks stress adult piping plovers and their chicks and can cause accidental fires that destroy dune vegetation.
8. Pick up trash and food on the beach. Garbage attracts predators, such as gulls and crows, which prey on plover eggs, chicks and sometimes adults.
9. Report observations. Report unlawful fireworks, off-leash dogs or fencing vandalism to your local police department.
10. Volunteer! Those who enjoy watching birds and want to help protect the piping plovers can call NH Fish and Game at (603) 271-2461.

Game's Nongame Program has provided protection and monitoring for the last decade. Since these efforts began, 74 chicks have successfully fledged in the state, with 11 of them fledged on the seacoast thanks to the two to seven nesting pairs that return to the area to nest.

Protection of the endan-

gered piping plover is a cooperative effort of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, NH Fish and Game, NH Parks and Recreation, and the towns of Seabrook and Hampton, as well as local residents, volunteers, and visitors to the Seacoast area. For additional information visit <http://plover.fws.gov>.

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