

Sippewissett Association

Newsletter

Winter in the Bahamas

Piping Plover Update

By Nancy McDonald

Good news! The female piping plover that nested on Woodneck Beach last spring is alive and well and wintering in the Bahamas. She was banded on North Andros Island, Bahamas, in February 2010. She has colored bands on her legs, in an order unique to her, making her identification definitive.

In February 2011, before heading north to breed, she was seen again in the Bahamas on the beach where she was banded. She was spotted in several places as she made her way north before she arrived in Sippewissett around April 18, 2011.

Very recently, I received a message from the research scientist in Canada who was responsible for the banding project. "Our" bird was seen February 4 on N. Andros Island, Bahamas, very near where she was banded in 2010 and where she was seen again in 2011. Will she return to Woodneck Beach in 2012?

Plovers nest among the rocks, and Woodneck Beach offers perfect conditions, especially before summer beachgoers return.

The adults survived a beautiful and very busy Memorial Day weekend, with many people trying to

spot them on the nest. Luckily, the plovers were not easily flustered, as long as they could get to the water's edge to feed, taking turns on the nest.

On June 7, right on schedule, two chicks were discovered running around, only hours old. There had been four eggs in the nest, but there was no sign of what happened to the other two. The Massachusetts Audubon staff checked the nest and found no signs of a predator or other disturbance.

The chicks are precocial and found their way to the water's edge almost immediately. Instinctively, they fed on tiny crustaceans, marine worms and insect larvae. The adults acted as chaperones, and called the chicks back to the fenced area when they sensed danger.

Having a cool, cloudy June was very beneficial for the chicks. The beach was quiet and they were able to run freely, feeding almost constantly, growing exponentially every

day. Those of you who saw the slideshow at the Annual Meeting can attest to this.

When they hatched, the chicks had the start of their adult markings. Within 10 days the chicks had almost doubled in size and fluff. In just over three weeks they were flapping their wings, getting ready to fledge.



*Piping plover chick at 24 days, Woodneck Beach.
Photo by Terry Pomper.*

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The mission of the Sippewissett Association is to: protect and foster the mutual benefit and interests of landowners of the Sippewissett region of the Town of Falmouth, Massachusetts; to promote and encourage cooperation among such landowners in order to ensure that the future development of said region shall be in keeping with its general residential zoning restrictions and to take whatever action or actions may be necessary to this end; and to protect and prevent the misuse of public and common areas in the Sippewissett region.

In mid-June there was a wedding down by the inlet. The guests and the bride had to walk very close to the fencing—the plovers were nowhere to be found. As soon as the last guest left, the birds ran out of the grasses and headed straight for the water. Clever birds!

On July 2, the chicks were 25 days old and officially considered fledglings. Both were spotted across the inlet that day. They flew back to Woodneck to enjoy the busy 4th of July weekend, foraging among the rocks, with their dad.

They were last seen July 4, heading toward West Falmouth, with the adult male. The female had moved on a few days before. It is typical for the female to leave first, and this one stayed with the chicks longer than most.

Most Sippewissett residents understand how special our beaches are for summer enjoyment and tourism. However, the successful breeding of the piping plovers is a reminder that the beach is also special for other creatures and reasons.

We are fortunate that Woodneck Beach provides the habitat for this species to successfully nest and raise their young. This is critical for their survival. Piping plovers are considered a threatened species under both state and federal law, in

part due to predators and habitat loss caused by development and spring flooding. Hurricane Irene flattened the ridge where the plovers had nested, but the beach and inlet are changing daily and slowly building up.

Last year was a rare opportunity for many, including me, to observe piping plover behavior up close on a daily basis. It was an opportunity to help protect them, as well as being educational and rewarding. Several



Piping plover chick at 11 days, Woodneck Beach. Photo by Karl Audenaerde

nests in West Falmouth were not as successful because they were washed over or raided by predators.

Piping plovers will start returning to the area in late March, so we will soon find out if the banded female and her mate return to Sippewissett. The male typically returns a few

days earlier to scope out potential nesting sites. Banding studies have shown that most plovers change mates in subsequent years, but there are always exceptions.

If the plovers return to Woodneck Beach this year, we hope that there will be larger, more explanatory signs in place and that beachgoers will respect them. The fencing will not be a new phenomenon and it is inconvenient for a short time only.

All of us can help with the plovers' success by keeping the beach clean, keeping dogs, even on leash, away from the fencing in April and off the beach entirely after May 1. It is best to observe the nest and adults from a distance and after the chicks hatch, 'Watch Your Step'!

For more information on piping plovers go to [http://www.fws](http://www.fws.gov/plover/facts.html)

[.gov/plover/facts.html](http://www.fws.gov/plover/facts.html).

Many thanks to Sippewissett Association Treasurer, Karl Audenaerde for his help documenting the chicks' rapid growth on film and in many mid-day updates.

Nancy McDonald is a volunteer for the Coastal Waterbird Program of Mass Audubon.

Volunteer for Spring Clean Up!

The Falmouth Beautification Council will no longer be sponsoring the town-wide Spring Clean-Up. However, the hope is that village and neighborhood groups as well as organizations and individuals will continue to pick up trash in their areas.

Nancy McDonald will continue to coordinate volunteers in Sippewissett, with a target date of the week of April 22–29. Roadside trash is a constant problem and new volunteers are always welcome. Please contact Nancy at nancy.mcdonald@verizon.net if you would like to help in a section of Sippewissett.

Mass Audubon on Coyotes

By Karl Audenaerde

Coyotes occasionally make the local papers, as was the case again early this winter when an East Falmouth family pet was attacked and later died. Some Sippewissett residents, too, have voiced their concerns. As luck would have it, Mass Audubon recently published an in-depth article on the subject; because of its length we cannot reprint it here, but are glad to offer an abstract. The complete article can be found at http://www.massaudubon.org/Nature_Connection/wildlife/index.php?subject=Mammals&id=23.

“Ours” are eastern coyotes, *Canis latrans*, thought to be a hybridization between the western coyote (*Canis latrans thomomys*) and red wolves (*Canis rufus*). They are the largest subspecies, but have not yet been officially recognized as such. They have been observed in Massachusetts since 1957, and their range includes unlikely places such as Cuttyhunk and Martha’s Vineyard.

These eastern coyotes typically weigh 30–35 pounds (males are slightly larger than females) and



stand 23–36 inches tall. They resemble a German shepherd, but have erect pointed ears, a more pointed muzzle and a very bushy tail that hangs down. They are equally at home in a wide variety of habitats. Male coyotes take an active role in raising the pups.

Coyotes will eat about anything that has meat on it, from deer to rabbits and all the way down to grasshoppers. If animal matter is scarce their diet will expand to include fruits and berries. Occasionally, house pets may fall victim as well, but those incidents are more rare than generally assumed. Automobiles remain by far the number-one pet killer; other predators on small dogs and

house cats include great horned owls, fishers, and female foxes feeding young.

Although they are susceptible to rabies, since 1992 (the year the disease showed up first in this state) there have only been three confirmed cases of rabies in coyotes in Massachusetts—to be compared with more than 1,800 raccoons and 75 house cats. Since the 1950s there have been four coyote attacks on humans in Massachusetts. In comparison, between January 2010 and September 2011, dogs have killed 43 people in the United States. Coyotes have a healthy fear of humans and just want to be left alone!

Aquaculture Update

By Eric Matzen

Your local oyster growers have been very busy since the last update. Our main goal for 2011 was to make a name for ourselves in the oyster community by sharing excellent oysters with as many oyster lovers as we could. Many Sippewissett oyster fans have described them as “intensely delicious.” Demand has been high and our harvests sell out quickly.

On the subject of weather: We are enjoying this relatively mild winter, and are cautiously optimistic that it will benefit our oyster growth. Hurricane Irene, however, we did not enjoy. The storm caused a good deal of stress as we prepared for the worst. The storm was severe, but less severe than expected. Our preparations kept the damage minimal. It was good practice for future storms. The annual Sea Chanty Buffet and Oyster Fest at Coonamessett Farm was also a blow-out—as in, canceled due to Irene.

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The Falmouth Shellfish Cooperative, operating out of Coonamessett Farm, is our base for sales. A new certified refrigeration facility and delivery van allow us to deliver very high quality shellfish locally. You may have seen Sippewissett Oysters featured at Shuckers Bar and Grill, Quick's Hole Restaurant, The Quarter Deck, The Roobar, and Trevi of Mashpee. We also sell the oysters retail, in season, through the CSA, and on the half-shell at Coonamessett Farm.

We are committed to working with our Sippewissett neighbors. You can contact your local grower by e-mail at _____Falmouth.Shellfish@gmail.com or through the Sippewissett Association.

Save the Date!

**Sippewissett Association
Winter Social**

Sunday, March 18, 2012

3:00–5:00 p.m.

West Falmouth Library

Join us for hors d'oeuvres and

Speaker: Arthur Gaines

*Woodneck Beach and the Various
Studies to Date on this Beach*

**The Sippewissett Association
PO Box 501
Falmouth MA 02541**