

Sippewissett Association

Newsletter

The Plovers of Sippewissett

*By Karl Audenaerde, with contributions from
Nancy McDonald and Rose Scavotto*

There are the swallows of San Juan Capistrano. And there are the plovers of Sippewissett. In spring 2014, we were traveling around the time they were supposed to arrive in our area, but thanks to the marvel of the internet we knew that the plovers had returned. And a surprise, but not that much of a surprise, the banded female—an old acquaintance by now—showed up with a mate. On May 4 there were two eggs, but when we, still jetlagged but excited, went to look for them a few days later, there were no plovers, no eggs, not a sign of life. Catastrophe! Meetings were held and fingers were pointed, but that didn't bring

the plovers back. Possible culprits: the crows. But even they deserve the presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

Word had it that the pair was spotted on the beach near the mouth of the Trunk River on June



Four, 25-day-old chicks on Black Beach, June 24, 2012. Photo by Terry Pomper.

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.

14 or 15. At any rate, by June 16, an orange webbing fence had been erected, cordoning off a good chunk of beach between the Quissett Association Beach and the Trunk River. It took me a day or two (and a good description of the nest's location provided by Nancy McDonald and Terry Pomper) to locate them. You have no idea how well these guys blend in on the beach until you try to find them!

By this time, the crowd of plover stewards had grown to include Mass Audubon, Falmouth DPW, Falmouth ConCom, the 300 Committee, state and town wildlife authorities, and who knows who else. We were lucky enough to watch the pair changing the guard at the nest, which allowed for a good look at the four magnificent eggs. On July 2 they hatched, all four of them.

But by now the Fourth of July was approaching, and crowds of people were expected in the area of the nest. The town went into overdrive, and DPW erected a very impressive barricade. But no more plovers. From the reactions I picked up I got the impression that half the town went into a panic, and all of us feared the worst. But by the fifth the whole family was spotted on the Moors Association beach—these upwardly mobile birds had moved to a private beach!

However, during or shortly after the move, two of the chicks became part of the food chain. The crows again got the blame, even though nobody observed the crime. The plover family's new abode came with a huge problem: Surf Drive. After the brood was spotted on the wrong side of the road, the state briefly contemplated

closing it to all motorized traffic. But Audubon and DPW stepped up and built an impressive barricade instead. Shore bird monitors of Mass Audubon checked on the family twice a day, and by July 30, all was well in plover land.

Mrs. Plover apparently felt that motherhood was overrated, and on July 14 she took off and was not seen again. That doesn't seem to be unusual behavior, but it leaves the poor male alone to take care of his offspring. And he did his job with enthusiasm. I saw him chase an innocent sparrow that landed too close, and when on a cool late afternoon the chicks got tired or cold they disappeared under his wings. You would never have known that the chicks were there, if it weren't for their legs sticking out from under a ball of feathers. The first chick fledged on July 26 (a day early), and soon was covering distances on the order of 100 feet with ease. On July 29 its sibling was still giving a pretty good impression of the road runner.

Which leaves us with the question: why all this commotion? Well, the 2013 nesting season was catastrophic, and except for a single nest somewhere near Popponesset, no eggs successfully hatched in our area. Loss of habitat, weather (unusually high tides), and predation are the main problems. The sad bottom line is that the current rate of reproduction is too low to sustain a stable population.

P.S. During this past winter, our banded female was spotted in her usual hangout in the Bahamas. And, two plovers just arrived on Black Beach.

Falmouth Ponds Phragmites Control Project

By Dick Payne

In 2013 it was suggested that there may be community support for control of the phragmites in Wood Neck, Gunning Point and Flume Ponds. A fundraising campaign proved that correct. Because a pond abutter at Wood Neck Pond threatened suit if we included that pond, we concentrated on the other two locations. Buzzards Bay Coalition agreed to take responsibility for overall management of the project and for receiving and disbursing funds. I am very grateful to Brendan Annett and Sarah Quintal for their help and encouragement.

The first herbicide application was in early fall of 2014, with cutting of the dead stalks later in the fall. They were removed from Gunning Point Pond but left to decompose on the shore of

Flume Pond with Conservation Commission approval. It would have been quite impossible to remove the Flume Pond cuttings.

Not all the phragmites was treated this first year. In both ponds, the brush was so thick on the upland side of the shores, our contractor, Chris Polatin, and his crew could not get through it. They brought a raft on which they mounted a 12-foot orchard ladder and sprayed as far as they could toward the upland from above. This fall they will be able to complete the job because they will be able to get closer to the upland. We expect that 2016 will see the most persistent phragmites disappear, with the exception of a few sprouts that may appear the following year.

Sippewissett Association Dues

Now Pay Online

At the Annual Meeting in June 2014, it was announced that an optional facility for paying Association dues online is now available. Online payments will be processed using PayPal, which allows you to use a credit card, debit card, or your own PayPal account.

To take advantage of this feature, first navigate to the web page <http://sippewissett.org/become-a-member>. At this location you will find instructions under the heading "Pay Online" for renewing an existing membership or for signing up as a new member.

If you choose, you can still sign up for a new or renewal membership by completing a paper membership form and mailing a check. A membership form is included with our annual membership mailing, which occurs during the summer. Forms can also be downloaded from <http://sippewissett.org/become-a-member>.

BuzzardsBay Coalition Discovery Center

21 Luscombe Ave., Woods Hole

The seasonal Buzzards Bay Discovery Center in Woods Hole is stocked with interactive exhibits for adults and children. Visitors can get up close and personal with sea stars, hermit crabs, whelks, and bay scallops in the touch tank.

Check the website (savebuzzardsbay.org/LearningCenters/WoodsHole) for a schedule of the free programs offered throughout the summer. The Center is open every day, 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Memorial Day to Labor Day

Volunteer at the Discovery Center

If you love Buzzards Bay and want to help spread the word, volunteer at the Buzzards Bay Discovery Center this summer. Contact the Center at woodshole@savebuzzardsbay.org to learn more.

The Sippewissett Association

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