



Joseph Sylvia State Beach 2014 Field Summary

Mass Audubon

Coastal Waterbird Program at Felix Neck

Mass Audubon's Coastal Waterbird Program at Felix Neck

Mass Audubon's Coastal Waterbird Program is one of the most effective entities working to protect coastal birds and barrier beaches in North America. Launched in 1986 in response to declining populations of piping plovers and terns in Massachusetts, the Coastal Waterbird Program's primary objective is to protect nesting and foraging areas throughout the state.

In partnership with federal, state, and municipal agencies, and with private landowners, the program has helped to increase the number of piping plovers nesting in the state from 135 pairs in 1986 to 729 pairs in 2012—approximately 1/3 of the Atlantic Coast population.

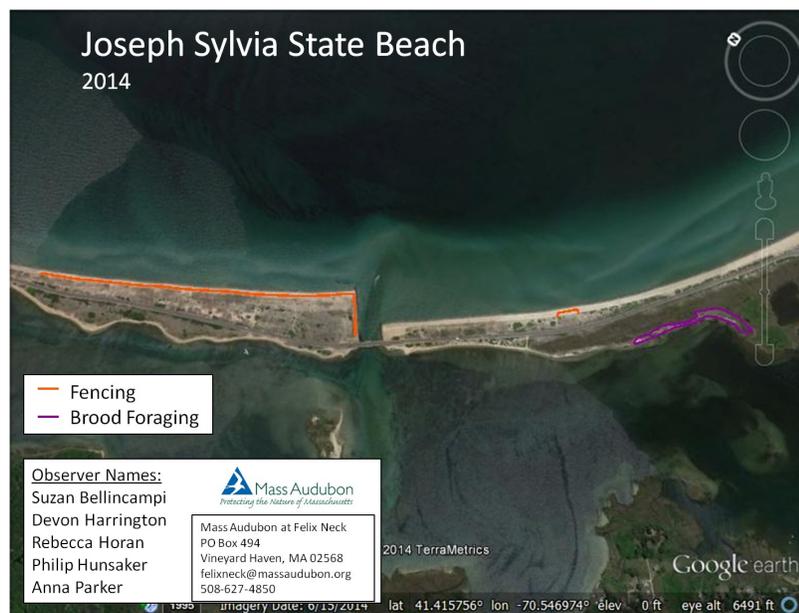
Felix Neck Wildlife Sanctuary locally manages shorebird protection efforts on Martha's Vineyard. We protect shorebirds and their habitat at sites across the island and provide guidance and expertise to private landowners and public entities. In addition, our education and volunteer programs with schools, groups, residents and visitors enhances wildlife protection efforts island-wide.

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2014 Field Summary

Felix Neck staff monitored nesting piping plovers, terns, and American oystercatchers on Joseph Sylvia State Beach from March through August 2014. Monitors erected and maintained protective fencing and informational signs during the season. Informal education was provided to beachgoers, as was formal educational programs, including guided beach walks for the public and a weekly family program Saturdays at Sengkontacket (sponsored by Friends of Sengkontacket). More than 75 people participated in these formal education programs. Reproductive success for piping plovers was low, no terns nested this season, but American oystercatchers did successfully reproduce at this site. Nests were lost due to suspected predation from skunks or crows. Dogs and/or their tracks were seen on every site visit. Vehicles are allowed on the pond side beach if the vehicle owner has a shellfishing permit and are actively shellfishing, however, vehicles often appeared to be driving or parked on the beach for recreation, rather than shellfishing.



Bird Abundance and Productivity

	Number pairs	Number fledged
Piping Plover	2	0
Least Tern	0	0
American Oystercatcher	1	3



Piping plover adult



Least tern adult

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Coastal Bird Reproductive Success:

Three pairs of piping plovers demonstrated nesting behavior, and an additional pair was observed acting territorial and feeding on the site for over two weeks during the season. Two of the plover pairs nested and both nests were lost, the suspected cause is predation from skunks or crows based on tracking at the site. The piping plover pair that nested on the Edgartown side of State Beach was suspected by monitors to have nested twice unsuccessfully on Cow Bay beach as well. The other nesting pair was found on the Oak Bluffs side and it is possible that their 3 egg nest hatched, given the timing of the empty nest found, but there were no chicks ever observed at the site.

Least terns arrived in early May, but none attempted to nest this season. Least and common terns were often observed feeding and flying over both the Sound and pond side beaches.



Piping plover at State Beach Oak Bluffs

One American oystercatcher pair nested at State Beach. The pair nested on a portion of the marsh across from Bend-in-the-Road parking area and successfully hatched and fledged three chicks. The oystercatcher chicks fed with their parents on the pond side of the Edgartown end of State Beach until fledging in late June.

Human, dog, crow, gull, and skunk tracks were observed on 70-100% of site visits depending on species. Rat tracks were also observed on several visits. Especially during the height of the summer season, July and August, the beach is often very crowded with beach goers and people and tracks were occasionally observed within the symbolic fencing on the Oak Bluffs side of the beach. Vehicles are allowed on the pond side beach if the vehicle owners have a shellfishing permit and are actively shellfishing. Fresh vehicle tracks by the beach entrance adjacent to Little Bridge, as well as by Big Bridge were observed during approximately 40% of site visits throughout the 2014 season, though more vehicles not apparently shellfishing increased in July and August.

Management Activities:

Felix Neck staff fenced habitat at Joseph Sylvania State Beach on March 28 and April 1. The fencing began north of Big Bridge and extended to the wooden groins on the Oak Bluffs side. The area between entrances 12 and 13 were fenced off on 5/29/2014 to protect the piping plover nest. Two shorebird education signs were installed, one north of Big Bridge and the other south of Big Bridge.

In addition to monitoring the nesting shorebirds, staff conducted educational beach walks open to the public and kayak trips in Sengekontacket Pond. In collaboration with Friends of Sengekontacket, an educational program for families with children ages 4 and up, "Saturdays at Sengekontacket," was held every Saturday during July and August. The program goals are to teach children, as well as their families, about the pond ecosystem and ways in which to protect it.

Management Recommendations:

We recommend continued educational efforts at Joseph Sylvania State Beach and enforcement of no dog regulations. As needed, and depending on the location of nesting shorebirds, considerations might be made to work with the County Manager and Town Shellfish wardens to limit vehicle (permitted shellfishing unpermitted recreational) access to the pond side beach.



Least tern egg and chicks



Piping plover chicks



American oystercatcher chick