



# Joseph Sylvia State Beach 2013 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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## 2013 Field Summary

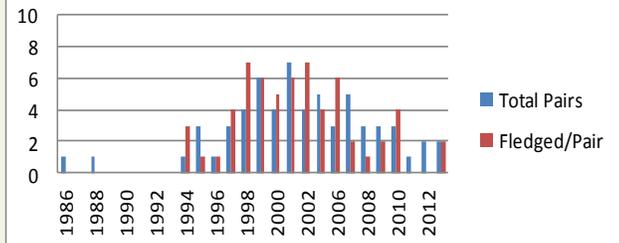
Joseph Sylvia State Beach was monitored for nesting piping plovers, terns, and American oystercatchers from mid-March through August, 2013 by Felix Neck staff. Monitors erected and maintained protective fencing and informational signs. Informal education programming was provided to beachgoers and formal education programs, including guided beach walks for the public and a family program "Saturdays at Sengekontacket," sponsored by Friends of Sengekontacket, were provided. Reproductive success for all species was low; cause of failure included storm washover, and suspected skunk and avian predation. Dogs and their tracks were seen on every visit, regardless of the established prohibition of dogs during the nesting season. Kite surfers were observed flushing the tern colony on at least one occasion.



## Bird Abundance and Productivity

	Number pairs	Number fledged
Piping Plover	2	2
Least Tern	16	0
American Oystercatcher	3	0

## Piping Plovers- State Beach OB/EDG



Piping plover adult



Least tern adult

### Coastal Bird Reproductive Success:

Piping plover fledging rate at Sylvania State Beach has been at an unsustainable level for past few years. In 2013, two piping plover pairs were present during the reproduction season. Piping plover pair 01 attempted to nest twice with no successful hatchlings. Piping plover pair 02 attempted to nest three times, with the third nest of 3 eggs hatching successfully. Pair 02's third attempt hatched in late July and two chicks were fledged in late August. There was no visible evidence of chick loss. Wash over, heavy rain and wind, and skunk and crow predation were the main causes of nest loss. State Beach plovers haven't successfully fledged chicks since 2010, so it was a good year for State Beach piping plovers.



Piping plover at State Beach Oak Bluffs

Least terns arrived on site in mid-May, and nests were laid by early June. By June 8th, two suspected nests were documented. On June 9th, the entire colony abandoned the site for unknown causes. A few individual terns were seen offshore foraging for the remainder of the season.

Three oystercatcher pairs attempted to nest at Sylvania State Beach. American oystercatcher pairs 01 and 02 attempted to nest only once on the ocean side of State Beach Oak Bluffs in the back dunes. Pair 01 nest was lost to unknown causes, and pair 02 nest was lost due to suspected avian predation. Pair 03 nested on the Sengekontacket side of State Beach Edgartown. The first attempt of pair 03 hatched, but all chicks were lost; only one chick was seen between 5/20-5/28. There was no evidence of chick mortality. This pair, 03, had a second nesting attempt in the same location that was lost due to suspected avian predation. One egg was found 2 feet from the nest bowl with a circular cracked hole.

Crow and gull tracks were present on site every visit. Skunk tracks were observed during 100% of visits. Rat tracks were also observed on several visits. Dog and human tracks were documented on 100% of visits. Extremely high pedestrian traffic is present on site as this is a very popular recreational beach. Pedestrian tracks were also observed inside the fencing on the Oak Bluffs side. Evidence of vehicles were observed on the pond side of Oak Bluffs and Edgartown on 85% of all site visits.

### Management Activities:

Felix Neck staff fenced habitat at Sylvania State Beach on March 20th. The fencing began north of Big Bridge and extended to the wooden groins. South of Big Bridge a small section of fencing was put up. Fencing was rectangular with 1 meter 30cm posts, orange twine, and blue/white/yellow informational signs. The diameter at the narrowest point was 60 meters. Path 22 was closed to protect the least tern colony and piping plover pair 02. The path was kept closed from 5/28 through late August when the piping plover chicks fledged. Two shorebird education signs were installed, one north of Big Bridge and the other south of Big Bridge. Monitors visited the beach an average of four to five times per week (60 visits over the eleven week nesting season).

In addition, staff conducted educational beach walks open to the public and kayak trips in Sengekontacket Pond. In collaboration with Friends at Sengekontacket an educational class for families with kids 4 and up, "Saturdays at Sengekontacket," was taught every Saturday during July and August. The goal of this class was to teach kids and families about the pond ecosystem and ways they can help protect it.

### Management Recommendations:

We recommend continued educational efforts at Sylvania State Beach and increased enforcement of no dog regulations. Discussions with kite surfers might be helpful in preventing disturbance to nesting shorebirds.



Least tern egg and chicks



Piping plover chicks



American oystercatcher chick