



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Outer Banks Group:

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· Fort Raleigh National Historic Site
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Hatching Chicks Influence Access Changes in Cape Hatteras National Seashore

Outer Banks Group Superintendent Mike Murray announced two beach access changes. Several bird nests are hatching within the boundaries of Cape Hatteras National Seashore, which direct the need to close areas to protect bird species. The areas affected include Hatteras Inlet and Cape Point/South Beach areas of Hatteras Island. "We try to be flexible in balancing resources protection and recreational access at the Seashore. Currently, chicks are hatching and we need to provide them protection," stated Superintendent Murray. "Each species involved has unique behavior and biology, which prevents us from developing a one size fits all approach."

Chicks started hatching about three weeks ago. An additional American Oystercatcher nest near Hatteras Inlet hatched late on June 6. Both the ocean shoreline within 0.1 mile of the nest and portions of the Pole Road will be closed from 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. for two to three nights, which will preclude access to Hatteras Inlet south of the closure. Access will reopen each day at 7:00 a.m. Once park biologists are able to determine feeding patterns, 24-hour access will be reopened as long as the chicks do not face additional disturbance threats.

Additional bird activity centers around the Cape Point/South Beach area. Three piping plover chicks hatched late last week 0.4 mile west of Cape Point at one of two known piping plover nests in the Seashore. The second nest, located at South Beach, was discovered at full clutch (four eggs) on Sunday and it is difficult to estimate an exact hatch date. In preparation of the upcoming hatch, park biologists are monitoring the nest daily and have proactively closed a 0.3 mile section of South Beach shoreline that is necessary to protect the chicks and provide adequate habitat. This, combined with other resource closures, result in a continuous shoreline closure from portions of South Beach to the west side of Cape Point.

Visitors are still able to access South Beach from Ramp 49 and travel north approximately 1.9 miles. Use of the interdunal road system to access South Beach from Ramp 44 is temporarily closed. Access to Cape Point is open via the ocean shoreline south of Ramps 43 and 44.

All users are asked to reduce their speed to 10 mph on the beach near resource closures. Additionally, all dogs must remain on leashes of six feet or less while in the Seashore.

Plover chicks are typically mobile within 24 hours after hatching. Once mobile, the chicks will leave the nest and move extensively along the beach, intertidal zone, and mudflats to feed. Plover chicks have been documented to move hundreds of yards from

the nest site during their first week of life. Piping plover chicks fledge (are able to fly) 25 to 35 days after hatching. Park biologists will monitor all areas involved and provide for access when it is feasible.

Piping Plovers are protected by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and are federally listed as a threatened species. The ESA prohibits harassing, harming, pursuing, hunting, shooting, wounding, killing, trapping, capturing, or collecting federally protected species. Penalties for violations of the ESA for threatened species include a fine of up to \$25,000 imprisonment for not more than six months, or both.

Beach areas used by chicks, for foraging and resting, etc, are closed to off-road vehicles (ORVs) as typical behavior of piping plover chicks increases their vulnerability to ORVs. Chicks frequently move between the upper beach (berm or foredune) to moist sandy feeding areas such as mudflats and the intertidal zone. These movements can place chicks in the paths of vehicles driven along the beach. Chicks sometimes stand motionless or crouch as vehicles pass by, or do not move quickly enough to get out of the way of moving vehicles. Chicks stand in, walk, and run along tire ruts, and sometime have difficulty crossing deep ruts or climbing out of them.

There were two incidents this past weekend in which ORV's were driven illegally through resource protection closures on South Beach and west of Cape Point. Superintendent Murray said, "While the vast majority of ORV users comply with posted closures, we simply cannot risk the loss of piping plover chicks to off-road vehicles. I am very concerned that the actions of just a few individuals will force us to increase protective measures, which could affect access for everyone."

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