



Wallops Island Protected Species Training

Protected Species of Wallops Island



Identification Awareness



The Two **BIG** Questions...

What do we monitor?

- **Threatened & Endangered species in the area:**
- **piping plover**
- **marine sea turtles**

Why do we monitor?

- **We want to protect shore birds, sea turtles, and marine mammals .**
- **It is a requirement of the Endangered Species Act and 2010 Biological Opinion issued by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.**

There are a multitude of migratory birds and sea life present on and around Wallops Island beach.

Some of these animals require protection and monitoring because they are listed as either 'threatened' or 'endangered' (T&E) by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The two most commonly spotted on our beach are the piping plover and the loggerhead sea turtle.

There could be other T&E species in the vicinity such as Kemp's Ridley, Atlantic green or leatherback sea turtles, but their occurrences are rarer



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Piping Plover

- **Piping plovers only breed in three geographic regions of North America:**
 - the Atlantic Coast,
 - the Northern Great Plains, &
 - the Great Lakes.
- **Atlantic Coast plovers nest on:**
 - coastal beaches,
 - sandflats at the ends of sand spits and barrier islands,
 - gently sloped foredunes,
 - sparsely vegetated dunes,
 - wash over areas cut into or between dunes.



Wallops Island Breeding Adult, 2010

- Piping Plover migratory and breeding season starts mid-March and ends at the beginning of September.
- During this timeframe the northern portion of Wallops Island is closed.
- No one is allowed past the barrier without permission from the Environmental Office.



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Piping Plover

Piping plovers became protected under the Endangered Species Act in 1986.

- Atlantic Coast plovers are “threatened”.
- Currently there are < 2000 breeding pairs.

Several Factors for Decline:

- development reduces coastal habitat,
- human disturbance,
- domestic animals and predators, &
- storm tides.

By managing the population on Wallops Island:

- We are helping to increase the number of successful breeding pairs, increasing the piping plover population as a whole.



Wallops Island Breeding Adult, 2010



Wallops Island Hatchlings, 2010



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We need your help!!

The following slides shows how to identify a piping plover and what measures you can follow to help ensure nest success.



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Piping Plover Identification

Piping plovers (*Charadrius melodus*) are small shorebirds.

The birds are approximately seven inches long.

Plovers have sand-colored plumage on backs and crown with white underparts.

Breeding birds have a single black breastband, a black bar across the forehead, bright orange legs and bill, and a black tip on the bill.

During winter, the birds lose the black bands, the legs fade to pale yellow, and the bill becomes mostly black.



Breeding Plumage

Piping plovers are known for their distinctive melodic mating call: The Piping Plover's call is a plaintive cry, sometimes described as a whistled *peep-lo*, with the first syllable higher.



Click here



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Piping Plover Identification



Killdeer



**Semipalmated
Plover**

The following
birds can be
seen on
Wallops Island
but are NOT a
piping plover.



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Piping Plover Identification

The same coloration that makes it difficult for predators to see piping plover also makes it difficult for you to see them!

Plovers commonly nest in sparsely vegetated areas, sand flats or shell flats.

Recently they have been nesting in and around beach grass.

Plovers rely on cryptic coloration and open areas to hatch nests.

This makes both birds and eggs hard to see.





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Piping Plover Identification



When still, piping plover blend into the pale background of open, sandy habitat on outer beaches where they feed and nest.



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Piping Plover Identification

This plover is near the dune line, an increasingly popular hangout for plovers.





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Piping Plover Identification

When conducting beach patrols be sure to:
“Tread” Lightly!

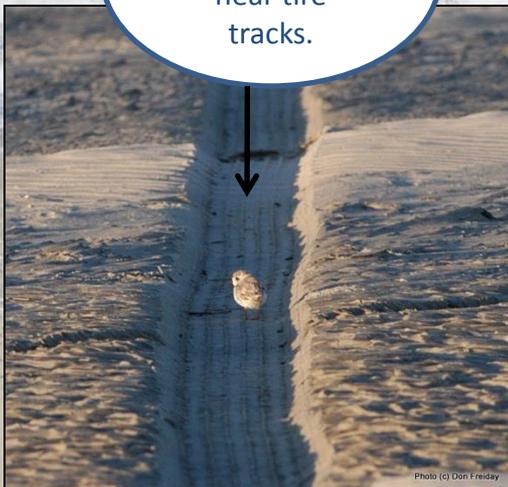
Drive along the intertidal zone only!

- Birds, chicks, and eggs in soft sand can be very hard to see.
- Birds and chicks have an affinity for tire tracks.

Baby plovers buried in the softer sand.



Plovers love to walk in and near tire tracks.



A plover nest narrowly missed by tire tracks.



A baby plover napping in a tire track.





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There is the potential for many other shorebirds to nest on Wallops Island.

They nest in “scrapes” or small indentations in the sand or shells.

It is very important to be vigilant as these nests can be extremely difficult to spot and further stresses the importance of driving in the intertidal zone only.



Oystercatcher eggs



Least Tern eggs



Black Skimmer eggs



Royal Tern eggs

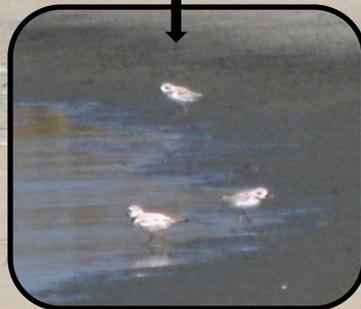


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Monitoring and Management

Environmental Office responsibilities:

- locate piping plover pairs,
- find nests,
- exclose nests,
- monitor nests until hatching,
- monitor chicks until fledged, &
- manage the plover breeding habitat for minimal human and predator disturbance.





Marine Turtles

The following slides will explain how to identify a sea turtle's nest via its crawl tracks.



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Sea Turtles near Wallops Island:



Loggerhead



Leatherback



Atlantic Green



Kemp's Ridley

Although there is a potential for these turtles to be near Wallops Island, the loggerhead sea turtle would be the most likely sea turtle in the area.



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Sea Turtle Crawls

Since most turtles, with the exception of Kemp's Ridley, nest very late at night or early in the morning hours you will most likely NOT see an actual turtle, just the evidence that they have been there...sea turtle crawl tracks!



Sea turtle crawl tracks have been likened to an ORV coming up out of the ocean, doing a donut and then going back in!



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Identifying a Sea Turtle Crawl

What to look for:



- entrance tracks,
- exit tracks, &
- nest mound.

If you see signs of a sea turtle crawl notify the Environmental Office IMMEDIATELY...

- The wind can erase crawl tracks in a matter of a few hours or less.

Do NOT walk on or over nest mound.

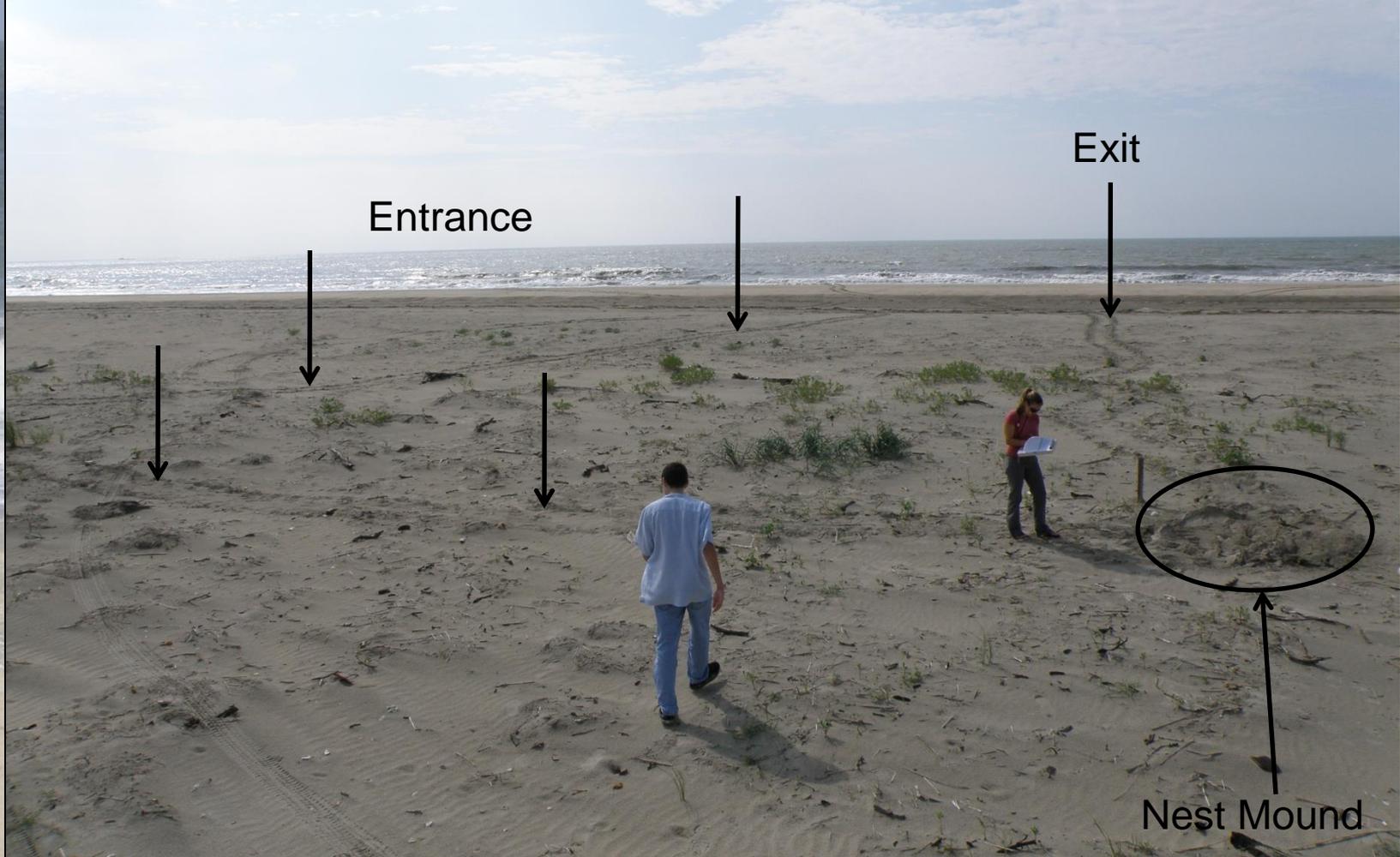
Note general location of nest and mark near (NOT on) nest mound with a large shell or log, etc...



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Identifying a Sea Turtle Crawl

The majority of crawls will follow this same path entrance, exit and a nest mound; however the point of entrance and exit can be farther apart.





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Monitoring and Management

Environmental Office responsibilities:

- verify a sea turtle crawl,
- check for eggs in nest mounds/verify nest,
- exclose nests,
- monitor exclosed nests weekly,
- wait for baby sea turtles to arrive &
- excavate hatched nests.





Stranded Marine Life

The Environmental Office assists the Virginia Aquarium Stranding Response Team in their recovery efforts with stranded marine mammals and sea turtles.



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Stranded Marine Mammals

If you see a stranded marine mammal (dolphin, seal, whale) or sea turtle please contact the Environmental Office IMMEDIATELY!

Quick notification is important for survival or for educational necropsy.





Environmental Contacts:

Immediately notify the Security Supervisor on duty who will then contact the Environmental Office, regardless of time day/night.

- Joel Mitchell (757) 824-1127
- Shane Whealton (757) 824-1090
- Lauren Chance (757) 824-1179

Recreational Beach users are encouraged to call Security at the Wallops Island Gate [\(757\) 824-2780](tel:7578242780) if they spot any protected species.





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**Thank you for
your help!
Security often
helps us find
our friends of
the beach!**

