

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

PIPING PLOVERS NEST SUCCESSFULLY ON THE EASTERN SHORES OF LAKE ONTARIO

A pair of Piping Plovers (*Charadrius melodus*) successfully nested on the eastern edge of Lake Ontario in 2015. This represents the first nesting in New York State away from the immediate marine coastline in 30 years. In total, five Piping Plovers were observed on these shores during summer 2015. Piping Plovers, which are listed as state and federally endangered, breed farther west on the Great Lakes (www.fws.gov/midwest/Endangered/pipingplover/index.html), so the nesting we report represents a substantial eastward extension of their current range. The number of nesting plovers on the Great Lakes has risen from 12 pairs in 1990 to 75 pairs in 2015, but all of these were located west of Wasaga Beach, Ontario (Francie Cuthbert, personal communication).

In early June 2015, we received a report from local birder Bill Purcell that a single Piping Plover was spotted on the shoreline of Lake Ontario in Oswego County. United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) staff went to the site to confirm the sighting and search for a nest. After several days of searching, it was determined that this was a single bird with no nest. The color band combination and numbers on the USFWS band indicated that this bird hatched in 2014 from a nest on North Manitou Island, part of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Michigan, approximately 490 miles (790 km) to the west. On 1 July, a pair of Piping Plovers joined the single bird. These birds were confirmed to be the pair that lost their nest due to inclement weather just days earlier in Toronto, Canada; one of these birds, the male, was banded (on North Manitou Island in 2014, Alice Van Zoeren, personal communication) and this band had been observed at the Toronto location. There was no indication this pair attempted to nest in New York State.

In addition to the Oswego County birds described above, a pair of Piping Plovers was discovered by local photographers Diana Whiting and Sue Phillips on 27 June in Jefferson County, on a stretch of beach approximately a mile long and secluded by water, just four miles north of the Oswego County site. After an intensive search of this stretch of beach, two NYSDEC staff and a volunteer found the pair with a nest containing two eggs. Both adult birds were banded and from the banding combination we determined that they were siblings that hatched from a nest in Wasaga Beach, Ontario, Lake Huron 300 miles (480 km) away, in 2013.

Two days later, in an effort to protect the birds, NYSDEC staff and a volunteer ventured out to the nest site with snow fence, posts and signs. Unfortunately, a heavy rain storm had occurred the day before and we discovered the nest had failed, with only a few pieces of eggshell remaining.

Disappointed, we decided to walk the beach to see if there was any sign of the pair. To our pleasant surprise, about a mile from the original nest which had failed, a new nest was discovered with the pair currently incubating one egg! Two days later this nest had two eggs. Fencing and signs were quickly erected in an attempt to protect the nest from human and dog disturbances. NYSDEC staff, Student Conservation Association (SCA) dune stewards and several volunteers monitored the site over the next several weeks and tried to increase public awareness as to how special this nesting pair was. After much hard work and dedication, we were excited to learn on 25 July that two chicks had hatched from the nest.

This success story was almost lost as a storm had brewed on Lake Ontario just two days prior to the eggs hatching, with waves actually crashing over the nest while the incubating bird sat tight. Staff placed sandbags and large pieces of driftwood around the nest, preventing the water from washing it away. Both chicks were banded on 30 July with USFWS and color bands. The next few days and weeks were trying, as the chicks began to run up and down the beach within harm's way of several predators, including unleashed dogs. On 7 August it was determined that one of the chicks was missing. Finally, on 18 August one of the volunteers spotted the surviving chick and an adult flying over the shoreline waters of Lake Ontario. The chick had successfully fledged.

Acknowledgments—The success of this nest would not have been possible without the help of NYSDEC staff, SCA interns, USFWS staff, Audubon New York staff and several dedicated volunteers.

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Piping Plovers nested along the Lake Ontario shore of New York State for the first time in 30 years. See Article, pp. 285-286.

Figure 1 (top): Adult Piping Plover on nest, with one hatched chick, Lakeview WMA, *Jefferson*, 25 Jul 2015, © Elizabeth Truskowski, DEC.

Figure 2 (bottom): Two Piping Plover chicks, Lakeview WMA, *Jefferson*, 30 Jul 2015, © Adam J. Bleau.