

Endangered Piping Plovers Find Help From Beach Patrol Program at Sand Dunes

By Paul Gingras

Close monitoring and assistance to the rare piping plover this year near the Brevort sand dunes is credited with a high survival rate of chicks. Eight nests, with two adults each, successfully produced 14 chicks, and they all left earlier this month for the Gulf of Mexico, where they will spend the winter.

The program to protect the endangered bird, administered nationally by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and locally by the Hiawatha National Forest, stakes out nests, protects them from predators, and, in some cases, rescues abandoned eggs for incubation and release back to the wild.

Piping plovers are extremely rare and endangered. In 1986, there were only 17 known pairs, but this year, biologists have identified 65 pairs, including those counted in the St. Ignace area.

Almost all piping plovers are found in Michigan.

Once absent from this area, piping plovers were discovered near St. Ignace in the late 1980s, but in 1989, there were only two nesting pairs, which raised only two young birds.

Part of the problem with their comeback has been that the birds nest near popular dune sites along US-2, which decreases their chance of survival. Fortunately, they stay clear of the beach area, preferring nearby areas that provide more forage and cover, said Steve Sjogren, a biologist with the Hiawatha and coordinator of the piping plover program in this area.

Cool weather that reduced the number of swimmers at the dunes this year also contributed to the survival of this year's chicks. But the real credit, he said, goes to the volunteers and the network of supporting agencies that dedicate themselves to protecting the nests.

"The volunteers were very, very helpful," he said, "and there are opportunities for more volunteers next season."

The local project, and similar efforts throughout Michigan, he said, seem to be working.

Six of the eight nests here survived and produced young, one was abandoned, and one was destroyed by a predator.

In the case of the abandoned nest, near the Brevort River, one of the adults disappeared June 11, probably killed by a predator, Mr. Sjogren said, and the mate abandoned the nest the next day. The group was able to move in and save the four eggs, and sent them to the University of Michigan Biology Station at Pellston, where they were incubated and hatched. Three of the embryos survived.

Plover nesting requires two adults, which take turns incubating the eggs, so when one adult is killed, Mr. Sjogren said, the mate will abandon the nest.

A second nest in the St. Ignace area was destroyed by a predator before the eggs were at a stage where they could be saved, Mr. Sjogren said.

Through the plover program network, the young birds rescued from the abandoned nest at Brevort River were given a new home. They were taken to Platte Point Beach in the Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore, where they were released among a group of chicks of approximately the same age, increasing their chance for survival.

Using the same network, a group of five chicks that had been raised from eggs recovered at North Manitou Island were brought to the St. Ignace nesting area and released among wild chicks here.

Volunteers with the program



An endangered species, piping plovers like this one, photographed near the sand dunes, were aided by a monitoring and protection program near the sand dunes on US-2 this summer. The program helped several nesting pairs raise young, most of which survived and migrated to the Gulf of Mexico early this month. (Photograph courtesy of the Forest Service)

seek to protect the birds from predators and human activity, notably unleashed domestic dogs. They help with fencing, signs, surveillance, and educating the public that frequent the nesting area.

"The goal is recovery [of the Piping Plover], and monitoring is a big part of that," Mr. Sjogren explained. "Once people know about the program, they are very accepting."

Helping the public accept the effort, the Hiawatha National Forest was able to leave a strip of beach open between nesting areas close to the mouth of Brevort River, he said. Had the plovers nested closer to the lake, however, that area of the beach would have been closed, too.

All areas where plovers were monitored are west of St. Ignace. While the Hiawatha keeps watch on suitable habitat sites at Round Island and along Lake Superior, no birds have been found at those locations.

The Forest Service began counting and monitoring the plovers in early May, when they migrated to the shoreline. The volunteers helped in June and July, logging in a total of 58 hours.

Piping plovers are an endan-

gered species, so the birds were kept under extremely tight scrutiny. Once they built nests, all were trapped and banded, helping the group track their movements. This is no easy task, Mr. Sjogren explained. For example, once a nesting adult is taken by predator, its nest is no longer viable, so its mate moves elsewhere in the area, and the group has to track where it goes.

Once the chicks hatched, they, too, were banded. The volunteers were like ambassadors, Mr. Sjogren said. They took time at the beach to talk to people about the project, distribute informational pamphlets, and discuss dangers to plovers, especially dogs, which are a real problem, since plovers nest on the ground.

To prevent damage from dogs and other mammals, the group placed meshing (accessible by plovers) around the nests as soon as they were built.

Areas around the nests were sectioned off with twine perimeters, and volunteers put up warning signs. Anyone entering the enclosures could have been ticketed, Mr. Sjogren said, but the Forest Service has never had to write a ticket.

Once eggs were laid, larger

Cool weather that reduced the number of swimmers at the dunes this year also contributed to the survival of this year's chicks.



Here at the mouth of the Brevort River on US-2 in Mackinac County, two piping plover nests were protected by the local Forest Service staff and volunteers this summer. The effort helped increase the imperiled species' population. Piping plovers, a shorebird near extinction, have been nesting near popular area beaches. The local program, run by the Forest Service, included volunteers for the first time this year. Volunteer efforts to educate the public about the fragile nesting grounds were a great help, said wildlife biologist Steve Sjogren of the Hiawatha National Forest, who coordinates the program. The plovers have increased from 17 known breeding pairs in 1986 to 65 in 2008. (Photograph courtesy of the Forest Service)

enclosures around the nests were built. Owing to the sensitivity of the birds, the enclosures had to be built within 15 minutes. The Forest Service had to walk a fine line between protecting the eggs and scaring the adults. Overly frightened birds will abandon the nests, he said.

Nests near Brevort River were well known and protected, so the Forest Service set up spotting scopes for the public to get a look at the rare species.

Next year, the forest service will consider limited predator control, which could reduce or eliminate specific predators seen preying on plovers, like coyote, skunk, fox, Merlin (pigeon hawk), or crow.

Predator control is tricky, however, he said, because predators are also part of the ecosystem.

This year was the first time the Eastern Unit of the Hiawatha National Forest recruited volunteers in its efforts to save the species, and the project paid off, Mr. Sjogren said.

The group that monitored and protected the plovers included members of the Straits Area Watershed Council, seasonal em-

ployee and wildlife technician Lisa Sommers, who was paid by The Nature Conservancy, and volunteer coordinator Amber Meyers. Volunteers included Kim and Vince Hagen, Ray Baron, Jeff Lange, Jennifer Powell, and Evelyn Mehan.

Ms. Mehan lives near the nesting area, worked on several aspects of the project, and contributed the most volunteer hours, Mr. Sjogren

noted. The program will start up again next spring, and the Forest Service will seek more volunteers, both for plover protection and the removal of invasive plant species in the area that alter the habitat and reduce the piping plover's chances for local survival.

To get involved, contact Steve Sjogren at 643-7900, extension 134, or ssjogren@fs.fed.us.

More Than 700 Old Tractors, Big Rigs Heading to St. Ignace

By Karen Gould

More than 700 antique tractors, nearly 100 customized semis and panel trucks, and restored kids pedal cars will be center stage the weekend of September 12 to September 14 during the fall truck show in St. Ignace. Activities include two parades across the Mackinac Bridge and through Mackinaw City and St. Ignace, truck, tractor, and car displays, and a static light show. All events are free to the public.

"This is probably the only show on earth where you can find toys, pedal cars, regular collector vehicles, custom trucks, antique tractors, and 18-wheelers," said Ed Reavie of St. Ignace, the founder of the Richard Crane Memorial Truck Show, around which this year's events are held.

The Owosso Tractor Parts Mackinac Bridge Antique Crossing begins Friday at noon with a 20-mile long parade of more than 700 antique tractors. They will be staged in Mackinaw City, proceed through town and across the Mackinac Bridge, through downtown St. Ignace, and finish at Kewadin Shores Casino on Mackinac Trail. Tractor owners, who are coming from 28 clubs and several states, will display their machines at the casino through the weekend.

"Bob Baumgras of Owosso Tractor Parts has done a fantastic job of promoting and organizing the area's first antique tractor show," said Mr. Reavie.

Guest of honor for the tractor event is agricultural television journalist Max Armstrong.

About 100 big rigs will arrive in town at 6 p.m. Friday as the 13th annual Richard Crane Memorial Truck Show gets underway.

Trucks will be on display at Little Bear East Arena and along State Street. Watching drivers back the 80-foot long rigs into the tight downtown spots, said Mr. Reavie, has become an event drawing many who appreciate the skill.

The Parade of Lights will begin around 8 p.m. Saturday as the show trucks travel across the Mackinac Bridge to Mackinaw City and back to St. Ignace, where they will take over State Street, parking two to three abreast, for a nighttime display of their custom show and running lights. The city will turn off the street lights for the showing, and spectators get an up-close look at the chrome and air-brushed rigs.

Mackinac Ford Sales of St. Ignace will sponsor a car show that includes hot rods, custom cars, and new vehicles at Little Bear East. Also at Little Bear will be a swap meet and display of popular pedal cars.

Kewadin Shores Casino will hold a customer appreciation day Saturday from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. with a free outdoor barbecue and cash drawings.

Mr. Reavie credits the Mackinac Bridge and local scenery for the popularity of the weekend events.

Crossing the bridge at dusk and parking in town near Lake Huron, said Mr. Reavie, has always been popular with the truck owners, and a rare opportunity for antique tractor owners to cross the Mackinac Bridge was a big draw for the first annual tractor show.

A free shuttle bus provided by Kewadin Shores Casino will be available on an on-call basis Saturday between Little Bear East Arena and the casino.

Island Biking Trip Raises Funds for Special Olympics



More than \$4,000 was raised for local Special Olympics programs Tuesday, August 19, during the annual Bike Around Mackinac Island fundraiser. About 45 athletes and volunteers traveled to the Island from St. Ignace, courtesy of Arnold Transit Company. On the Island, Mackinac Island Carriage Tours treated the group to a carriage ride. Organizers Vi Paquin of St. Ignace and Laura Aikens of Sault Ste. Marie said the funds benefit Eastern Upper Peninsula Special Olympics. Those participating in the Island trip, pictured here, represent people from both Mackinac and Chippewa counties.

Mackinaw City Will Help Build Pavilion at Historic Village

By Paul Gingras

Construction of a pavilion at Mackinaw Historic Village will help draw visitors, especially school groups, to the park, and will be a joint project of the Mackinaw Area Historical Society and the Village of Mackinaw City.

The 24-foot by 40-foot open-air facility will accommodate about 100 children and will be started this fall, reported Ray Roth, president of the historical society, at the Thursday, August 21, meeting of the village council. Existing buildings at the park are too small to hold large groups.

The pavilion will cost about

\$30,000. The bulk of the cost for materials, about \$28,000, will be paid by the historical society. Dave McFarland of the Architect Forum will design the pavilion for \$2,200. To prepare the site for concrete, the village crew will provide about \$5,000 in labor, said Village Manager Jeff Lawson.

The building will be designed to look like a pavilion from the late 1800s or early 1900s, which is consistent with the time period the Historic Village represents.

Most of the construction work will be done by volunteers, and the structure should be completed by May 1, 2009.

"We've already had three

schools visit at the village," said Mr. Roth. "We have a program in the Pest House, in the Freedom School, and also for the nature walk."

The historical society will create additional programs for school children for next spring.

A realistic goal is for about 20 schools, with an average of 50 students each, to visit the park next year, Mr. Roth said. That would generate about \$5,000 in admissions.

To further augment the site with new trees, the village council approved a request by Mr. Lawson to apply for a community forest grant through the Department of Natural Resources.

Partnering with the Historical Society, Mackinaw City will seek \$2,000 from the state, \$1,000 from the Historical Society, and will pay \$1,000 in labor to obtain and plant 30 trees there.

Mr. Roth noted that this will add to recent aesthetic improvements at the Historic Village, which have dramatically improved the site.

At the entrance "you will see flowers, trees, and bushes, which our grounds chairman Sandy Planisek and her crew have added to the general ambiance," he said.

Mr. Lawson added the village continues to pursue a marked trail system leading from Mackinaw City to the village site.

New Members Joins Les Cheneaux Historical Association Board

Four new members have taken their seats on the Les Cheneaux Historical Association board, following Monday, August 11, appointments. The new members are Roxanne Nordquist Large, Curtis "C.C." Vaught, Linda Sudol, and Brad Smith. The new members replace those whose term limits were reached, including Mike Miller, Kerrie Smith, Chris Zane, and Wendy Lopes.

Assignments on the 11-member board were also made, and include President Gretchen Storey, Vice President Richard B. Smith,

Treasurer Barbara Smith, and Secretary Linda Sudol. Grounds managers are Brad Smith and Steve Autore. Membership chair is Roxanne Large. Returning trustees are Stacy Sandler, Jim Merbaugh, and Paul Smith.

Terms are three years, and a board member can serve a maximum of two consecutive terms, or six years.

Unless otherwise scheduled, the board meets the fourth Monday of each month at 7 p.m. at the Les Cheneaux Maritime Museum in Cedarville.