

Coastal Birds in Massachusetts: Trends, Challenges, and the Future



Piping Plover J van de Graaff

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Presentation today

Snapshots of:

- Key protected coastal species in MA, including status and ecology
- Primary threats and the CWP approach
- Facing climate change and planning for the future



Coastal Waterbird Program Objectives

- Protect rare coastal birds and their habitats
- Conserve Massachusetts' coastal ecosystems through science-based management
- CWP monitors 30% of Piping Plover, 40-60% of Least Tern and 30% of American Oystercatchers breeding in the state



Birds of our Coast



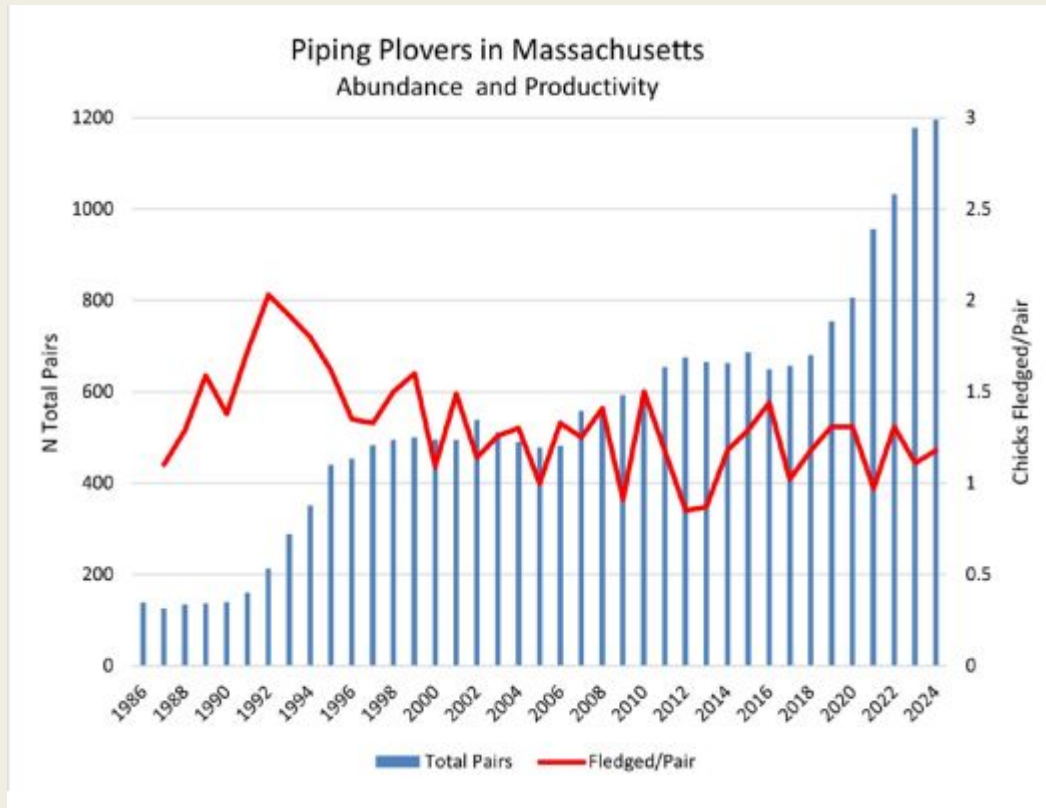
Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*)



- Small, sand colored shorebird that nests on open beach
- Listed as Threatened under the US and MA Endangered Species Acts
- World population: 7,000 birds
- 4,000 breeding birds on the Atlantic Coast, Newfoundland to North Carolina.
- MA supports over half of entire AC breeding population



Piping Plover Abundance 1986-2024



Key metric: productivity at 1.24 or above

Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*)



- Small seabird species with a black loral stripe that nests on open beach
- Species of Special Concern in MA; state listed throughout most of its range on the Atlantic Coast



Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*)

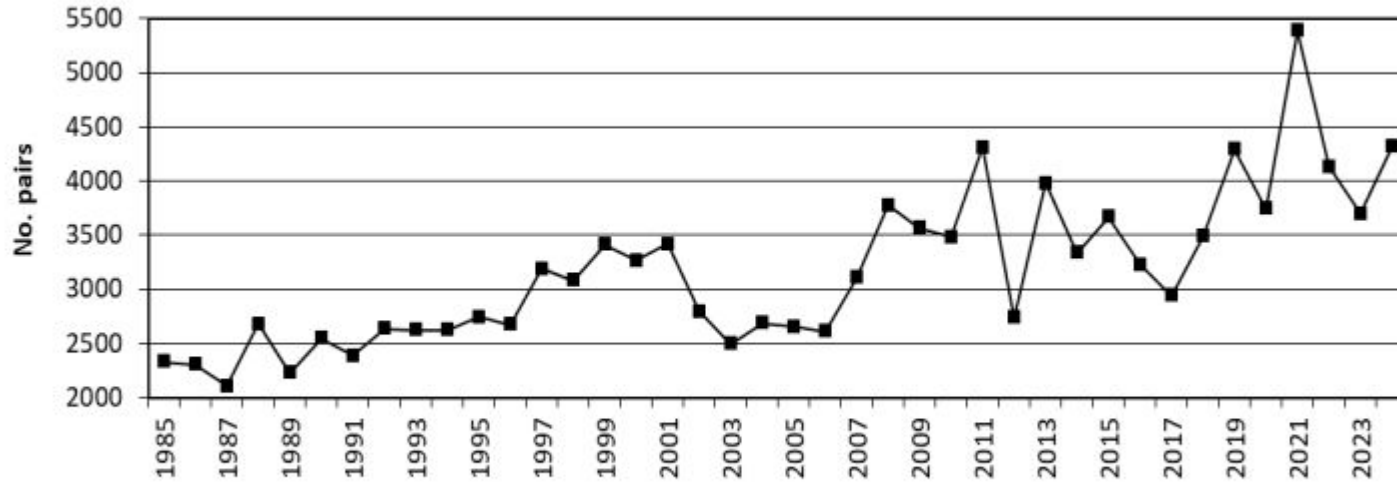


Figure 5. Number of nesting Least Tern pairs in Massachusetts, 1985 – 2024.



[NHESP 2024; INVENTORY OF TERNS, LAUGHING GULLS, AND BLACK SKIMMERS NESTING IN MASSACHUSETTS IN 2024

- Least Terns have increased over 3-fold to ~5,000 pairs
- Overall trends are positive (NHESP)

American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*)

- Large, striking shorebird with a bright red bill
- State Wildlife Action Plan, State of the Bird Watch List; a species of conservation concern in Massachusetts
- American Oystercatchers increased from a few pairs prior to 1980 to well over 200 pairs; 45% growth over the last 15 years nationally



Coastal bird challenges



Needs of beach-nesting birds

Needs:

- Safe, undisturbed place to nest directly on the sand
- Ability to forage as uninterrupted as possible
- Refuge for chicks

Threats:

- Storms; overwash, erosion
- Predators
- Human disturbance
- Dogs
- Vehicles
- Lack of forage access; habitat degradation



Coastal Waterbird Program Toolkit

- On-the-ground monitoring, management and protection
- Training and outreach (staff and communities)
- Public Policy and advocacy
- Conservation science and research



Building Resiliency: Climate Change



- CWP Research: beach profiles, vegetation density, overwash, invertebrate/prey research, brood range mapping
- Protecting available habitat
- Renourishment Projects



Questions?



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