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MEMO TO: Cooperators, Massachusetts Breeding Shorebird Inventory
FROM: Scott Melvin, Zoologist, Mass. Natural Heritage Program
RE: 1984 Summary Report - Massachusetts Inventory of Breeding
Piping Plovers, American Oystercatchers, and Willets
DATE: 28 September 1984

Piping Plovers (Charadrius melodus), American Oystercatchers (Haematopus palliatus), and Willets (Catoptrophorus semipalmatus) were systematically inventoried in Massachusetts for the first time in 1984; results are reported herein. Inventory work was conducted by over 30 individuals, many of whom are also involved in annual tern censuses, and was coordinated through the Nongame and Endangered Species Program of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Data for Piping Plovers were reported as estimates of breeding pairs; data for American Oystercatchers and Willets were reported as both pairs and estimated numbers of individuals.

An estimated 112 pairs of Piping Plovers were censused in Massachusetts during the period 18 May - 1 July 1984 (Table 1). This represents the largest breeding population of Piping Plovers in eastern North America. As expected, this 1984 total exceeds the 70-plus pairs that were reported incidental to tern censuses in 1983; Piping Plovers not associated with tern colonies were not reported in 1983. Thus, we believe that the difference between the 1983 and 1984 totals represents a sampling bias rather than a real increase, and that the Piping Plover population in Massachusetts is actually stable or declining.

Piping Plovers were reported from over 40 coastal sites (Table 1) from Salisbury and Plum Island south to Westport and Dartmouth, and east to Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket. Most sites reported only 1 to 4 pairs; the exception was an estimated 14 pairs at Sandy Neck in Barnstable.

The majority of Piping Plover reports were for the period 18 May - 12 June; in fact, more observations were reported from the first 2 weeks in June than for the designated 18-24 May census period. This suggests that future Piping Plover censuses can be timed to overlap censuses of colonial waterbirds, particularly terns, as long as complete coverage of potential Piping Plover habitat is achieved and inventory efforts go beyond traditional colonial waterbird nesting sites to check other areas of beaches and dunes where Piping Plovers may occur.

A total of 90-95 American Oystercatchers, including an estimated 42 pairs, was reported from Massachusetts during May and June 1984 (Table 2). All breeding locations were in southeastern coastal areas. Thirty-two of 42 pairs (76%) were reported from 3 locations: Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, and Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge (NWR).

An estimated 85-94 Willets, including 37-39 pairs, were reported in 1984 (Table 3). Breeding Willets currently have a more widespread distribution in Massachusetts than do American Oystercatchers, occurring from Plum Island south to Dartmouth, and east to several locations on Cape Cod. Two locations, Monomoy NWR in Chatham and the general vicinity of Plum Island and the Parker River NWR, accounted for over 55% of the pairs reported.

Brad Blodget and I extend our thanks to all who contributed population data on breeding shorebirds this year. The total observer effort and resulting statewide coverage were outstanding, and we appreciate your individual efforts.

Table 1. Results of Massachusetts inventory of breeding Piping Plovers,
18 May - 1 July 1984.

Location	Estimated Pairs
Salisbury Beach, Salisbury	1
Parker River NWR	3
Plum Island State Park, Ipswich	2
Crane's Beach, Ipswich	3
Snake Island, Winthrop	0
Boston Harbor Islands	0
Third Cliff, Scituate	2
Fourth Cliff, Scituate	1
Duxbury Beach, Duxbury	1
Plymouth Beach, Plymouth	3
Stoney Point Dike, Wareham	2
Long Beach Point, Wareham	1
West Island Beach, Fairhaven	2
Barney's Joy, Dartmouth	2
Little Beach, Dartmouth	1
Horseneck Beach (state and town), Westport	4
Richmond Pond, Westport	2
Black Beach, Falmouth	1
Washburn Island, Falmouth	1
South Cape Beach, Mashpee	1
Town Beach, Sandwich	3
Springhill Beach, Sandwich	1
Scorton Creek, Sandwich	3
Sandy Neck, Barnstable	14
Dead Neck - Sampson's Island, Barnstable	3
Long Beach, Barnstable	2
Gray's Beach, W. Yarmouth	0
West Dennis Beach, Dennis	0
Forest Beach, Chatham	0

Table 1. Continued.

Location	Estimated Pairs
Cockle Cove, Chatham	0
Harding's Beach, Chatham	2
Morris Island Dike, Chatham	1
Monomoy NWR, Chatham	3
North Beach, Chatham and Orleans	4
Nauset Heights, Orleans	2
New Island, Orleans and Eastham	1
First Encounter Beach to Nantasket Creek, Orleans and Eastham	0
Coast Guard Beach, Eastham	5
Marconi Beach, Eastham	1
Indian Neck, Wellfleet	0
Pamet, Truro	2
Pilgrim Beach, Truro	1
Beach Point, Truro	2
French's (Exit 9), Provincetown	1
Race Point, Provincetown	1
Wood End Light, Provincetown	0
Naushon Island, Gosnold	0
Weepecket Islands, Gosnold	0
Pasque Island, Gosnold	3
Nashawena Island, Gosnold	1
Cuttyhunk Island, Gosnold	3
Penikese Island, Gosnold	0
Martha's Vineyard	10
Noman's Land	0
Nantucket	10
Total	112

Table 2. Results of Massachusetts inventory of breeding American Oystercatchers, May - June 1984.

Location	Estimated Pairs	Individuals
Little Beach, Dartmouth	1	2
Monomoy NWR, Chatham	12	25-30
North Beach, Chatham	1	2
Naushon Island, Gosnold	1	2
Weepecket Islands, Gosnold	1 ^a	2
Penikese Island, Gosnold	1 ^a	2
Cuttyhunk Island, Gosnold	2	4
Martha's Vineyard	14	28
Muskeget Island	1+	7
Whale Island	2	4
Nantucket	6	12
	42	90-95
Totals		

^a Resident but apparently not nesting.

Table 3. Results of Massachusetts inventory of breeding Willets,
21 May - 5 August 1984

Location	Estimated	
	Pairs	Individuals
Woodbridge Island, Newburyport	1	2
Plum Island/Parker River NWR	7-9	14-18
Calf Island, Boston Harbor	0	1
West Island, Fairhaven	2	4
Barney's Joy, Dartmouth	2	4
E. Sandwich Beach, Sandwich	1	2
Sandy Neck, Barnstable	1	2
Gray's Beach, W. Yarmouth	1	2
West Dennis Beach, Dennis	1	2
Forest Beach, Chatham	2	4+
Harding's Beach, Chatham	2	4
Morris Island Causeway, Chatham	1	2
Monomoy NWR, Chatham	13	35-40
North Beach, Chatham	2	4
New Island, Orleans and Eastham	1	2
Cuttyhunk Island, Gosnold	0	1
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Totals	37-39	85-94