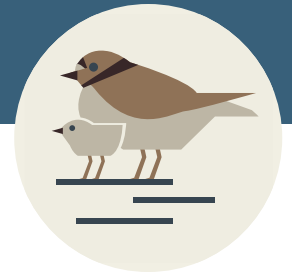


# Coastal Waterbird Program 2024 Field Highlights



## A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Mass Audubon's Coastal Waterbird Program protected threatened coastal birds through management and education at 203 sites along 141 miles of the Massachusetts coastline. Fifty-four staff members contributed to these efforts including four full-time staff, ten regional staff, and 40 seasonal staff. In addition, three AmeriCorps teams and more than 50 volunteers provided essential support to the program. The Coastal Waterbird Program installed protective fencing and signage, monitored nesting activity, provided educational opportunities for beachgoers, and supported landowners and local communities in coastal habitat protection. Our vital partnerships with over forty-three municipalities, state and federal agencies, and hundreds of landowners helped support thriving coastal wildlife in Massachusetts.

**Lyra Brennan**

## Coastal Waterbird Program

The program is active in 43 municipalities in Massachusetts, with offices located in Mass Audubon regional hubs.

### State-wide Program

Lyra Brennan, *Director*

Jamie Infanti, *Program Manager*

Rose Caplan, *Field Coordinator*

Deb Davidson,  
*Administrative Assistant*

### Regional Offices

Amy Weidensaul  
*Senior Regional Director*

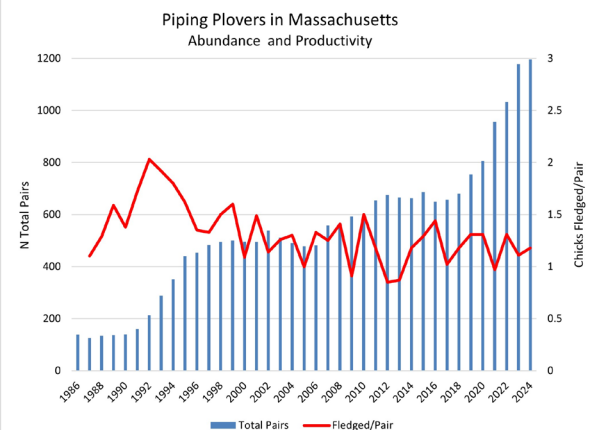
Erin Kelly, *Director (Boston)*

Melissa Lowe, *Director (Cape Cod)*

Suzan Bellincampi,  
*Director (Islands)*

## PIPING PLOVER

State abundance of Piping Plovers continued to increase in 2024 to an adjusted preliminary count of **1,196** pairs, compared to 1,178 pairs in 2023. Preliminary statewide estimates of reproductive success were on par with or slightly higher than in 2023, with a range of 1.04-1.32 chicks fledged/pair in 2024 compared to 1.11 fledged per pair in 2023.



Mass Audubon's Coastal Waterbird Program (CWP) protected **379 pairs of Piping Plovers**—32% of the state population and roughly 17% of the Atlantic Coast population estimated at over 2,200 pairs. Plovers at CWP-protected sites produced **1.24 fledglings per pair** in 2024 compared to 1.25 chicks fledged/pair in 2023, reaching what is considered a sustainable reproductive rate for the species for two years in a row.

Plover abundance and success on CWP-protected sites continues to increase, showing that intensive management yields powerful conservation results. In 2024, **62% of first Piping Plover nesting attempts hatched eggs**, an increase from 50% in 2023. The most significant proportion of egg loss was attributed to predation: 60% of failed eggs in 2024 were predated, compared to 48% in 2023. Overwash accounted for fewer failed eggs in 2024, with only 11% of eggs lost to overwash compared to 27% in 2023. Collectively, 9% of eggs were lost to nest abandonment or failure to hatch in 2024 compared to 8% in 2023.

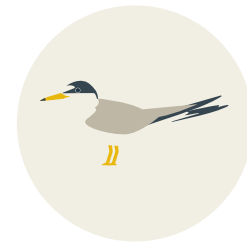




## TERNS

Mass Audubon surveyed a total of 140 sites statewide for tern species. We protected 2,390 pairs of Least Terns (**49% of the MA breeding population in 2024**), 480 pairs of Common Terns, and 26 pairs of Roseate Terns nesting at 49 colony-sites. Statewide abundance of Least Terns increased by about 37% to a 2024 preliminary statewide estimate of 4,901 pairs (compared to 3,565 pairs in 2023). Reproductive success of Least Terns nesting at 42 sites protected by Mass Audubon in 2024 ranged from no fledglings produced to 1.35 fledglings/pair. Terns at approximately **23% of nesting sites experienced fair to excellent fledging success**, similar to the 24% seen in 2023. 12% had poor success, and 65% of sites fledged no terns, similar to the 64% in 2023. As in 2023, predators were the most important factor determining tern nesting success in 2024. Significant overwash events also impacted several key sites including South Beach in Chatham, which produced no Least Tern fledges in 2024 despite a maximum colony size of 124 pairs.

State and Federally endangered Roseate Terns engaged in nesting activity on CWP-protected Norton Point in Edgartown, where 26 pairs were observed incubating nests on site. Norton Point also hosted **97% of the state's breeding Black Skimmers**, with 29 pairs nesting there in 2024.



## AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER

American Oystercatcher abundance in Massachusetts increased by 5% to approximately 250 nesting pairs in 2024 compared to 238 nesting pairs in 2023. A notable **87 pairs were detected on Mass Audubon-monitored sites** of which 74 breeding pairs were monitored for productivity by Mass Audubon, approximately 30% of the state population and an increase of 21% from 62 pairs in 2023. Oystercatchers were successful in hatching 42% of all eggs laid, a decrease from 71% of eggs in 2023. Known attributed factors of egg mortality (% of failed eggs) were as follows: 38% predation; 13% overwash; 3% failure to hatch; 2% abandonment. The fledging rate at Mass Audubon-managed sites was lower in 2024 than in 2023, with 0.99 chicks fledged/pair compared to 1.23 chicks fledged/pair, respectively. Statewide, average fledging ranged from 0.91-1.01 chicks fledged/pair. Estimated annual productivity to maintain a stable oystercatcher population is 0.35 fledged chicks/pair.

Notable nesting sites for American Oystercatcher included Norton Point in Edgartown, with 11 pairs fledging 14 chicks. Popponesset Spit in Mashpee had its **first nesting American Oystercatcher pair in over 10 years**, which successfully fledged 2 chicks. In Boston Harbor, we protected 19 pairs of American Oystercatcher in 2024.







## NOTABLE BEACHES

**Significant increases in abundance and productivity** occurred at several sites in 2024 including:

- **Long Beach** in Barnstable, which had a 56% increase in Piping Plover abundance to 14 pairs and a 71% increase in productivity to 1.14 chicks fledged/pair from 2023 to 2024;
- **Westport Town Beach**, where Piping Plover productivity more than doubled from 0.67 to 2.2 chicks fledged/pair from 2023 to 2024;
- **Forest Beach** in Chatham, where Piping Plover abundance doubled from 2 to 4 pairs and productivity nearly doubled from 1.5 to 2.75 chicks fledged/pair from 2023 to 2024;
- **Lobsterville Beach** in Aquinnah, where Piping Plover productivity increased by 83% from 1.2 to 2.2 chicks fledged/pair from 2023 to 2024;
- **Tern Island** in Chatham, where Piping Plover abundance more than doubled from 2 to 5 pairs from 2023 to 2024, and where Least Tern abundance increased by 39% to 220 pairs in 2024 and productivity increased by 63%;
- **Wychmere Beach Club** in Harwich, where Least Tern abundance increased by 46% from 72 to 105 pairs from 2023 to 2024 and productivity nearly tripled from 0.25 to 0.71 chicks fledged/pair;
- **Norton Point** in Edgartown, where Common Tern abundance more than tripled from 101 pairs

in 2023 to 366 pairs in 2024 and productivity skyrocketed from 0.50 to 1.90 chicks fledged/pair.

**New nesting activity and success** occurred at several sites, including:

- **Scusset Beach State Reservation**, where a Piping Plover pair successfully nested for the first time in over 10 years and fledged 2 chicks;
- **Dyer Prince Beach** in Eastham, where a Piping Plover pair successfully nested for the first known time and fledged all 4 chicks.

**Heavy predator pressure** resulted in lower productivity at some sites including:

- **Wychmere Beach Club** in Harwich, where Piping Plover adult predation and chick losses led to a reduction from 5 to 3.5 pairs and productivity decreased by 29% from 2.4 to 1.7 chicks fledged/pair from 2023 to 2024;
- **South Cape Beach** in Mashpee, where despite an increase from 5 to 7 Piping Plover pairs, productivity decreased by 72% from 2 to 0.57 chicks fledged/pair from 2023 to 2024;
- **Seagull Beach** in Yarmouth, where Least Tern abundance decreased by 85% from 91 pairs in 2023 to 14 pairs in 2024 and no fledglings were produced.



## By the Numbers

# Coastal Waterbird Program

## 2024

**Mass Audubon's Coastal Waterbird Program** has a thirty-five year legacy of protecting vulnerable beach-nesting birds and their habitats. Our primary objectives are to 1) directly protect and monitor coastal birds and habitats, 2) advocate for coastal ecosystem protection, 3) build conservation capacity in local communities through training and outreach, and 4) conduct management research and develop best practices for wildlife management. In partnering with agencies and local communities, the Coastal Waterbird Program has been instrumental in achieving an eight-fold increase in Piping Plovers, and significant increases in tern and oystercatcher populations in the state.

**Coastal Waterbird Program**  
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508-556-7801  
[massaudubon.org/cwp](https://massaudubon.org/cwp)



**379**

pairs of Piping Plovers were protected by the Coastal Waterbird Program (CWP) in 2024.

**97%**

of the state's breeding Black Skimmers nested on Norton Point in Edgartown.

**141**

miles were under the protection of the CWP in 2024.

**43**

municipalities partnered with CWP.

**203**

sites protected by CWP

**51**

Piping Plover chicks fledged from Dead Neck Sampson's Island, an all-time high since monitoring began at the site.

**21%**

increase in the number of American Oystercatchers protected by CWP.

