Winter is Gone, Spring has Sprung (or has it?)

Wow! What a winter! I’ve gotten very spoiled over the last few winters when temperatures in January sometimes were in the 70’s. Not so this year.

Piping Plovers are slowly moving north, and there have been a few spotted here and there. The Least Terns are smart - they’ll wait another month and maybe by then the temperatures will be a little warmer.

In this issue of As the Plover Terns, you’ll find that we’ve launched our long-awaited new website. Make sure you check it out!

We are SUPER excited that the Nebraska Environmental Trust has granted us funds for the next three years. The Partnership will also be receiving State Wildlife Grant funding, and Nebraska Partnership for All-Bird Conservation funding. These funds are essential for working toward our goal of protecting terns and plovers. Thanks!!

On pages 4-5, check out all the fun activities that we’ve been involved with. Don’t forget - we would be happy to give a presentation to any group. Just contact us - our contact information is on page 10.

We are continuing our promotion of Healthy Families Play Outside and the Lincoln Safari by re-running the information on pages 7 and 8. If your community doesn’t have a Safari, why not get one started? Kids and adults love it!

Have a great summer, and check our website often for updates.

Chris Thody, Editor

New and Familiar Faces for 2008

The Partnership would like to introduce our seasonal technician for the 2008 field season.

Jason Thiele will graduate in May with a degree in Fisheries and Wildlife from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He was president of the UNL Wildlife Club and, along with some other club members, helped us clear out our warehouse (See Fall 2007 As the Plover Terns). He also received the 2008 Brian Smith Memorial Outstanding Wildlife Club Student award. After his summer with the terns and plovers, he plans to pursue a degree in Conservation Biology.

Jason grew up on a farm near Clearwater, Nebraska, where he developed his interest and appreciation of nature.

Melissa VanderLinden is a Biologist I with the Nongame Bird Program at NE Game and Parks Commission, and she will be assisting us this summer. Some of you may recognize her, because she was a seasonal technician for the Partnership in 2005. After working with us in 2005, she spent two summers with terns and plovers working for the USGS in North Dakota on the Missouri River. In the winter of 2006, she worked in Arkansas mistnetting birds.

Her hometown is Green Bay, Wisconsin, and she graduated from University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.
**NET Grant Helps UNL Conservation Efforts For Least Terns and Piping Plovers**

LINCOLN, Neb. – A three-year grant totaling $270,000 from the Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) will help the University of Nebraska-Lincoln further its conservation efforts for federally endangered Interior Least Terns and threatened Piping Plovers.

NET announced earlier this month that UNL will preliminarily receive $130,000 for a project “Advancing Tern and Plover Common Sense Conservation into the Future.” This is the first year of three grants for the project, totaling $270,000.

The funding will go to the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership, which operates within UNL’s School of Natural Resources. The Partnership is recognized nationally and internationally as a model for proactively resolving threatened and endangered species controversies and conflicts. “The partnership has demonstrated that by working cooperatively with commercial interests, local communities and government agencies, effective conservation and management measures can be implemented,” Partnership program coordinator Mary Bomberger Brown said.

The three-year NET grant will help the partnership broaden and develop partner community efforts, expand education programming, expand community efforts, expand education programming, and retain high quality staff.

**Coordinator’s Corner**

I forgot how long winter in Nebraska can be. This one may have seemed especially long to me since I’m waiting for my first nesting season with our Least Terns and Piping Plovers. If they would hurry up and get back, we could get started and I could get to know them better. I need to be patient though, if they come back too soon, bad weather might catch them and that wouldn’t be good.

The Partnership made the most of the off-season this year. We were awarded 3 grants to support our efforts for the terns and plovers, one from the Nebraska Environmental Trust, one from the Nebraska State Wildlife Grants program, and one from the Nebraska Partnership for All-Bird Conservation. We are grateful to these agencies for their belief in and support of the Partnership.

We unveiled our newly re-designed web page <http://ternandplover.unl.edu> and email address ternsandplovers@unl.edu in January. It has photos, videos, and sound clips of the birds, as well as current information about the birds, the Endangered Species Law, and the Partnership. Why don’t you bookmark the web page and visit frequently so you can keep up-to-date with our activities?

In February, we hosted the second annual Nebraska Least Tern and Piping Plover meeting. Forty people from around the country (Nebraska, Idaho, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, and Virginia) representing a variety of state and federal agencies, conservation groups, private industry, and academic institutions attended. The common bond was a concern for Least Terns and Piping Plovers in Nebraska. Our birds are lucky in having such a capable group of people working on their behalf.

I want to remind you that Partnership merchandise is available for purchase through the University of Nebraska’s Maps and More Store <http://nebraskamaps.unl.edu>. The organic cotton t-shirts, handy sacks, and travel tumblers feature tern and plover illustrations by noted wildlife artist Julie Zickefoose. The hats carry our recently redesigned logo. I’d be remiss if I didn’t mention that your contributions to the Tern and Plover Excellence Fund through the University of Nebraska Foundation are most welcome. The terns and plovers would be grateful for your help.

The Partnership is excited to continue its work to protect and conserve the terns and plovers. We are grateful to our funding partners for their support and we look forward to continuing our success in the future.

We are interested in your observations of terns and plovers. If you see them anywhere in your travels, please let us know.

If only the weather would get nice and the birds would get back………..Mary
It’s that time of year again, and Spring is in the air. Come to think of it, Least Terns and Piping Plovers are also in the air, migrating from their wintering grounds back to Nebraska for the breeding season. The journey that these birds make each year, not just in the spring but also in the fall when they leave Nebraska and return to their wintering grounds, is quite remarkable. I first witnessed these two bird species in the summer of 2000 when I worked as a technician for the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership.

That summer was great for so many reasons. I had just received my B.S. degree in Natural Resource Sciences from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the winter of 1999, and this was my first wildlife research job. I was able to work outside every day, visiting sand pits and assisting with airboat surveys on the river, while monitoring Least Terns and Piping Plovers. I learned so much about terns and plovers by observing their daily activities that summer, from their courtship rituals to nesting behaviors to those cute little plover chicks running along the shoreline learning to forage soon after hatching and those cute little tern chicks depending on the adults to bring them food. And most of all, I will never forget all the wonderful people that I was fortunate enough to get to work with that summer.

Working as a technician on the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership left a lasting impression on me. The experience was highly valuable and it sparked an interest in birds that I will have forever.

After that summer was over, I was able to continue working at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission as a technician for the Nongame Bird Program. I assisted with survey and monitoring work on nongame bird species, including the endangered Whooping Crane and threatened Bald Eagle, as well as continued work on Least Terns and Piping Plovers. For the early Spring months, I also worked as a technician for a project that was studying Snow Geese in the Rainwater Basin in south-central Nebraska. We observed and counted Snow Geese, and other waterfowl, migrating through the Rainwater Basin during the spring.

In the fall of 2003, I was hired on full-time with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to fill the position of Environmental Analyst in the Realty and Environmental Services Division. Currently, my duties consist of reviewing many different types of state or federally funded, or permitted projects across the state. The reviews that I conduct involve identifying the potential adverse impacts of an action on fish and wildlife resources, and then making recommendations on ways to reduce or eliminate those adverse impacts on the resources of concern.

"Least Terns and Piping Plovers nesting along the Platte, Loup and Elkhorn Rivers are utilizing several of Nebraska’s unique biological landscapes, as identified by the Nebraska Legacy Project. By working in these areas, the Tern and Plover Partnership has additional opportunities to protect those habitats that multiple species depend on while protecting terns and plovers,” she said.

The UNL grant is one of 77 projects receiving a total of nearly $14.8 million in NET funding this year.

"Thanks, NET!"
We are excited about the new and different directions our education and outreach programs are taking.

New Webpage Design

The webpage is done!! We went live in January. We packed it full of information on Least Terns and Piping Plovers, and there’s lots of great pictures, video, and sound clips to try.

Check it out! http://ternandplover.unl.edu

Family Nature Nights

We have participated in three fun-filled evenings at Clinton Elementary, Randolph Elementary, and Hartley Elementary schools in Lincoln. These after-hours events introduce kids and their families to a variety of stations that have activities about natural resources. Of course, they think our booth is the best because we make the biggest mess! We play a games called “Fill the Bill” where kids pretend they’re either Least Terns, Piping Plovers, hummingbirds, or swallows.

Least Terns “dive” into a container of water filled with rubber fish. They “catch” fish using their beaks (long-nosed pliers).

Piping Plovers “pick” at rubber worms and insects with their beaks (short-nosed pliers) in a container full of gravel.

Hummingbirds drink nectar (suck koolaid up through a straw).

Swallows catch flying insects (popcorn) in their mouths (hands), and gobble them up.

earth wellness festival

Fifth graders from around Lancaster County participate in this yearly event, held at Southeast Community College in Lincoln. For our activity, students learned about Least Terns and Piping Plovers, then played a game called “Migration: It’s a Risky Journey”.

Stations were set up throughout the classroom, and students had to perform tasks at each station. They would also learn their fate—either they would survive migration or would perish along the way. They learned that it’s not a simple flight from point A to point B, there are a lot of hazards in between.

The Big Event

In 1982 Joe Nussbaum, then Vice President of the Student Government Association at Texas A&M University, began The BIG Event as a way for students to say “thank you” to the surrounding community. Nussbaum envisioned a one-day service project where residents of Bryan and College Station would be shown appreciation for their continued support of Texas A&M University students during their college careers.

Mr. Nussbaum viewed The BIG Event as a means for students to show their gratitude by completing various tasks at area residents’ homes. Joe believed that it was the least the students could do to give one big thanks to their community on one big day each year.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln started their own Big Event in April 2006. Since then, 3,400 volunteers have participated in this one
Outreach Activities, continued

day event. In 2008, 1,400 volunteers participated, helping 95 non-profits and neighborhood associations.

Each fall, Student Involvement’s Service-Learning area sends a letter and work order form to Lincoln non-profits and neighborhood associations. They encourage community members who work with those entities to become involved in the Big Event. UNL students, staff and faculty enjoy living in Lincoln and working along side their community family whether it be landscaping, painting, restoration or spring clean-up projects.

The Partnership has utilized this great source of volunteering for the past three years. Each year, volunteers have helped us make miles and miles of mylar flagging. There were 10 participants this year: Mary LaGrange, Ted LaGrange, Jennifer Hellwege, Tereza Rezk, Suzanna Rezk, Lynn Prusa, Beth Hartman, Ned Vlach, Beth Benson, and Peg Filliez. All these volunteers were either UNL staff members or a family member. Thanks, Big Event volunteers!!

Arlington School’s 5th and 6th Grades Campout at Gretna 4-H camp

Every year, the Arlington School’s 5th and 6th grade classes get a chance to experience the great outdoors with a day of fun events and an overnight campout at the Gretna 4-H camp.

The kids went to several different stations during the day, including: learning about Interior Least Terns and Piping Plovers, crafts, dissecting owl pellets, launching their hand-made rockets, archery, rifle, and a challenge course.

It wasn’t only the kids having fun either - it was the young at heart. Check out the pictures of Mary on the zip line on page 2.

Mylar Flagging at Valley

The cold, wind, and sleet couldn’t keep a hardy group of volunteers from helping us put up mylar flagging at a soon-to-be housing development near Valley. The Partnership uses mylar flagging as a deterrent to try to prevent Least Terns and Piping Plovers from nesting in areas where they may be in harm’s way, or possibly delay work that needs to be done.

The Partnership works together with developers, contractors, utility workers, and homeowners at new housing developments that were once sand and gravel mines. During the changeover process, we advise these people about the life history of the birds, the status of the birds, and work together to find the best management practices that both protect the birds and allow production, excavation, and building to continue. Proactive solutions rather than reactive solutions make for a winning outcome.

Here are the hardy helpers from the blustery April day. Two of our helpers came all the way from Kenya, Africa!

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As the Plover Terns

Preparing to play the Hidden Hazards game.

Chris telling a group of Arlington school children about terns and plovers.

Great fun was had by all at our “Hidden Hazards” obstacle course. The game was a way of teaching the children about the hazards migrating birds (in this case, Least Terns and Piping Plovers) face during their long migrations from their wintering grounds to their nesting grounds.

We would like to specially thank Mark Mancuso with Dial Land Development Corporation and Larry Hagewood with Design Engineering and Associates, Incorporated, for their commitment to assisting the Partnership with their conservation efforts for Least Terns and Piping Plovers. Working together is what it’s all about!
Terns and Plovers - post-Lewis and Clark

After the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1803–1805, naturalists traveling with expeditions crossing Nebraska noted the presence of Least Terns and Piping Plovers throughout the state. In 1820, members of the Major Stephen Long Expedition reported finding Least Terns nesting along the Missouri River in the Engineer Cantonment area, which was located near Lewis and Clark’s Council Bluff, in present day Washington County. Famed naturalist Thomas Say was a member of this expedition and these observations were most likely made by him. Another notable member of the expedition, artist Titian Ramsey Peale, painted a Least Tern that he observed on the trip.

In 1823, Paul Wilhelm, the Duke of Wurttemberg, a German naturalist traveling in Nebraska from July to September, reported finding Least Terns nesting near the mouth of the Platte River, in present day Cass County.

The famous artist John James Audubon traveled along the Missouri River and through Nebraska for about six months in 1843. He reported seeing terns and north-eastern Nebraska, near the confluence of the Vermillion River with the Missouri River, in what is now present day Dixon County.

The Gouverner Kemble Warren Expedition (1855–1857) was charged with reconnoitering a route from the Missouri River to the Black Hills. Members of the expedition reported finding Least Terns and Piping Plovers nesting together near the confluence of the Loup and Platte rivers, an area they called the Loup Fork, in present day Platte County. Ferdinand Hayden, a naturalist traveling with the Expedition, commented that Least Terns and Piping Plovers were very abundant and nested on sandbars in the Platte River.

Even as Nebraska became more settled, terns and plovers were frequently seen and reported nesting along rivers in the state. Least Terns were reported, in 1859, to be nesting along the North Platte River, east of Ash Hollow, in Keith County. Reports from the 1860s and 1870s tell us that Least Terns were nesting commonly in Cedar, Dixon, Lancaster, and Sarpy counties. Reports from mid-1860s tell us the Piping Plovers nested commonly in Dakota, Dixon, Sarpy, and Wayne counties.

2008 Current Calendar of Events (Subject to Change)

May
1 - Family Nature Nights, Hartley Elementary (Lincoln, NE) - 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
4 - Volunteer Partners Recognition Award Ceremony (Lincoln, NE)
13 - Nebraska Children’s Groundwater Festival (Grand Island, NE) 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
16 - Endangered Species Day

June
14 - Waterfest (Holmes Lake, Lincoln, NE) - 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
22 - Trail Trek (Lincoln, NE)

July
4 - Independence Day
21-23 - Nature Education Forum (Nebraska City, NE)

August

September
24-25 - Nebraska Association of Environment Educators (Ponca State Park, NE)
Volunteer Appreciation Picnic (watch our website)
Healthy Families Play Outside includes a year-long advertising campaign and nature safari supported by the Zoo and its partners, and a variety of individual activities, programs, and educational handouts created, sponsored and implemented by each of the partners for their corresponding networks.

The Healthy Families Play Outside project has five components:

1. A city-wide advertising campaign that promotes outside active play and healthy physical activities and habits
2. A year-long, city-wide safari that involves outdoor sites, events, and activities coordinated and implemented by the Zoo and supported by the partners
3. Several coordinated activities that are independently planned and promoted by the partners to support the advertising campaign and the safari sites
4. A website that will provide ideas and information about healthy outside play, information about the safari sites, and a calendar of events that support the project
5. Sales and coupons donated by local businesses that encourage outdoor activities.

The goals of the Healthy Families Play Outside project are:

- To educate families about the importance of outdoor physical exercise and the benefits inherent in this kind of activity
- To introduce Lincoln’s parks and outside spaces to low-income and immigrant families
- To provide an incentive for families to get outside and play in Lincoln’s parks and outside spaces
- To focus media attention on the need for active, physical, outdoor play and the resources available in Lincoln

Partners: Nebraska Game and Parks; Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department and Pioneer Park Nature Center; Lincoln City Libraries, Lower Platte Natural Resource District; University of Nebraska Extension; Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools; Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.

Partners will plan and implement individual activities, resources, and events that support the goals of the Healthy Families Play Outside project. Each partner will participate in project meetings, distribute information about project activities through its network, and maintain records of time and fiscal expenditures relating to the project so match can be met.

In addition to the partners, supporting entities and the services they provide include:

1) Dimensions Foundation and Groundwater Foundation - encourage network families to register to participate in the treasure hunt
2) UNL College of Education and Human Sciences – maintain the listserv that will provide consistent communication among all partners and supporting entities
3) Lincoln Public Schools – allow use of school property as potential treasure chest locations
4) Lincoln/Lancaster Health Department (Jane Linsenmeyer) – distribute information about and encourage families to Register to participate in the treasure hunt.

The Zoo’s Role: The Lincoln Children’s Zoo will: 1) provide staff to coordinate the project and implement the city-wide, year-long treasure hunt, and 2) act as the program’s fiscal agent.
**Health Families Play Outside, cont.**

**Evaluation:** Success will be measured by:

1) The number of families that register to participate in the treasure hunt
2) The number of businesses and organizations that become supporting entities as the project matures
3) Attendance at partner functions
4) Media enthusiasm for the project
5) Website hits
6) Survey responses of those who register and those who finish.

Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools will conduct the evaluation. Gwen Nugent will be the primary evaluator for this grant. Throughout the year, the treasure hunt coordinator will gather opinions from participants and partners and problems will be corrected as they occur.

The **Healthy Families Play Outside** safari will get families off the couch and take them to unstructured corners and hidden places within Lincoln thus encouraging a sense of exploration and discovery. It will provide opportunities throughout the year to experience the natural environments in the Lincoln community.

When a family registers to participate they will receive a safari duffle bag that contains: a map, a journal/site-clue book and a package of crayons. Registrations will be taken at all public libraries, a few schools, and at all partner facilities.

There are 35 spots in our safari, identified in the site-clue book by a name and address. Many are accessible by city bus – with a minimum of walking. Some are accessible from hiker biker trails, some are right on our city streets. Families are encouraged to walk, skip, bike, roller skate, and skateboard to these locations. All 35 sites will have a post, with an embossed symbol on it, placed somewhere on the site. These posts will be found using the clues in the safari journal. After the post is found, the participants will make a rubbing of the symbol in their journal. In 12/35 cases, completing this rubbing entitles the family to a souvenir – something provided by our sponsors that encourages healthy families to play outside or rewards their effort (a flashlight, a magnifying glass, a Frisbee, a bottle of bubbles...).

In addition to the health benefits, the **Healthy Families Play Outside** project introduces Lincoln residents to the facilities in the community that support and encourage outdoor activity and it provides incentive to participate for an entire year. It is only over time that habits are altered or created. We hope that if a family plays together outside for an entire year the activity may become a habit and continue even after the incentive of “winning” is gone.

The program is slated to start in January, 2008, but requests for registration materials will be taken at HFPO@lincolnzoo.org beginning immediately. When materials are available registration information will be sent.

A website will be created to support the safari at LincolnSafari.org. This website will contain a calendar of events for all the partners and will be linked to all the partner websites and other sites that encourage outside play. The website www.MyYard.org is an example of what information the LincolnSafari site will contain.
About the Partnership

The Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership (Partnership) studies and protects endangered Least Terns, threatened Piping Plovers and other birds within the Platte River system, Nebraska, in a manner that minimizes conflicts with private industry, and educates and involves local communities in this effort.

History: The Partnership was founded in 1999 to prevent and resolve conflicts between nesting birds and sand and gravel mining industry operations. Jeanine Lackey and Ron Johnson from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, and John Dinan of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission initiated the program. The approach of the Partnership is to work with all interested parties to find sensible, proactive solutions to protecting terns, plovers, and other components of the Platte River ecosystem, while ensuring that business, industry, and private interests are free to continue to operate with minimal interference.

Partnership Activities

- Protect colonies from predation and human disturbance using electric fences, enclosure cages, and signage.
- Create strong working relationships between sand and gravel mining companies, homeowner’s associations, local governments, conservation organizations, and the public.
- Prevent and mitigate conflicts between nesting birds and business’ interests.
- Increase awareness and appreciation of conservation issues by participating in events that educate the public, business, and government.
- Involve students through our “Job Shadowing” program.
- Monitor tern and plover colonies through our community based “Adopt-a-Colony” volunteer program.
- Produce publications such as the poster “A Tale of Two Birds” and companion educator’s packet/CD, as well as research publications, our biannual newsletter, brochures, fact sheets, and web page.

Partnership Impacts by the Numbers

43—Number of conflicts resolved since 1999.
60—Number of Volunteers per year.
130—The minimum number of additional piping plovers estimated to have been produced because of Partnership management techniques.
430—The minimum number of additional least terns estimated to have been produced because of Partnership management techniques.
ZERO—The number of prosecutions and fines participating industry partners received since 1999.

Partners

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Please consider a donation to the Tern and Plover Conservation Excellence Fund. Contact Ann Bruntz at 402-458-1176 for abruntz AT nufoundation.org for more information.
Consider Donating to the Tern and Plover Conservation Excellence Fund

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University of Nebraska Foundation
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For more information, call 402-458-1100 or 1-800-432-3216 or visit our website http://www.nufoundation.org

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MARYLAND: For the cost of postage and copies from the Maryland Secretary of State, State House, Annapolis, MD 21401, (410) 974-5334, 1-800-825-4510.
NEW JERSEY: Information filed with the Attorney General concerning this charitable solicitation and the percentage of contributions received by the charity during the last reporting period that were dedicated to this charitable purpose may be obtained from the attorney general of the state of New Jersey by calling (973) 504-6215 and is available on the internet at http://www.state.nj.us/lps/ca/ocpi/charities.htm.
NEW YORK: Office of the Attorney General, Department of Law, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.
WASHINGTON: Secretary of State at 1-800-332-GIVE.

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Thank you for your support!