



TERN AND PLOVER CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP NEWSLETTER

AS THE PLOVER TERNS

Volume 3, Issue 1
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A Newsletter for and by Volunteers and Partners

It's that time of year again, when the birds have flown south, and we find ourselves asking, "Where did the summer go?" Even with the southern migration of our beloved terns and plovers, the Partnership continues to keep busy.

One of the most important and exciting educational projects we have completed is the poster *A Tale of Two Birds*

with the accompanying Educators' packet and original song *Sing Along Sandy Shores* on CD. You will find more information about this on Page 4.

We also want to let you know about two great additions to our Partnership family. Diane Beachly of Hastings is our new regional coordinator. We are very happy to welcome her aboard. If any of you know of potential volunteers

in the Grand Island/Kearney area, please contact her. See the article on Page 2 for additional information.

Secondly, we have received a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Grants are essential to the continuation of our program. This particular grant partially funds my position. **Thanks to all!**

Chris

Features

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- New CD and poster

Partner Pitch

by Mark Dietz

Self-guided Trail at Camp Maha

The Girl Scouts-Great Plains Council is excited to expand their collaboration with the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership in developing a Self-guided Interpretive Trail at Camp Maha. This fall, the Girl Scouts-Great Plains Council submitted to Girl Scouts of the USA an application of the *Linking Girls To The Land* grant. Elliott Wildlife Values Project and the U.S. Forest Service provide funding for the grant. The grant program is designed to encourage young women to be involved in natural resources education.

Once funding is approved in December 2004, the staff of the Great Plains Council and Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership staff will design a 1½-mile self-guided trail with 30 interpretive sites. The trail will be designed to edu-

cate girls and their adult leaders about camp history, environmental issues, conservation, and why conservation of natural areas is important.

Along the trail there will be 30 interpretive sites that will point out areas of interest. While hiking along the trail, girls will learn about terns and plovers that nest on the sand bars of the Platte River, tree identification, prairie restoration, water and soil conservation, upland forest habitat, archeology, geological formations, and cultural history. Each interpretive site will have a 12"x18" sign; each sign will have interactive text and photographs or artwork interpreting the point of interest.

We believe our project will help educate girls about the importance of land stewardship. Girl Scouts today will be our land stewards of tomorrow.

The author, Mark Dietz, is the Facilities Manager, Girl Scouts- Great Plains Council.



Above: Girl Scouts at Camp Maha view the Platte River through spotting scopes aided by Sam Wilson, Conservation Technician, 2003.

Tech Talk

The moment I was hired as a tern and plover conservation technician I was anticipating the summer ahead of me. My first job as a wildlife biologist! I finally had the chance to do something important, something worthwhile...save endangered birds. I had read several newspaper and journal articles concerning Least Terns and Piping Plovers; I knew they were imperiled in Nebraska and throughout the United States. I could barely wait to begin working and to make a difference in the lives of these birds.

Ironically, the birds did not care for me too much. In fact, they rather preferred not to be reminded of my presence. Being dive bombed and pooped on by a screeching tern is not exactly a subtle hint. "I'm saving your babies!" I would say, flinching as another tern swooped and aimed. I was slowly be-

ginning to realize these birds did not want to be saved by me, especially if it meant dealing with humans on a daily basis. Besides, aren't humans the reason they are endangered in the first place? Maybe they would rather just save themselves.

"They're just confused," I would tell myself.

Confused or not, these birds are trying to survive in a shrinking world where extinction is not uncommon. Throughout the summer, I witnessed incidents of these two species battling fate to get ahead in the race for survival. A plover produced a five-egg clutch (all of which hatched and three of which reached fledge-hood) and a tern produced a four-egg clutch



By Clare Welch

(three of which hatched). Maybe this was their master plan, I thought. Terns and plovers will step back from the brink by simply laying more eggs. This was an intriguing theory although, unfortunately, not probable. What more could the Least Tern and Piping Plover do to save themselves? In late June, during the annual Platte River population census, our team wit-

nessed a squabble between a plover and a tern. Upon further investigation, we discovered the two contesting the ownership of a nest. The nest belonged to the tern, but the plover was diligently insisting on incubating it. Hmmm, could this be the next reprieve...bird babysitting? Surely not.

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Regional Coordinator Corner

by Diane Beachly

I would like to thank all of you for your involvement in the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership. Your contribution to the conservation of least terns and piping plovers in Eastern Nebraska and the success you have helped generate enabled the Partnership to receive a new grant. This new grant from the Nebraska State Wildlife Grants program created my position as regional wildlife assistant. I'm Diane Beachly, and I'm thrilled to be involved in the partnership as we strive to connect conservation and business through cooperative efforts.

My main responsibility will be collaborating with the sand and gravel mining industry in the Central Platte and Loup Rivers. I will be introducing our program to local sand and gravel operators as we extend our program into Central Nebraska. Then I'll meet with willing landowners and operators next spring to learn what their mining plans will be during the nesting season. A site specific plan will then be devel-

oped to reduce the likelihood of conflicts between nesting birds and planned mining activities. (The plan will likely include setting out poles with Mylar streamers to discourage the birds from nesting in certain areas and placing attractants where it will not interfere with their mining operations to encourage nesting terns and plovers.) Another aspect of my job is educational outreach. I can give presentations about our program to all types of groups from school children to civic organizations. Lastly, I'll be involved in research activities, particularly monitoring how successful nesting terns and plovers are at sandpit locations. We plan to continue monitoring the effectiveness of our predator deterrent electric fencing and I will be gathering GIS and other information to quantify what makes a sand pit suitable for terns and plovers to nest there.

I grew up on a farm in Central Nebraska north of the Platte River. I am interested in water issues, agriculture,

and wildlife habitat. It has long been a dream of mine to work with endangered bird species. In a prior job I coordinated volunteers who looked for migratory whooping cranes and improved habitat conditions on the Platte River and I am doubly rewarded now to be working with the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership especially because I get to meet and interact with so many dedicated people.

Please join us in welcoming Diane. Her contact information can be found on Page 4.

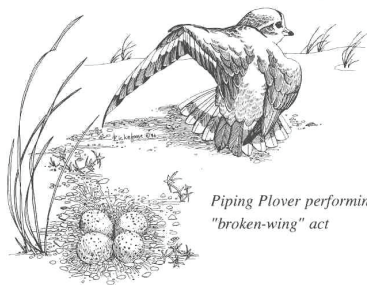


Two Birds

By Bryan Kluever

When most of us hear the word *bird*, a certain mental image arises in our minds. A perched blue jay, a foraging duck, a soaring eagle; when thinking of the avian community, these are the images that crept into my mind...until now. As a summer technician, I have had the rare opportunity and privilege to work with Least Terns and Piping Plovers, two unique birds that are quite disparate from one another.

I have no doubt that there are many people who have not seen pictures of these creatures, and still fewer have had the opportunity to see an individual or colony. I assure you the loss is theirs. Although similarities exist between the two, like their penchant for sand, there are several qualities that differentiate these beachside neighbors.



Piping Plover performing "broken-wing" act

The Least tern is the show off of the two.

Ever gregarious, they seem to be more at home in the company of a crowd. In flight they are whimsical, yet precise, their black caps giving them a dignitary appearance. When confronted by an enemy they band together in a plucky fashion, each member of the cohort attempting to out-call the other.

The Piping plover, on the other hand, is a bit of a recluse that enjoys nothing more than the company of its family. Their flight is subtle and straightforward. They employ geometric like accuracy, flying from point A to B with the least possible waste of vigor.

If made uncomfortable or worrisome when nesting, the plover suddenly becomes a master of the stage, giving a most convincing performance of an injured wing.

Their call is somewhat of an enigma. Although not impressive in tone or length, it is unique in that you simply

cannot decipher the bird's whereabouts when hearing it. All too often I would find myself endlessly scouring an area, convinced these birds were using chicanery to cloak their position.

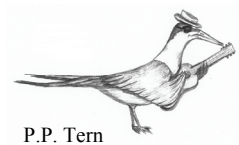
Yes, there is no doubt that these birds offer subtle and drastic differences to the human eye. And although your perceptions may be different from mine, I implore you to share them with others.



Bryan is pursuing options for a Master's Degree program.

Events

The Annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic was held on September 19, 2004, at Platte River State Park. Catering was provided by Famous Dave's Barbeque, The Garden Café, and HyVee. Door prizes were given out, courtesy of Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and Wildbird Habitat Stores. Live music was provided by P.P. Tern and the Plover Chicks. The weather couldn't have been better, and a good time was had by all. We would like to thank all of you who were able to attend and we hope to see even more of you next year!



P.P. Tern

Tern Tidbit: Intruders entering colonies are in for a rude awakening. In addition to dive-bombing the intruder, terns will actually defecate on them.

Plover Point: When plovers feign, or fake injury dropping their wing, they also make a peculiar twittering vocalization.

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In fact, Least Terns and Piping Plovers will not be able to save themselves. We as humans are responsible for the devastation of their natural habitat, and are therefore responsible for reclaiming some of it in one form or another. The most rewarding experiences this summer have come from those unexpected quirks of behavior lingering inside each plover and tern. As a Nebraskan, I do not want to imagine the Platte River devoid of bird life, especially these iconoclastic representations of Nebraska's avian diversity.



Clare is currently searching for a graduate studies program and for employment in the wildlife field.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership is proud to announce the completion of a poster, educators' packet, and CD. These items are available for nationwide distribution and are geared toward fifth to eighth grade students. The CD includes the packet and a song written and performed by Ron Johnson (P.P. Tern) along with Steve Hanson. Back-up vocals are sung by Renae Held, one of the Plover Chicks.

We are very excited about finishing this project. Please help us spread the word about this great tool for educators. Anyone wishing to receive the poster, packet, and CD can contact Chris Thody at 402-472-8741 or cthody2@unl.edu.



Quoted quotables: One touch of nature makes the whole world kin. - William Shakespeare

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Partners: Overland Sand and Gravel Company, Western Sand and Gravel Company, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Girl Scouts-Great Plains Council, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Nebraska Environmental Trust, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, Arps Gravel and Concrete, Lyman-Richey Corporation, Mallard Sand and Gravel, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

<http://ternandplover.unl.edu>

