

NEWS



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Gull-Free Zone Begins to be Established on Monomoy Refuge

As many as 150 acres of grassy sand dunes on Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge appear to be available for occupancy following the successful first phase of a project to restore prime migratory bird habitat by reducing the number of gulls on South Monomoy Island, according to Ronald E. Lambertson of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages the refuge.

"The initial results are better than we expected," Lambertson said. "We are confident that with this first step we have a successful start on this habitat restoration program."

Surveys of the project area, the north end of South Monomoy Island off Cape Cod, Massachusetts, show approximately 340 active nests remaining of the 2,832 herring gull and great black-backed gull nests treated with a gull toxicant, Lambertson said.

The program seeks to provide a gull-free zone where other bird species could nest, such as the endangered roseate tern and the threatened piping plover, both protected by the Endangered Species Act.

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"We expect that other, non-gull, species may begin to increase in numbers or repopulate the refuge within the next two years," Lambertson said. The goal of the program is to have a diversity of bird species on the refuge.

The nesting bird population on Monomoy refuge prior to the project was 95 percent herring gulls and great black-backed gulls. The aggressive and territorial behavior of the gulls -- including attacking and eating other birds -- allowed the gulls to dominate the habitat. Nesting roseate terns once numbered 900 pairs, but they no longer nest on the refuge. Piping plovers, which have shown good population increases elsewhere along the Atlantic coast, have not shown the same recovery rate on Monomoy because of gull predation and last year numbered only 14 nesting pairs.

Service biologists had predicted that few of the gulls would die off the island as a result of the poisoning and that the gulls would die within 48 hours of application of the toxicant. However, the number of gull carcasses found on the mainland were higher than predicted and some birds died up to a week after the final bait application.

While both issues caused concern among area residents as well as Service staff, the results turned out to be similar to other habitat restoration projects. Service staff are awaiting laboratory results and are examining procedures relating to these two issues.

Service staff met last week to review this year's project and to begin planning for next year. The project to restore habitat for bird diversity will continue through the 1999 nesting season.

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**Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge
Numbers**

		<u>Pairs</u>	<u>Individuals</u>
1995 nesting birds: (selected species)	Herring gulls	5,200	10,400
	Great black-backed gulls	7,350	14,700
	Roseate terns	zero	--
	Piping plovers	14	28
	Arctic terns	zero	--
	Laughing gulls	zero	--

On South Monomoy Island:

Project area location, size: Northern 2-1/2 miles of South Monomoy Island, 350 acres
Gull nests treated with gull-toxicant and acreage actually treated: 2,832 nests in approx. 175 acres
Number of bait applications, each gull nest (dates of bait: May 18 - 19 and May 21 - 22) 2
Gulls potentially exposed to bait (assuming 2 birds/nest and each nest actively occupied): 5,664

Carcasses recovered through June 11, 1996 (numbers are individuals, not pairs)

Total recovered	1,911
Herring gulls	1,185
Great black-backed gulls	726
Carcasses found on the mainland	Total 634
Herring gulls	563
Great black-backed gulls	71
Carcasses found on the refuge:	Total 1,277
Herring gulls	622
Great black-backed gulls	655
Remaining gulls, still nesting	680
Unrecovered (gulls that abandoned the treatment area and did not ingest bait, or gulls that ingested the bait and were not recovered)	3,073