

## Preserve & Protect

FREE Cape Lookout National Seashore 2008–2009 Edition

## Of Storms and Birds

The ecology of barrier islands is shaped by storms often in dramatic events. In 2003 Hurricane Isabel struck



New Drum Inlet to "Ophelia" Inlet

the Core Banks in mid-September. The storm caused considerable long-term damage to human communities along the coast. On the undeveloped Core Banks there was some short term damage to wildlife as many sea turtle nests were washed away by the flooding. Yet there was long term benefits created for the beach nesting birds. The storm tide scoured the banks removing vegetation, flattening the low dunes and creating large open sand flats. These overwash fans of bare sand are desirable for beach nesting birds since their nests are laid



Piping plover eggs and chicks

on the ground and are camouflaged like sand and shell. Without vegetation to hide potential predators such as raccoons the birds have a 360 degree view to watch for intruders that may harm the nests. This means no sneak



American oystercatcher

attacks by predators and gives the adult birds more time to lead predators away from the eggs. These cross island sand flats also have the benefit of providing good habitat away from the recreational beach. The vegetation and dunes eventually grow back after several years, forcing the birds to nest out on the open beach where there is more recreational disturbance. Often, another storm comes along to maintain the overwash fans and reshape the banks.

Hurricane Ophelia in mid-September 2005 not only controlled the expanding vegetation but opened a new inlet. Inlets are favored by shorebirds partly because that's where their food is and for the open sandy habitat. Birds and fish find inlets productive foraging areas. Fall and winter storms can provide benefits to bird nesting habitats. Timing is important because spring or early summer storms may help the habitat, but actually hurt that year's reproductive success.

In 2007 Sub Tropical Storm Andrea in May and Tropical Storm Barry in June caused many nest losses due to flooding the ground nests of piping plovers and American oystercatchers. The first nests are often the most successful and while the birds renested it placed an additional hardship on them to start the process a second time. The terns and skimmers typically don't start nesting until mid-May and missed the stronger Andrea Storm. At the New Drum Inlet sand spit these birds did well on open sandy habitat. This site supported the largest colony of nesting gull-billed terns in the state. While we can't control the timing or force of coastal storms, we can protect bird nesting sites. The park posts these sites by April 1 to exclude all entry so the birds can have an undisturbed place to raise their families.

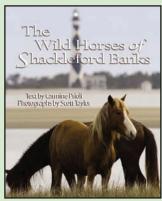


## Wild Horse Watching Tips, Shackleford Banks

Shackleford's IIO-I3O horses live in about 30 groups called "harems" (stallions, mares and foals) and "bachelor bands" (only stallions). They may be seen in all parts of the island but you may need to hunt around a bit to find them.

Remember that the horses are wild – they must find their own food and water and protect themselves from danger. Wild horses see humans and dogs as something dangerous. If you get too close to the horses they may defend themselves by charging, kicking or biting. For you and your pet's safety:

- Watch the horses from a safe distance. If the horse stops what it's doing to stare directly at you, stop there. If it starts to move away, you are already too close.
- Bring binoculars and use a telephoto lens so you won't disturb the horses or endanger yourself.
- Keep your dog on a leash for its and the horses' safety (and it's the law!).
- Always carry fresh water for yourself and your pet. During the warm months, bug repellent is recommended.



The Wild Horses of Shackleford Banks