

Cape Cod National Seashore Guidelines for Groups Visiting Beaches While Nesting Shorebirds are Present

These guidelines pertain primarily to groups visiting Cape Cod National Seashore beaches from April through July. We suggest that group leaders stop at Salt Pond or Province Lands Visitor Centers to ask about the locations of nesting shorebirds and any regulations currently in place. The objective is to reduce stress on the birds caused by disturbance by visitors.

General rules to reduce disturbance:

- The smaller the group the better (10 or less is preferable).
- Always look down the beach with binoculars to see what bird activity is ahead of you before you take the group. This is especially important when there are chicks on the beach that could be anywhere.
- Before you get to the nesting area, explain to the group that they should try to be as quiet as possible and limit their movement when they get close to the nest site.
- For all groups, but especially larger groups of 10 or more, stop approximately 20 meters before you reach the symbolic fencing (or chicks).
- Stay far enough away that your presence is not altering the behavior of the bird (i.e. feeding, incubating eggs). If you see the adult bird get off the nest or an adult bird is approaching you doing the “broken-wing” behavior, back up. If they don’t return to the nest or are still exhibiting stressed behaviors (bobbing head, peeping, broken-wing), you should leave the area.
- Do not linger in front of the symbolic (post and string) fencing or near chicks. It’s best to quietly walk by.
- To avoid the chance of chicks being accidentally stepped on, large groups should try to avoid areas with 1- 3 day old shorebird chicks. Chicks this young are very hard to see and will often crouch down in the sand when they are disturbed or feel threatened. You can check with the shorebird staff prior to your program to get up-to-date information on recent hatchings.
- If you see an adult bird “brooding” the chicks (that’s when the chicks are under the adult bird), walk around them. The same is true if you see the adults/chicks feeding.
- Never follow a chick(s) or get too close.
- A rule of thumb is to walk as low down on the beach as possible allowing for the greatest distance from the nesting area (symbolic fencing). This will reduce disturbance to the incubating shorebirds and tern chicks.