

Wilson's Plover Chicks Have Hatched on Matagorda Beach and Sargent Beach  
by Taylor Bennett

We are at the peak of beach nesting bird season along the Upper Texas Coast. Gulf Coast Bird Observatory is studying these birds as they nest and raise their young. The species we are focusing on are the Wilson's Plover and Least Tern. The Wilson's Plover is a shorebird that prefers to nest in the soft sand along the dunes, mudflats, and shelly areas with vegetation. During the breeding season, they break up into pairs and create their own territories.

The Least Tern is a water bird that prefers to nest in large groups in open shelly areas. Both of these species are protected by the Migratory Bird Act and are considered species of high concern due to habitat loss and disturbance. For each species, we monitor for pairs, nests, and chicks. We also band Wilson's Plover adults and their chicks, when they hatch.

We're monitoring two sites this year: Matagorda Beach and Sargent Beach. For Matagorda Beach, we monitor half of Matagorda Peninsula and three areas: Colorado River Mouth Flats (CRMF), Dunes Dr., and Three-mile Cut. Most of the Wilson's Plover nests that failed this past month have successfully nested again. We currently have six active nests and one mystery brood along Matagorda Peninsula. A mystery brood is a pair of birds with chicks that had a nest that we were unable to locate.

The pair has three downy chicks which we were fortunate to catch and band. We banded three more Wilson's Plover adults: two females (A6 and C6) and one male (K6). Unfortunately, the Least Tern nests all failed due to weather and disturbance. For CRMF, we had one Wilson's Plover nest successfully hatch two chicks, which we were able to band. We also discovered three mystery broods. Two of the broods have three chicks each. We were only able to band one of the three chicks for each brood. The third mystery brood only has one chick, which we banded as well. We currently have two active nests at CRMF. We haven't observed any nesting Wilson's Plover or Least Terns at Three-mile Cut or Dunes Dr. So far, we have eight active nests, 12 chicks, four banded adults, and eight banded chicks total for Matagorda.

Sargent Beach has still proven to be quite productive. So far, we had two Wilson's Plover nests hatch with one chick each and we managed to band both of them. Along with chicks, we banded four new Wilson's Plover adults: three females (Y5, E6, and H6) and one male (J6). We currently have three active nests at Sargent. The Least Terns are having to continue to re-nest due to weather and disturbance from vehicles. So far, we have two active nests, two chicks, four banded adults, and two banded chicks total for Sargent.

April through August is the time when Wilson's Plovers, Least Terns, and other nesting birds are most vulnerable. Please remember to fish, swim, and play 50 yards away from nesting birds and chicks. Drive slowly, avoid the dunes and sandy areas where plovers tend to nest, and keep dogs on a leash. All of the Wilson's Plover adults and chicks that we band this year will be available for symbolic adoption through our online nature store at [www.gcbo.org](http://www.gcbo.org). On behalf of Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, thanks for reading and stay tuned for next month's article.

**IMG\_WIPL Chicks:** Taylor Bennett holding three downy Wilson's Plover chicks after they received their new bands. Photo by Sarah Belles.