

ISLAND BEACH STATE PARK

VISITOR'S GUIDE 2022

EXPLORE
THE PARK
YEAR ROUND

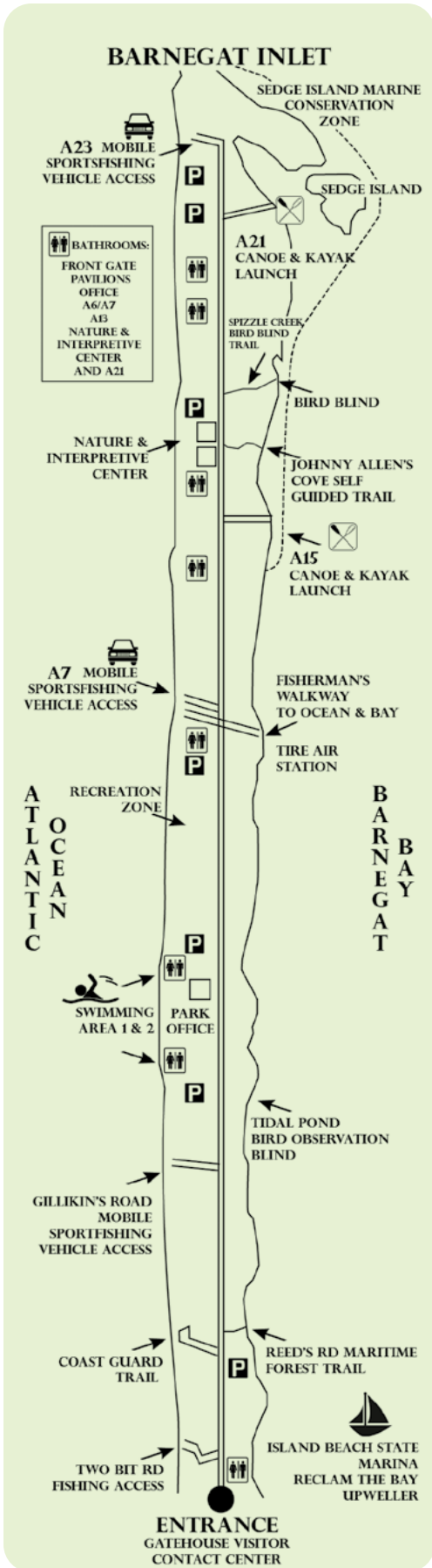
- ✓ SWIM
- ✓ FISH
- ✓ KAYAK
- ✓ CLAM
- ✓ HIKE
- ✓ VOLUNTEER
- & MORE

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Ocean County Board of Commissioners

Explore more at
OceanCountyTourism.com



Calendar at a Glance

May

- 7th May Day Festival and Pet Expo
- 21st Ocean Fun Days

June

- 4th National Trails Day

July

- 21st Thursday in the Park
(free events and activities)
- 28th Thursday in the Park
(free events and activities)

August

- 4th Thursday in the Park
(free events and activities)
- 18th Thursday in the Park
(free events and activities)
- 25th Thursday in the Park
(free events and activities)

September

- 11th Beach Plum Festival
- 17th NJBBA Children's Surf Fishing
Tournament

October

- 8th Barktoberfest

November

- 13th Friends of IBSP Member Meeting

December

- 3rd Beachgrass Planting

January

- 1st New Years Day Walk

Additional events are listed on
www.friendsofisp.org/events/ and
www.islandbeachnatureprograms.org

► **Cover Photo - Laura Brower**

WELCOME

Whether you prefer relaxing on our pristine white sandy beaches, surf fishing with friends, wandering through dense maritime forests or kayaking in Sedge Islands Marine Conservation Zone, IBSP has something for everyone. Throughout the year, our staff works tirelessly to ensure that IBSP is ready and bustling with activities to keep the whole family entertained.

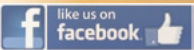
This year, we've focused our efforts on coastal resiliency by adding over 30,000 American Beach Grass plants to our dune system. The NJ Beach Buggy Association also added several hundred feet of dune fencing to help stabilize eroding areas. Further, in January of 2022, visitors generously donated over 300 Christmas trees to assist in our dune stabilization efforts. Apart from that, we have added mile marker posts along the road, added new solar motion detection lighting at A21 and the air hose station at A7 and updated the restroom facilities at A13 and A19. Lastly, we've designed and installed a new display in the Interpretive Center, installed two new Barn Owl nest boxes, and have added several new interpretive programs for the summer. Make sure to check out the nature programs webpage for more info! www.islandbeachnatureprograms.org

As always, our dedicated Friends group has been supporting us along the way. They have made some key purchases for the park including American Beach Grass, lifeguard radios, a flagpole at the Park Police building, and so much more. We're so thankful for the Friends of Island Beach and look forward to continuing this great partnership.

Jen Clayton, Superintendent

Charlie Welch, Assistant Superintendent

IBSP – The way life should be



ISLAND BEACH STATE PARK



PLAN YOUR VISIT

SUMMER SEASON

(MEMORIAL DAY - LABOR DAY)

Weekdays 8am - 8pm
Weekend & Holidays
7am - 8pm

OFF SEASON

(LABOR DAY - MEMORIAL DAY)

Everyday 8am - Sunset

NJ State Park Pass*

Frequent visitors may be interested in purchasing an annual park pass, valid for entrance to all NJ State Parks.

NJ Resident \$50
Non-Resident \$75

NJ Residents Senior
Citizen Pass (62+) FREE

NJ Residents Disability
Pass FREE



Pets are permitted in the park, but must be on a leash (maximum length six feet.) They are NOT allowed on the lifeguard beaches during the summer season and NOT allowed on the Spizzle Creek Bird Blind Trail. (Pets can frighten wildlife.)

Entrance Fees



20' & UNDER

SUMMER SEASON

(MEMORIAL DAY - LABOR DAY)

Weekdays

NJ Resident \$6
Non-Resident \$12
Weekend | Holidays
NJ Resident \$10
Non-Resident \$20

OFF SEASON

(LABOR DAY - MEMORIAL DAY)

NJ Resident \$5
Non-Resident \$10

Motorcycles

NJ Resident \$5
Non-Resident \$7

Bus**

NJ Group \$65
Non-NJ Group
\$120

**Buses require registration in advance,
accompanied by \$25 deposit.

Walk in at Tice's Shoal

\$3 per person



Ocean Swimming

Lifeguards are on duty 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Weekends beginning Memorial Day weekend (May 28) and daily from June 18 through Labor Day. Swimming Area 2 opens June 18. **No swimming permitted after 6 p.m.**



Cycling is permitted in the bike lanes running parallel to the road. All children under 14 must wear helmets.

OUR AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

winter

43° | 23°

spring

62° | 39°

summer

84° | 62°

fall

68° | 45°

*For more information call NJDEP at 1-800-843-6420 or 609-984-0370

** For more information on Oversized-vehicles and Weekend/Holiday restrictions call the Park Office (732) 793-0506



Picnicking

Picnicking is allowed on the ocean beach in the Recreation and Southern Natural Areas. Open fires are permitted 50 feet east of the dune line from parking area 3 south only. No fires or cooking devices of any kind are permitted on the beach in the lifeguard areas during the summer season.

Scuba Diving, Surfing, Wind boarding

Scuba divers must provide valid certification and register at the park office. Surfing and wind boarding are permitted at the south end of the lifeguard area.

Beach Access Vehicles

Vehicle use is restricted to Mobile Sport Fishing Vehicle Permit holders. Permits are sold out for Spring/Summer 2022. Additional permits will be available

October 1, 2022 at yourpassnow.com. For information about permit requirements call 732-793-0506.

Air is available at your park office and parking area A6/7.

NJ Resident \$195
NJ 3-Day \$75

Non-Resident .. \$225
Non-NJ 3-Day \$90

Keep your Park Clean & Green



for your convenience dumpsters are located at Swimmings Areas 1 & 2, and A7 and A23 parking lots.

Please be kind to the environment

Prohibited

Unauthorized alcoholic beverages, camping, ATVs, drones.



Kayaking

Kayaking opportunities abound along the Sedge Islands Marine Conservation Zone.

Launch along the bay shore at A15 or A21. Beware of tide conditions and potential strong wind in the afternoon. Kayaking is not permitted on the ocean side.

Visitors can park at A15 launch site. At A21 visitors can drive down to the launch to unload kayaks but cannot park there. Visitors must park their car in the oceanside lot by the bathroom/windmill and walk back to launch site.



Bathroom

Bathrooms are located at the gatehouse, park office, both swimming areas, A6, A13, the Nature Center, A19 and A21.

Horseback Riding

Riding is permitted on the southern six miles of ocean beach from October to April. Advance registration is required.

Lost and Found

Lost and Found is located at the Park Office.



Persons with disabilities may obtain specially designed beach wheelchairs for ocean swimming or surf fishing at the bathing pavilion during the swimming season.

To contact State Park Police, call 1-877-WARNDEP (927-6337) For emergencies call 911.

Questions? Call the Park office at 732-793-0506

2022 IBSP Nature Programs

Arrive Curious... Leave Inspired

Explore the natural wonders of IBSP on one of our fun and interactive programs!

For a complete list of dates, times, fees, age restrictions and to register, please visit:

www.islandbeachnatureprograms.org

GUIDED PROGRAMS

Pre-register for these fun, interactive and educational programs led by our team of Park Naturalists.

Please call the nature center for additional details at 732-793-1315 or email Kelly.scott@dep.nj.gov.



- ❖ **Sedge Islands Kayak EcoTour**
- ❖ **IBSP After Dark**
- ❖ **Beginners Surf Fishing Clinic**
- ❖ **Surf IBSP**
- ❖ **Sunset Paddle**
- ❖ **And more!**

DAILY FREE PROGRAMS

Join Park naturalists for some free family fun as you explore the natural wonders of IBSP. Meet at the fish tanks in the pavilion at Swimming Area #1. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Free with paid park admission.

- Seining the Barnegat Bay – 11AM & 2PM
- Touch Tank Talk – 12PM & 3PM
- Shellfish Gardening 101 – Mondays @12pm, IBSP Marina

EVENT

Barktoberfest Fall Festival & Pet Expo

October
8th

11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Rain or shine.

Island Beach
State Park
Swimming
Area 1

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pet expo,
food trucks,
dog walk,
K-9 demos
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on leash
invited to
attend.



\$8 suggested donation



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EVENT

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FAMILY FUN DAY
SWIMMING AREA 1

9 AM - 4 PM

\$8.00
SUGGESTED DONATION
RAIN OR SHINE



PLEASE VISIT WWW.FRIENDSOFISLANDBEACH.ORG FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Explore more at OceanCountyTourism.com

Volunteering in the Park

Love Island Beach State Park? Want to get more involved? Consider becoming a volunteer! Island Beach State Park relies heavily on it's dedicated team of volunteers throughout the year. Park volunteers come from a wide range of backgrounds and occupations, but have in common a love for this beautiful State Park. Volunteering in the Park is a truly rewarding experience for all - individuals, families, scouts, students, and corporate groups.

Volunteer Needs Include:

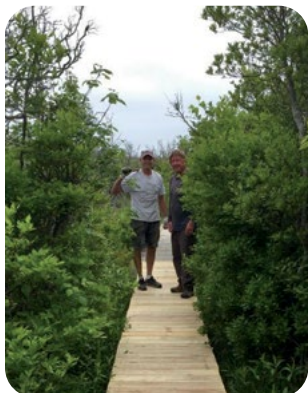
- Trail Maintenance
- Beach Cleanups
- Planting Beach Grass
- Collecting Donations
- Festival/Event Setup and Planning
- Staffing the Nature and Interpretive centers
- Assisting with Educational Programs

If you would like to join our team of volunteers, contact the Friends of ISBP Volunteer Coordinator, Stevie Thorsen - stevie.thorsen@friendsofislandbeach.org.



Selling Ice Cream at the Beach Plum Festival

See you in the Park!



Maintaining Trails



Collecting Donations for Friends of IBSP



Planting Beach Grass

Email: kleesbarandgrill@AOL.com



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WATCH LIVE!

Two Cameras Live Stream Island Beach State Park to the World

Join the thousands of people who tune in for a virtual look at Island Beach State Park. The beach camera, mounted at Swimming Area 1, shows viewers current beach conditions. It is used daily by surfers, fisherman, and beach goers. The Pete McLain Osprey Camera provides a live stream of the osprey nest located near the Interpretive Center. Viewers love to watch Beau and Bay, our resident osprey, go through their life cycle each year. The osprey return to their nest in March from their wintering grounds in South America and the Caribbean. Osprey mate for life and return to the same nest year after year. Camera viewers will see Beau and Bay fix up their nest, lay their eggs, and raise their nestlings who eventually fly off in the fall.

The cameras require regular maintenance and can be quite costly. Please consider making a tax deductible donation to the Friends of IBSP to help keep the camera running.



Photo: Tamara Ugaro

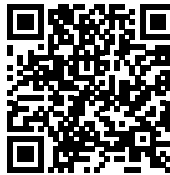
VIEW OUR CAMERAS

Beach Camera:



www.friendsofibsp.org/live-cams/oba1-beach-cam/

Osprey Camera:



www.friendsofibsp.org/live-cams/osprey-cam/



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The Shacks of Island Beach

By Emma Connelly

A Brief History of Island Beach...

Although Island Beach's history can be traced as far back as the 1630's, during which time it was controlled by England's Duke of York, our story begins in the early 20th century. In 1926, Henry Phipps – former partner of Pittsburgh Steel magnate Andrew Carnegie – purchased the land known as Island Beach from a New Jersey Real-Estate Company. This nearly untouched strip of New Jersey Coast was a valuable find, and Phipps intended to make the most of it. He envisioned a seaside resort-town rivaling his other investments, such as Miami Beach.

Unfortunately for Phipps, his plans failed when in 1929 economies around the globe were crippled by the Great Depression. In 1930, Phipps died, leaving his estate to be managed by Francis Parkman Freeman.

Having managed Island Beach prior to its purchase by Phipps, Freeman wasted little time in enacting his own vision of how the land should be maintained. In 1933, he and two others (his wife, children's mystery author Augusta Huiell Seaman; and former Coast Guard Captain Joseph Tilton) founded the Borough of Island Beach. With a total of 18 taxpayers, the small borough was overseen by the Freeman's and their successors until the early 1950's. In 1953, the State of New Jersey bought Island Beach from the Phipps Estate for the sum of 2.75 million dollars, beating out a competing offer from a Boston RealEstate company which planned to develop Island Beach into a resort. The decision to preserve Island Beach rather than develop it was made thanks to the efforts of many concerned citizens, spearheaded by Richard Pough of the American Museum of Natural History. These individuals had petitioned and raised money for the preservation of Island Beach as a Nature Sanctuary during the early 1950's, eventually succeeding in their efforts in 1953. After public-use facilities were installed, the newly minted Island Beach State Park was opened to the public in 1959. This park continues to be some of the last undeveloped beach property on the Atlantic coast of the United States



The Sportsmen's Shacks...

Upon the purchase of Island Beach by Henry Phipps in 1926, there were others who called Island Beach their home – albeit temporarily. In the early 20th century, there were many small structures on Island Beach, numbering well over 100. Locally known as the Island Beach “shacks,” these dwellings were occupied by fishermen, hunters, and outdoors-men from neighboring New Jersey communities such as Toms River and Belmar. Constructed with the sole intention of functionality (not comfort), these shacks were made from cheap, salvaged materials, and were by nature temporary. Driftwood, tar paper, and even materials from the occasional shipwreck were used during construction. In other cases the

shacks were simply houseboats which had been dragged up on the beach beyond the high-tide mark and “parked” there for weekend use by local fishermen.

These individuals, known at the time as “squatters,” saw Island Beach as a land of plenty. Fishing in Barnegat Bay or the Atlantic Ocean, hunting local wildlife,





and gathering native vegetation, such as the popular Beach Plum, were all enticing reasons to spend time on Island Beach, especially during the Great Depression and it's immediate aftermath. Fishermen and hunters could supply their families with fresh food from Island Beach when many were going hungry.

Phipps' plan to develop Island Beach into a resort town led him to search for a way to evict these individuals from his land. In response, the fishermen claimed squatters' rights to the land. However, as a number of these fishermen had at one point paid the previous land-owners for use of their land, this argument was null and void. On the other hand, they did legally own the shacks which they had built on Island Beach. To settle the matter, a compromise was proposed. Henry Phipps presented the fishermen with the following solution: they could continue living as they had been, with the condition that all shack-owners pay a small annual fee to lease the land from his estate. During these years, many of the leaseholders built upon the foundations of the original shacks, and turned them into comfortably rustic weekend getaways. This continued under Francis P. Freeman, with the condition that the shack-owners take care of the land they leased – mainly by leaving it alone at all costs. In the late 1930's, he established the Barnegat Bay & Beach Company to manage the leases. Freeman was among the first to make efforts to preserve the delicate dune ecosystem which, thanks in part to his efforts, flourishes on Island Beach to this day. Upon the purchase of the property by the State of New Jersey, the agreement between the shack-owners and the land-owners was continued, although certain aspects of the leases' terms were changed. The squatters, now known as "shackers" or more officially "leaseholders," would continue to pay a fee to lease the land from the State. However, upon the death of the current leaseholder, the lease would be terminated and the shack either destroyed or left to be reclaimed by nature. This practice has continued over the past 60 years, leading to the reduction in lease sites from well over 100 in the 1920's to six as of 2018.

The Judge's Shack: A Family's Seaside Legacy

Perhaps the most recognizable of the remaining lease-sites is known as "The Judge's Shack." Built in 1911 and located in the dunes of the eastern side of Island Beach State Park, this shack serves as an important landmark for modern surf fishermen, just as it has since it was moved south to its current location in 1952. Leased by Federal Judge Richard Hartshorne and his family beginning in 1942, the shack served as a summer weekend home for the Newark, NJ family. In 1952, prior to the purchase of Island Beach by the State of New Jersey, the lease was transferred to Judge Hartshorne's younger son, John F. Hartshorne, who held the lease until the early 2000's. In 2016 the lease was taken over by Island Beach State Park to be preserved as a historic site. This effort was spearheaded by Historic Preservation Architect Penelope Hartshorne Batcheler, the eldest daughter of the Judge, and resulted in the creation of the Friends of the Judge's Shack preservation group. Made up of family friends of the Judge, Historic Preservation experts, and other dedicated citizens, this group works tirelessly to preserve the shack against shifting sand, dangerous weather, and the relentless march of time.



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Sedge Islands Marine Conservation Zone

A Guide to a Unique Tidal Marsh Ecosystem

Island Beach State Park
Ocean County, NJ

Sedge Islands Marine Conservation Zone

The 1,900 acre Sedge Islands Marine Conservation Zone (SIMCZ) is located at the southern end of Island Beach State Park. Floating buoys and signs along the boundary notify the public that they are entering the SIMCZ. This is one of New Jersey's most productive wildlife habitats because it contains a combination of maritime forest, thicket, and an extensive tidal marsh. The NJ Department of Environmental Protection manages the area to protect it while making it accessible to the public for a variety of recreational uses.

Sedge Islands Marine Conservation Zone Map can be picked up at the Front Gate, Main Office, Nature Center or by logging on to www.savebarnegatbay.org



- | | |
|---|--|
| Permitted | Prohibited |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Boating •Recreational clamming •Recreational crabbing •Fishing* •Birding •Hunting** *Kayaking and Stand Up Paddleboarding *NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife regulations apply † Except on mainland | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Use of Wave Runners or Personal Water Crafts •Violating NO wake areas •Approaching Osprey or Peregrine Falcon nest platforms •Entering designated bird nesting areas •Use of alcohol or illegal drugs |



For emergencies call **911** or **877-WARNDEP**

North

1/8 mi 0 1/8 mi

Scale is approximate

Legend

- Sand Dune
- Sand Bar
- Thicket
- Tidal Marsh
- Maritime Forest
- Foot Trail
- Road
- Public Restrooms
- Designated Parking

Editor: Michael J. Winters 2016
Executive Director: Britta Wenzel



Friends of Island Beach helped NJDEP install new signage in Sedge Island Marine Conservation Zone (SIMCZ). The new signs inform and educate visitors when they enter the area and about the importance of protecting New Jersey's only marine conservation zone.

KAYAKING

The Sedges

GPS Points:

- ① East entrance to Horsefoot Slough:
N 39° 47' 08.5", W 74° 06' 27.1"
- ② Horsefoot Slough Beach:
N 39° 47' 05.8", W 74° 07' 00.3"
- ③ Entrance to Marsh Elder Thoroughfare:
N 39° 47' 10.7", W 74° 06' 52.1"
- ④ North entrance to Snake Ditch:
N 39° 47' 02.9", W 74° 06' 06.5"
- ⑤ South entrance to Sea Dog Island:
N 39° 46' 37.8", W 74° 06' 09.7"

Trails:

-  Spizzle Creek Bird Blind Trail (1-2 hours; 1.5 miles)
-  Little Bay Trail (2-3 hours; 3 miles)
-  Marsh Elder Trail (2-3 hours; 2.5 miles)
-  Buster Island Trail (2-3 hours; 3 miles)

Most visitors to Island Beach State Park are unaware that the 1,900 acre Sedge Islands Marine Conservation Zone (SIMCZ) is located along the southwestern end of the park. This pristine natural area has a variety of shallow, narrow channels carving the saltmarsh into a series of islands that make the area perfect for exploring by kayak. Osprey, Peregrine Falcons and a variety of wading birds make this area an incredible place to view wildlife. While activities such as fishing, crabbing and clamming are permitted, personal watercraft are prohibited in the area.

The SIMCZ is best accessed from launch areas at parking lots A15 and A21. The kayak launch at A21 is an unloading/loading zone only. No vehicles are permitted to park in this area. Paddlers should be aware that strong winds, swift tidal currents and exposed sand bars at low tide can make paddling in some parts of the SIMCZ challenging. Maps showing kayak trails are available at the park office, nature center or by logging on to savebarneгатbay.org. Don't forget to apply sunscreen before you launch and drink plenty of water while you are paddling.

- Jim Merritt,
Sedge Island Program Director

Sign at the Southern entrance to Sedge Islands Marine Conservation Zone.



Birders Barn Owls



Image courtesy of Flickr user Stephen Barnett

The birding community at Island Beach State Park (IBSP) is amazingly passionate about birds. Their passion comes as no surprise since IBSP is known as one of the most elite birding locations in New Jersey, with over 300 different species recorded at the park. However, when passion turns into informed appreciation, and that appreciation leads to actual conservation efforts, the birding community deserves some recognition!

IBSP was approached by the birding community several years ago with a suggestion to “Bring back the Barn Owl.” Barn owls (*Tyto alba*) were once a fairly common species that could be observed at IBSP, easily identified by their beautiful white, heart shaped face and striking dark eyes. They are medium-sized with long, rounded wings and short tails. Barn Owl’s require large areas of open land to hunt, which makes the marshes along the west side of IBSP the perfect habitat for them to thrive.

Barn owls are still widespread globally, but their numbers have been declining in New Jersey. Today the barn owl is listed as a Species of Special Concern in New Jersey (not yet endangered or threatened but possibly on its way). According to the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ, the exact reason for the decline of barn owls is unknown, but we do know that the availability of cavities for nesting appears to be a limiting factor. Barn owls are secondary cavity nesters. They don’t make their own cavity but use existing natural or man-made cavities. Knowing this, IBSP, The Friends of IBSP and the birding community at IBSP partnered together and raised enough money to purchase 3, man-made Barn Owl nesting boxes.



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With the help of the Seaside Park Fire Department (SPFD), the nesting boxes have been erected in habitats determined to be appropriate for the owls and/or the location of a previously known nest box. Each box will be closely monitored for activity during breeding season. While we expect it to be several seasons until we have activity in the nests, we are so excited at the possibility to have Barn Owls back at IBSP.



Thanks again to the birding community,
The Friends of Island Beach and the SPFD!

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Climate Change and Sea Level Rise at IBSP

New Jersey's climate is changing. Temperatures are increasing, sea levels are rising, salt marshes are being submerged, ocean acidity levels are increasing, and we are seeing an increase in the frequency and intensity of storms. Here at IBSP, we are working tirelessly to address and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

What exactly is climate change?

Climate change is defined as a long-term shift in global or regional climate patterns (temperature, rainfall, wind speed, etc) and the cause of current climate change is largely attributed to human activity. Burning fossil fuels, like natural gas, oil, and coal, deforestation, and some industrial processes release greenhouse gases into Earth's atmosphere. There, these gases trap heat from the sun's rays inside the atmosphere causing Earth's average temperature to rise (global warming).



What are the effects of climate change at IBSP?

The effects of climate change are real, immediate, and increasing. New Jersey has already experienced twice the global average of sea level rise, and the Barnegat Bay Estuary is experiencing one of the highest rates of sea-level rise in the continental United States, approximately 4 mm per year (about 16 inches per century). At IBSP, the major effects of climate change include:

- Increased water temperatures – eelgrass, a critical component to life in the Barnegat Bay, cannot survive if water temp exceeds 86° F. As ocean temperatures rise, some fish species are moving north or into deeper waters to remain within their normal temperature ranges, impacting commercial and recreational fishing.
- Rising sea levels & Eroding shorelines – Salt marshes at IBSP are becoming submerged, tidal flats in the Barnegat Bay are becoming open water, and beaches are eroding.
- Loss of salt marsh ecosystems – Salt marshes are key coastal ecosystems that provide habitat for valued and protected wildlife, including invertebrates, fishes, and birds. They provide vital ecosystem services to humans such as protection from storm surge and waves, attenuation of flooding, absorption of pollutants, and nutrient removal via denitrification.
- Increased ocean acidity – Increased ocean acidity (the ocean becomes more acidic by absorbing excess carbon dioxide) would effect young scallops and surf clams ability to build shells, and potentially reduce their populations, which account for about two-thirds of New Jersey's commercial fishing revenues.
- Increased frequency and intensity of storms – Storms will become more frequent and stronger, resulting in greater storm surges that can damage infrastructure and coastal homes.

How is IBSP adapting to climate change?

In accordance with the NJDEP's Coastal Resilience Plan (CRP), IBSP is working towards building stronger and more resilient ecosystems, while reducing risk of further impacts. Examples include protecting tidal wetlands (participating in tidal wetland monitoring program and developing long term plans for restoration and mitigation); managing eroding shorelines with nature-based stabilization features (proposed living shoreline project at A15), increasing our ongoing beach and dune restoration/maintenance projects (dune grass plantings, dune fencing, etc), and using alternative energy sources (solar and wind energy).



What can you do to help?

Climate change adaptation often involves large-scale infrastructure projects or changes in public policy. But adaptation isn't something that only government agencies and big companies can do. You can play a part, too. Even small changes, multiplied over many households, can make a difference.

- Save energy at home – buy energy efficient appliances and LED lightbulbs
- Walk, bike or take public transport
- Grow your own food & compost leftovers
- Shop local and buy sustainable
- Reduce water waste
- Plant a tree
- Spread the word and speak up! Talk to your representatives about climate change.

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My Incredible Experiences Monitoring Beach Nesting Birds at Island Beach State Park

I've been monitoring beach nesting birds with NJDEP for the past two years, 2019 and 2020. I recall my first year volunteering, I was at my post in the Northern Natural Area of Island Beach State Park, observing a pair of Piping Plover endearingly named Kermit and Diane by the research staff. Through my binoculars, I could see Diane was sitting on her eggs, while Kermit was standing guard. 2020 was the third year Kermit and Diane have been nesting at Island Beach State Park. They are one of four pairs of Piping Plovers being monitored by the scientists working for the New Jersey Division of Fish &



Wildlife (NJDFW), **Endangered and Non-game Species Program** (ENSP). The other pairs are Briggsby and Butterbean, and Tupoc and Augusta, all second-year birds, as well as Wizzle and Suga, who nested for their first time this year. Identified by the bands on her legs, we know that Suga was born and fledged on the Barnegat Lighthouse State Park breeding grounds last year. All of these birds can be easily identified by the color-coded bands carefully placed on their legs by the ENSP scientists. The bands allow scientists to track where the birds go in the winter, who is returning to which nesting sites, how old they are, and other important information.

Piping Plovers overwinter in large flocks in warm **Bermuda**. In spring, individual birds typically return to the same breeding grounds, not far from where they were born or where they have successfully nested in previous years. The males return first, around mid-to late May, and each establishes his nesting area. The females return shortly after and typically mate with their same partner from the previous year. The four pairs nesting in the Northern Natural Area of IBSP prefer the stretch of beach between Gillikins Beach Access and Two-Bit Road. No vehicles are allowed to drive on the beach in this area, providing for a safer nesting and fledging experience for the birds, and free of controversy from beach buggy vehicles.



Once the birds have created their nest, which is essentially a scrape in the sand, the state scientists put a cage around it, including sides and a top, as well as electrified wire, a foot or two above the ground, all around the enclosure. This protects the birds from predators when they are nesting, sitting on their eggs, or brooding their chicks. Piping Plovers can be attacked by Great Black-backed Gulls, crows, red foxes, raccoons, and feral cats. The electric wire deters the foxes from digging underneath the fence.

The clutch of eggs usually numbers four. My job as a volunteer includes watching, waiting and recording my observations. When I see cracks in the egg shell, I know the chicks are about to hatch. They usually hatch in the sequence they were laid, one per day for four days until they are all hatched. Piping Plover chicks are precocial – similar to baby chickens or ducklings, on day 1 or 2 they are mobile and able to follow their parents around and learn how to find food. At this

time, I monitor more often to keep an eye on the growing youngsters. They have an additional predator to watch out for – the Ghost Crab. These native beach dwelling crabs are abundant in the Northern Natural Area where there are no vehicles riding the beach. They make relatively large holes in the sand, which can entrap a chick. These white-as-a-ghost crabs are well camouflaged, and are strong and swift, able to take down a vulnerable young chick with relative ease. Piping Plover parents are vigilant however, and scientists have observed them defending their chicks from ambush.

Diane and Kermit's clutch were the first to hatch this year during the first week of June, followed by Briggsby and Butterbean's clutch, then Tupoc and Augusta's eggs. Because Wizzle and Suga were first-time nesters, they started their clutch late and their chicks hatched 5-6 weeks after the other three clutches. This is not unusual for first-year nesters. Each pair of Piping plovers were proud parents of four chicks!

As a volunteer, I enjoy spending my days on the beach, monitoring the birds as they grow. If others are walking on the beach, I engage them by sharing educational information about the conservation efforts to protect the endangered **Piping Plover**, endangered **Black Skimmer** and other beach nesting birds under threat, including **Common Terns** and **American Oystercatchers**, which are both species of special conservation concern. I remind people not to walk beyond the string line set-up by the ENSP staff to mark the nesting territory. Sometimes I need backup by the Park Police, but most people are curious, interested and appreciate the education and conservation efforts of the staff and volunteers. It's rewarding to share the experience with others, and inspire stewardship of our beautiful beaches and coastal habitat.

As the season progressed, some chicks were lost. Because there are typically only a handful of monitors who spend limited time with the birds, it's not always clear how the chicks succumb. But some chicks fledged successfully. Once the chicks can fly on their own to avoid predators, they are considered fledged. All who fledged this year did so by July 25. Kermit and Diane fledged two chicks, Tupoc and Augusta fledged one chick, and sadly, Briggsby and Butterbean lost all of their chicks this season. Despite extensive searching, none of Briggsby and Butterbean's chicks could be found. Good news though for Wizzle and Suga, our first-time parents fledged two chicks. The goal of the NJDEP ENSP is to have at least two birds fledge from each clutch. On average, each pair needs to fledge at least 1.5 chicks in order for the population to remain stable. We started with 16 chicks and only 5 fledged, an average of 0.3125 fledglings – not a good year for our IBSP Northern Natural Area population. Read more about the **2019 Piping Plover nesting season** in the Northern Natural Area at Island Beach State Park.



This was also a tough year for the Endangered and Non-game Species Program scientists who were short-staffed due to cuts and furloughs as a result of COVID-19. They were unable to band the chicks this year, so next season there will be unbanded birds whose identities will remain unknown – a hindrance to the decades-long pool of data being collected.

I was first introduced to the Piping Plover Volunteer Nest Monitoring Program by Kelly Scott, the Naturalist at Island Beach State Park. She directed me to Christina “Kashi” Davis, Environmental Specialist with the NJDEP ENSP. If other BBVMNs want to offer their time as volunteers to monitor beach nesting birds, you can contact Kashi Davis at **Christina.Davis@dep.nj.gov**. Training begins in late March. I look forward to returning to the Northern Natural Area of Island Beach State Park next spring.

*by Paul Lang, BBVMN, 2016, in collaboration with Becky Laboy,
photos by Paul Lang*

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- Photo by Ray Yeager



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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

The Friends of Island Beach State Park have been serving as a volunteer organization to enhance interpretive, educational, recreational and research programs at the park for over 20 years. So much was accomplished in 2021:

- 60,000 beach grass culms planted
- Barktoberfest and Beach Plum Festivals had record turnouts
- We sponsored the Lifeguard Tournament
- Partnered with POAC to offer a day of fun and surf to the autism community
- Park trails were restored and new split rail fence was added
- Donated equipment and assisted in maintaining the Park’s Nature and Interpretive Centers
- Over 5000 volunteer hours in the books!

This year is shaping up to be even more active with events and projects! Come on out and join us for fun in the park.

- Bill Gwyer - Friends of Island Beach State Park

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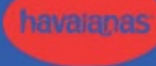
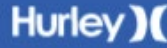
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