

The Wing Nut

By Janet Doughty

Visitors to our coast in May were shocked when beaches were closed to protect piping plovers. Didn't those locals know that it is summer? Don't they know the value of tourism? How can some little bird be more valuable than their money?



Their consternation is understandable. If I had looked forward to a few days at Hatteras only to be turned away, I would have been upset, too. In fact, the very news that Hatteras beaches were closed because of piping plovers nesting made me want to go there even more! After all, I love birds. I would have walked very carefully so as not to disturb a nest because I just wanted to see the baby birds!

More people are watching birds and contributing their observations than ever before. As we add to the body of knowledge about ornithology, we people are faced with

more and more decisions. For instance, I know that just my presence within watching distance of the nest would have disturbed the parents from their duties. One of the characteristics of the plover family is that the parents will lead potential predators away from their young but feigning injury (or insanity) and limping off with great wailing and drama. While they are distracting predators, the parents are not incubating or feeding their young. A pair of Killdeers nest every year in the front yard of an elementary school in Craven County.

Killdeer are plovers. According to the Compact Oxford English Dictionary, a plover is "a short-billed wading bird, typically found by water but sometimes frequenting grassland. ORIGIN Old French, from Latin pluvia 'rain'." I looked up 'pluvia'; it refers specifically to a meadow where there has been a lot of rain. Since plovers are generally found between the tides, it isn't a bad word for this group of birds. The taxonomic name for plovers, *Charadriidae*, is the Latin version of the name Aristotle gave these birds. That name means 'an inconspicuous waterbird that nests in ravines'. The two plovers in this discussion are both known by their calls: killdeer is the word that sounds most like a *Charadrius vociferous* when in flight while *Charadrius melodus* makes a musical little piping sound.

The killdeer in front of the school have fascinated the surrounding neighborhood for years. These noisy and striking little birds will scrape a spot in the middle of the front yard and hatch their eggs right out in front of everybody. Since these eggs actually get to hatch, there

must be something about these birds that provides them some protection. It isn't fierce talons; in fact, plovers are even lacking a 4th toe. They make three-toed little tracks, barely showing a bit of webbing between their toes. It isn't their fierce beaks; plover beaks are dove-like, usually shorter than their heads. It could be the evasive tactics; it's hard not to be taken in by a killdeer in full cry, dragging that broken wing and howling in pain. All that drama does not feed babies, though.

The advantage those killdeer have is their invisibility. On the run, killdeer are striking birds, with the alternating black and white bands across their face and chest. The rest of their coat is a smart brown, with black and white edges on their tail. Sitting on the ground, a killdeer is almost impossible to see. Those black and white edges break up the apparent shape of the bird; combined with the brown back, it is excellent camouflage. No wonder Aristotle thought they nested in a ravine -- when a baby killdeer is chased and flattens down on the ground, it is as if the chick dropped into a hole!

Piping plovers have only one black stripe on their face and chest; the rest of their coat is light with white edges on the tail and wings. When these little sand-colored birds sit still on their sand-scrape nests, they are quite difficult to see. The most careful beach-combing bird-watcher might well step on such a nest site before they saw it.

Sometimes we have to choose which species needs the beach the most! For now, we can spend the rest of the summer listening to the little piping plovers on Hatteras.

The Senate Report - Keeping In Touch

By North Carolina Senator Scott Thomas

The 2004 session of the legislature started on May 10. I have been working on a number of issues important to our district and state.

Governor Easley came to Havelock to announce \$150,000 in state funds to Allies or Cherry Point's Tomorrow (ACT). These funds, requested by me and other members of our local legislative delegation, will be used by ACT to represent Cherry Point MCAS and NADEP in the upcoming round of Base Realignment and Closings (BRAC). I am also working on additional funding that will be needed in the 04-05 fiscal year.

Major General William Ingram, adjutant general of North Carolina's National Guard, joined me in Morehead City recently to announce my legislation to help support our National Guard families. The legislation would create a new vehicle license plate bearing a yellow ribbon and the words "support our troops" and the national motto, "In God We Trust." North Carolinians could choose to buy these special plates for \$30, with proceeds going toward The Chaplain Aubrey McLellan Soldier and Airman Assistance Fund, which provides grants and loans to National Guard families that are struggling financially.

The 'In God We Trust' license plate is an opportunity to show our national pride and to show our support for the thousands of troops and National Guard members serving our country -- and it's a way for us to help fellow North Carolinians by providing emergency assistance for National Guard families in need. I presented this bill in the Senate Finance Committee and on the Senate floor. It has passed the Senate and now goes to the House for consideration.

I am also sponsoring several other proposals to help support our military personnel and facilities, especially with the next round of federal base closings (BRAC) coming up next year.

Under those proposals the following would occur:

* \$2 million would be appropriated in the 04-05 budget to help fund the statewide effort and Allies for Cherry Point's Tomorrow (ACT) preparation for BRAC.

* One-third of motor fuel taxes collected at the state's military installations would be returned to those bases to

fund recreational and quality-of-life programs for troops and their families (SB 1157).

* A \$5 million Military Base Land Preservation Fund would be created to help military steer development away from bases and flight routes and to improve noise and safety problems for nearby residents (SB 1158).

* The Advisory Commission on Military Affairs would grow from nine to 15 members, including the Lieutenant Governor, a Veterans Affairs official and local government representatives (SB 1159).

* Military reservists assigned to North Carolina would qualify for in-state tuition at the state's community colleges and universities (SB 1160).

* Counties and cities must give military bases adequate notice of land-use planning changes (SB 1161).

On another topic, the Senate has approved an important health care initiative (Senate Bill 1098) to build a cardiovascular disease institute at East Carolina University and a cancer center at UNC Hospitals.

As a graduate of East Carolina University, I am proud of the positive impact the university and medical school have on our entire region and state. This bold initiative will provide great advances in education, research and treatment of cardiovascular diseases. Heart disease and stroke are among the leading causes of death in our state -- in eastern North Carolina in particular -- and our cancer mortality rates are well above the national average. Both projects are estimated to create 1,100 jobs combined.

The bill now moves to the House of Representatives for their consideration. I hope you will contact members of the House to express support for these initiatives.

I look forward to your feedback on these various proposals. And, as always, I welcome your thoughts on other measures we can pursue to strengthen our economy, improve education and provide quality health care.

Please contact me at the following address.

SENATOR SCOTT THOMAS

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Happy Birthday Bess!

On Saturday, June 12, friends and relatives joined Bess Dolgos in celebrating her eightieth birthday. Everyone had a wonderful time. Bess sent a special thank you to one and all.

To my family, neighbors, friends and such,

All of whom I love so much.

I send my thanks to one and all.

If I can remember your number I'll give you a call.

Your presence at my Birthday Blast

Created beautiful memories that are sure to last.

When your birthday slips on in

Let's get together and party again.

Sincerely,

Bess



Bess with her two sons, Nick and Mathew.



Guests gather at the situm after the Birthday Blast at the house.