

Plovers at a Glance--2007



This is the first 2007 edition of the bi-monthly report on the status of the federally threatened Western Snowy Plover at Point Reyes National Seashore (PORE). This first report will provide background information on the plight of the plovers and the history of the Snowy Plover Docent Program. Future reports will stick to stats only. Enjoy—Jess...

History

The National Park Service in collaboration with PRBO Conservation Science began monitoring plovers at the Seashore in 1986 in order to survey the overall health and distribution of the snowy plover population. According to the state and PORE accounts, the coastal population of the Western Snowy Plover was threatened in large due to habitat loss and degradation by development and invasive, non-native vegetation (European Beach grass and ice plant). Other factors contributing to the decline of plovers include predation pressures (disproportionate effect on small population sizes) and a number of human-related activities (i.e. dogs, kites, trampling) that cause plovers to flee their nests and use up important energy reserves. The subsequent listing of the bird as a federally threatened species led to a number of seasonal closures to humans and/or dogs on beaches during the critical breeding months. The Fish and Wildlife Service's Snowy Plover Recovery Plan has set population goals for a myriad of beaches from Washington to Baja, with PORE's goals set at 64 plovers, or 32 nesting pairs.

Over the years, PRBO and PORE have experimented with a variety of measures that would encourage plover survival and nesting rates, including providing exclosures around nests and removing invasive, non-native vegetation in order to open up more ideal habitat for nesting plovers. Other measures have included covering bovine feeding stations, in order to discourage raven activity, and the introduction of a docent program that would inform visitors to share the beach during the critical breeding season.

Since 2001, the Science Division, in collaboration with the Point Reyes National Seashore Association (PRNSA) has funded a Seasonal Park Guide position that aids park and PRBO biologists in creating awareness and interpreting the importance of this resource during the bird's critical breeding months: March-September. In our effort to spread coastal stewardship and conservation messages, the Park Guide is responsible for overseeing the Snowy Plover Docent Program. The goals of the program seek to:

- **Increase public awareness** for the Western Snowy Plover.
- **Generate appreciation** for nesting coastal species through interpretation.

- Reduce potential human impacts on plovers and their habitat by educating people about closures/exclosures.

Currently the program has eight returning docents and five new docents participating in the Snowy Plover Docent Program.

2007 Plover Season

The official 2007 breeding season kicked off with the first plover nest, which was initiated on April 3rd. PRBO Biologist Kate Peterlein and her intern are busily monitoring the plovers almost everyday. They survey the beach from North Beach to Abbott's Lagoon or Kehoe to Abbott's on any given day. The most active nests sites remain to be between North and Kehoe beaches, with the highest concentration within a mile of either side of the lagoon. While plovers nest in the wrack zone, above high-tide line (more exposed to elements), it is common to find the males with their broods of chicks foraging in the newly restored beach dunes, thanks to the efforts of Natural Resources Vegetation staff, crew, and volunteers. Memorial Day Weekend kicks off our docent season at Abbott's Lagoon Trailhead. Come by and see us, we need all the help we can get.

Current Stats

- 16 nests so far/ 2 failed for unknown reasons
- 7 nests are being incubated (23 potential chicks)
 - 1 nest is in the restored area
- 3 broods are running around the beach (9 chicks)
- 0 fledglings (able to fly and independent of male adult)
- 10 chicks lost for unknown reasons (most likely predation)

If you have more questions, or would like to go out with the PRBO biologist or myself, please e-mail me at Jessica_Taylor@nps.gov.

See ya on the beach...

