



Plovers at a Glance 2009



This is the first 2009 edition of the periodic report on the status of the federally threatened Western snowy plover at Point Reyes National Seashore (PRNS). This issue will provide background information on the plight of the plover as well as the history of the Snowy Plover Docent Program with stats from the current season.

History

The National Park Service in collaboration with PRBO Conservation Science began monitoring plovers at the Seashore in 1996 in order to survey the overall health and distribution of the snowy plover population. According to the state and PRNS accounts, the coastal population of the Western Snowy Plover was threatened in large part 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 federal listing of the bird as a threatened species led to a number of seasonal closures to humans and/or dogs on beaches during the critical breeding months, March through mid-September. The Fish and Wildlife Service's Snowy Plover Recovery Plan has set population goals for a myriad of beaches from Washington to Baja, with PRNS's goals set at 64 plovers, or 32 nesting pairs.

Over the years, PRBO and PRNS have experimented with a variety of measures that would encourage plover survival and nesting rates, including providing exclosures around nests to protect against predators and removing invasive, non-native vegetation in order to open up more ideal habitat for nesting plovers. Other measures have included altering dairy cow food sources, in order to discourage raven activity, and implementing a docent program that informs visitors about sharing the beach during the critical breeding season.

Since 2001, the PRNS, in collaboration with the Point Reyes National Seashore Association (PRNSA), have funded a Seasonal Park Guide position that aids 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.

On May 16, 2009 new and returning docents attended a day-long training session in which they learned about the docent program, the snowy plover and its natural history and other park related information. Currently, there are 9 returning and 7 new docents participating in the Snowy Plover Docent Program.

2009 Plover Season

The official 2009 breeding season kicked off with the first plover nest initiated on April 12. Last year, the snowy plovers at Point Reyes had a very tough reproductive year in which only 5 chicks fledged due mostly to predation and unfavorable weather conditions. PRNS Biologist Lacey Hughey and intern Amanda Bell, with the help of numerous volunteers, have been busy since March conducting surveys and monitoring the plovers on a near daily basis. While plovers nest in the wrack line, above the high-tide line, males with their broods of chicks in years past have been spotted foraging in the recently restored beach dunes. The 2009 breeding season began this past Memorial Day Weekend at Abbotts Lagoon with volunteers engaging visitors at the trailhead and roving the beaches and trails.

Current Stats

- 11–12 breeding pairs at PRNS (about equal to 2008)
- 2 chicks (1 brood) running around the beach - born May 27
- 7 nests found so far
 - 1 nest hatched (2 of 3 eggs)
 - 3 nests have failed (1 by raven, 1 by weather/winds, 1 by tides)
 - 3 nests are currently being incubated (9 eggs)

If you have any questions about the program, please call (415-464-5124)
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