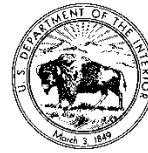


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News Release



For Immediate Release
May 28, 2009

Contact: Matt Baun (530)841-3119

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE SEEKS INDIVIDUALS RESPONSIBLE FOR TAKING EGGS FROM SNOWY PLOVER NEST AT CLAM BEACH

Arcata, Calif – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is asking for the public’s help in identifying two individuals observed removing eggs from the nest of a federally protected snowy plover earlier this month at Clam Beach, in Humboldt County, California.

A temporary wildlife monitoring station used to document nesting activity at plover sites captured footage (still frames shown below) of two individuals, believed to be women, flushing the incubating adult plover off the nest, and then taking what appear to be three un-hatched eggs. Anyone with information about the incident is asked to contact the Service’s Office of Law Enforcement at (916) 414-6660.

“Despite the warning signs posted at the main entrances at various public beaches, there have been an increasing number of reports of unlawful take of the snowy plover,” said Randy Brown, Acting Field Supervisor for the Service’s Arcata Fish and Wildlife Office (Arcata FWO).

The Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act and is also protected under the Federal Migratory Bird Act Treaty Act. The incident, which occurred on the afternoon of May 9, appears to be a clear violation of both Acts.

Brown noted that three snowy plover nests were destroyed, or partially destroyed during the 2008 breeding season (March through September), and two nests have been destroyed so far this year. Brown also said his office has investigated reports of destroyed plover nests as a result of them being stepped on, driven over, and trampled by unleashed dogs. In addition, an adult snowy plover was crushed in mid-February, by an ATV on Centerville Beach.

Several years of low reproductive success in Mendocino, Humboldt and Del Norte Counties have significantly decreased numbers of snowy plovers in northern California according to Jim Watkins, the recovery coordinator for the species at the Arcata FWO.

“Snowy plovers are not doing well in northern California,” said Watkins. “The local snowy plover population is being maintained by immigrants from other areas to the south, most likely San Francisco Bay. The local plover population is almost 100 percent uniquely marked with colored leg bands, so that each adult bird can be identified.”

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Watkins said information about local plover populations, nesting sites and nesting success is provided by research being conducted by Humboldt State University, with assistance from Mad River Biologists, and beach management agencies.

The Service is asking the photographed pair to identify themselves to law enforcement. If the public has information regarding this incident, or other incidents leading to the destruction of snowy plover nests, they are encouraged to contact Randy Brown, Acting Field Supervisor, at (707) 822-7201, or the Office of Law Enforcement at (916) 414-6660.

Tips for the Public

There are many ways to share North Coast Beaches and help protect the Western Snowy Plover.

From March 1 through September 30 (Breeding Season)

- Stay out of the signed nesting areas.
- Leave Pets at home or keep them on a leash.
- Keep vehicles on sand wetted by the last tide cycle.
- Keep kites well away from signed areas as they mimic flying predators.
- Do not camp or have fires near snowy plover nesting areas.
- Keep the beaches litter free to discourage predators.
- Check for local restrictions at nesting areas, as they vary from site to site.

Background Information on the Snowy Plover

- Snowy plovers historically nested on beaches along most of the Pacific coast. Now they are rarely seen.
- Plovers are small, lightly colored birds. They lay their eggs directly on dry sand areas of open beaches. They blend so well with their surroundings that they are can be stepped on or run over.
- Snowy plover parents take turns sitting on the nest for up to 30 days before the eggs hatch. When a parent is startled, it leaves the nest. The eggs are then left at risk to predators, weather and blowing sand. After hatching, the chicks will spend another 30 days growing and learning to fly. During this period the chicks remains at risk to predators and disturbance by people and their pets.
- The Arcata FWO is working to recover snowy plovers and has undertaken a number of steps to help in the recovery effort. Some of the local Arcata FWO projects have included: working with County, State, Humboldt State University and others, to install symbolic fencing at Clam Beach around the area's most productive chick rearing area; funding a docent program with Friends of the Dunes to increase public awareness of the western snowy plover and beach habitats; and funding increased Sheriffs' patrols of County beaches where western snowy plovers nest.

Photos: US Fish & Wildlife Service

