



NEWS RELEASE

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Increases Noted System Wide

State Parks' Management Efforts for Snowy Plover Showing Results Along California Coast

SACRAMENTO – Management measures implemented system wide by California State Parks and aimed at protecting the threatened western snowy plover shorebird continue to result in increases in both the number of nests and chicks, State Park officials announced today.

State Park officials said the following results were recorded for 2004, the most recent nesting season:

- Western snowy plover nesting was reported in 19 units managed by the Department, up from 17 units in 2003.
- A total of 886 total nests were reported in state park units, a 62 percent increase in the number of nests documented in 2003.
- Of the total nests, 523 were reported successful at hatching at least one egg, a 52 percent increase over the 344 successful nests reported in 2003. This was the same percentage increase as reported between 2002 and 2003.
- A total of 1,394 chicks were reported in 2004, a 43 percent increase over the number of chicks reported.

System wide, State Park officials said 32 percent of the 843 chicks that were either banded or otherwise intensively monitored were reported to have reached fledging age (about 30 days from hatching), down from a 55 percent fledging rate for the 346 chicks in 2003 primarily due to increased predation.

Currently, 30 state parks along the coast have special management actions in place, including visitor education and interpretation, park staff training, nest area monitoring and nest site protection. The Department's efforts to protect and restore populations of the threatened bird continue to yield promising results, according to biologists with the California State Parks who have compiled and reviewed reports on last year's nesting season.

The western snowy plover is about the size of a sparrow. It is pale gray-brown above and white below, with dark markings on its head and around its neck. Because of declining numbers -- it is estimated that, at most, there are only about 2,600 breeding plovers left along the entire Pacific Coast -- it is listed as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Of the 886 nests reported in units managed by the Department in 2004:

- Estero and Morro Bay area units reported 400 nests, 45 percent of the system wide total.

The largest number of nests were reported from Montana de Oro State Park, with 298 nests. Of these, 168 nests (or 60 percent) were successful at hatching at least one egg. This is up from a total of 150 nests last year, with 100 being successful. Nests this year were reported to have hatched 456 chicks, up from 260 chicks reported in 2003.

Other park units in this region with nesting reported in 2004 included the Estero Bay/Villa Creek Beach unit with a total of 64 nests (up from 34 nests in 2003), but only 16 successful nests (down from 17 nests in 2003). Morro Strand State Beach had a total of 38 nests in 2004 (slightly down from 40 nests in 2003), and eight successful nests (up from three nests in 2003). Forty-four chicks were reported at Estero, down from 54 chicks in 2003. Twenty chicks were reported at Morro Strand, up from nine chicks last year.

Reliable fledgling rates for these units were not available because chicks were not banded.

- Santa Cruz and Monterey Bay area units reported 247 nests.

Of these nests, 166 (66 percent) were successful in hatching 479 chicks, a 35 percent increase over the number of chicks hatched the previous year. The number of chicks fledged in 2004 (189 chicks) represents a 13 percent decrease over 2003.

The Santa Cruz/Monterey Bay area has the longest record of plover monitoring and protection in the state, dating back to the mid-1980s with the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO). Since then, State Parks and USFWS have become increasingly involved in cooperative monitoring and management activities in the larger study area, which includes State Park System units, other state lands, federal property, and other lands.

The area extends from Waddell Creek (Big Basin Redwoods SP) in the north to the City of Monterey in the south. Most nesting habitat lies along the extensive sandy beaches within the bay. PRBO prepares and publishes annual reports on nesting activities for the study area.

- Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area reported a total of 147 nests, with 110 being successful (75 percent). This is up from a total of 95 nests reported in 2003 and 63

being successful (66 percent). Nests this year produced 263 chicks, with 25 percent (66 chicks) fledging.

- San Diego area units reported a total of 42 nests.

At Silver Stand State Beach, 14 of the 24 reported nests were successful in hatching chicks. However, only nine of the 64 chicks produced reached fledging age. Heavy predation on the chicks from gull-billed terns was again this year the primary cause of poor fledging success.

At Border Field SP, 9 of the 18 nests reported were successful. Of the 26 chicks known to have been produced, only 15 percent were reported to have fledged, again primarily due to predation by gull-billed terns.

- San Mateo and Northern Santa Cruz area units reported 25 nests.

Half Moon Bay State Park reported 21 nests with 14 being successful (67 percent). Only one of the 37 reported chicks fledged.

Big Basin Redwoods State Park (Waddell Creek area) had one nest and it was successful in fledging one chick. Three nests were reported at Wilder Ranch State Park, with one nest being successful and one chick being fledged.

- Santa Barbara and Ventura area units reported 17 nests being initiated on property managed by State Parks.

As in past years, all nests were reported from McGrath State Beach. Twelve nests were successful (71 percent) and 32 chicks were reported.

- Mendocino and Sonoma area units reported a total of six nests.

Nesting was reported at Mackerricher State Park for the first time in many years. Four nests were initiated and two were successful. Three of the six chicks produced were reported to have fledged. For the second consecutive year, nesting was reported at Manchester State Park. Two nests were reported and both were successful at hatching chicks. However, no chicks fledged.

- Del Norte and Humboldt area units reported two nests.

One nest was reported from Little River State Beach and the other from Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park. This was the first nest reported at Prairie Creek in more than two decades. Both nests were successful and three chicks were reported to have fledged.

California State Parks over the years has implemented several management measures in its coastal parks that provide important nesting or wintering habitat for the bird.

These measures include fencing or roping off areas, restricting human activities that disturb the birds, predator control, prohibiting dogs in important habitat areas and increasing enforcement of existing dog leash laws on California state beaches. Of the approximately 2,600 snowy plovers nesting on the West Coast of the United States, more than 2,000 nest on the coastline of California. About one-quarter of the California coast is within State Parks jurisdiction.

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