

*Plovers are protected
by law, and safeguarding
their nesting habitat
requires the cooperation
of beach visitors.*

Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

GRAY DAVIS
Governor

MARY D. NICHOLS
Secretary for Resources

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Acting Director, California State Parks



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CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS For information call:
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Cover drawing by Carleton Eyster. Photography by Peter Knapp (plover) and Dave Dixon (plover nest).

Rules & Guidelines for Protecting the Snowy Plover



You have a role
in the survival of the
western snowy plover
on California beaches.



Rules Visitors Must Follow

Since snowy plover nesting coincides with the busy beach season, there are rules that visitors must follow to avoid or minimize impacts on the birds.

1. Dogs are prohibited on all California State Parks coastal beaches unless specifically authorized. Where authorized, dogs must be leashed.
2. Do not light fires or camp on the beach except in designated areas.
3. Stay out of fenced or posted habitat areas.
4. Fireworks are prohibited.
5. Do not feed any wildlife.

Failure to follow these rules may result in citations and fines.

Guidelines Visitors Should Follow

- Do not approach birds, nests or fencing. Avoid picnicking or sunbathing near plover nesting habitat.
- Equestrians must stay out of nesting areas. Observe posted restrictions and keep to wet sand in plover habitat.
- Do not fly kites, hang glide, or toss Frisbees or balls near snowy plover nesting habitat. Other activities causing disturbance may also be restricted.
- Dispose of garbage properly to avoid attracting plover predators.
- Do not collect kelp or driftwood from the beach; it provides nesting and feeding habitat for snowy plovers.

THE CHALLENGE TO SURVIVE

The Pacific coast population of the western snowy plover is listed as a threatened species and is protected by the federal Endangered Species Act. California State Parks has a legal obligation to protect snowy plovers. **Please report to park staff any plover nests, threats or disturbances to plovers.**

Snowy plovers have lived on California beaches for thousands of years, but today human use of their remaining beach habitat seriously threatens their survival. Once numbering in the thousands, less than 1500 breeding plovers remain. Prior to 1970 they nested at 53 locations in California, while today they nest in only half as many sites. California State Parks beaches provide much of the suitable habitat remaining in California for this small shorebird.

The western snowy plover is a sparrow-sized, light-colored shorebird with dark patches on either side of the neck, behind the eye, and on the forehead. Plovers blend in with their surroundings so well that they are extremely hard to see, making it easy for unsuspecting visitors to disturb the birds or even crush the eggs and chicks, never realizing the damage they've caused.

Plovers can be found on flat, open, coastal beaches, in dunes, and near stream mouths. In the spring and summer, loose colonies of plovers lay 1-3 eggs in nests that are simple scrapes in the sand. Eggs hatch in about 27 days, and within hours the tiny chicks are on the beach searching for food. Chicks are on their own in 30 days. The breeding season lasts from early spring to mid-fall, coinciding with the time of greatest human use on California beaches.

THREATS AND PROTECTIONS

Besides the presence of humans, domestic animals on the beach also pose a problem. Dogs chase and may catch birds or destroy nests, cats prey on birds and chicks, and even leashed dogs may frighten plovers off their nests. Native predators such as skunks, crows, ravens and shrikes join exotic predators such as the non-native red fox to prey upon plovers and their chicks, and kites flown above look like predators. Other threats include beach fires and fireworks. During the winter, when the plovers are resting and feeding, continual disturbances use up their stored reserves and may lower their breeding success the following year.

To protect the plover, California State Parks monitors plover numbers and the success of their breeding efforts, fences individual nests or larger nesting areas to keep visitors away, removes exotic plants that affect plover nesting habitat, and initiates control programs if predators threaten chick survival. Some recreational activities are restricted, and some portions of beaches are closed to dogs to protect important nesting areas. California State Parks is working closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others to ensure the survival of the plover on California public beaches.

