

Sharing the beach with Western Snowy Plovers

December 19, 2021



You've heard about the western snowy plover, right? If not, don't worry, here are the basics. Western snowy plovers are small, federally threatened birds that live on beaches from Washington all the way to Baja California, Mexico. Here on North Coast beaches, plovers breed from March 1 to September 15. During the fall and winter, these little birds are focused on staying fed, warm, and safe through the harsh weather. To keep full, plovers forage on invertebrates in the wrack line, the area along the beach where debris are deposited during high tide. To keep sheltered from the wind and cold and disguised from predators, plovers often huddle down in sand depressions or sit behind beach debris or small dunes.

Snowy plovers aren't our only feathered friends on local beaches this winter. They can, however, be distinguished from the others by their sandy-gray upper plumage, white undersides, and blackish bill and legs. Compare these characteristics to other species you might see on beaches this time of year:

Many threats to shorebirds, snowy plovers included, persist even during the non-breeding season. Disturbance from humans and our canine companions has been shown to reduce feeding rates and body condition in shorebirds. This reduced wintertime foraging success is suspected to impact breeding success.

Let's work together to give our shorebird neighbors the best chance of a successful winter and a future breeding season. Here's what you can do to help:

Know beach-specific dog rules before you go. If dogs are permitted, follow the leash rules. Never allow your dog(s) to chase birds.

- Do not approach birds.
- Do not leave or bury trash or food scraps on the beach. Garbage attracts predators

such as gulls, crows, ravens, and skunks. Please dispose of all trash properly and do not inadvertently (or intentionally) feed wildlife.

- If you're on a beach that allows vehicles, drive 'low and slow', staying on the hardpacked sand below the high tide line where plovers and other shorebirds forage.
- Walk on the wet, hard-packed sand below the wrack line.
- Check and follow beach-specific camping and campfire regulations.