

PLIGHT OF THE PLOVERS



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A BIRD IN DANGER

The Western Snowy Plover (*Chadrius alexandrinus nivosus*) is a small, pale shorebird with a sad story to tell. Once numbering in the thousands, it is estimated that only 1200 - 1600 of this species' coastal population survives along the Pacific coast from

Washington to Baja California. Almost 5% of them reside on Ocean Beach during their non-nesting season!

Their coastal habitat of flat, sandy beaches has been dramatically reduced by urban development, the spread of non-native dune

plants and increased human recreational use. As these beach habitats become more popular for people, roaming dogs, and off-road vehicle use, plovers are increasingly threatened.

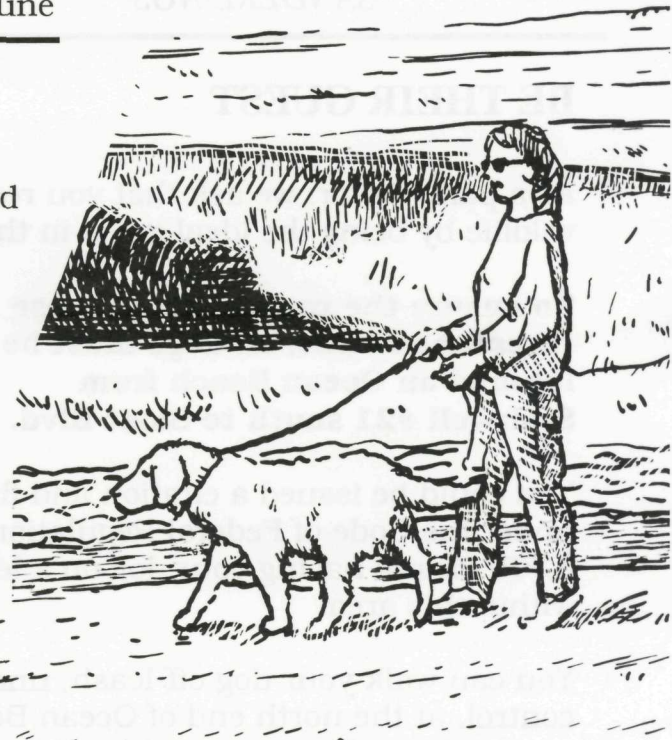
OCEAN BEACH: Your National Park

Ocean Beach is a 5-mile strip of coastline on the western edge of San Francisco extending from the Cliff House to Fort Funston. It is part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) and is managed by the National Park Service.

In March 1993, the coastal population of the Snowy Plover was listed as a threatened species, and is now protected under the Endangered Species Act.

The National Park Service was established in part to protect the last of America's vanishing wildlife, and faces an important challenge in helping the plovers.

You can help protect the Snowy Plover on Ocean Beach by understanding this bird's plight.



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN OCEAN BEACH SNOWY PLOVER

During their months in San Francisco (July through April), Snowy Plovers spend their days like we would want to -- eating and resting. They build up fat reserves for breeding and then move up and down the coast and to inland salt flats to nest.

When resting, they choose depressions in the sand, such as shallow footprints, where they are camouflaged and out of the wind. If disturbed, they will usually walk and "bump" one another from one depression to another.

It is imperative that the Snowy Plovers do not become agitated enough to take flight as this uses up valuable stored energy reserves and could jeopardize their breeding success.

Park visitors, such as joggers, walkers, and horseback riders, do not seem to bother the birds very much. However, dogs focus their chase on plovers and other shorebirds, greatly disturbing them.



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IDENTIFYING THE WESTERN SNOWY PLOVER

"Is that a plover or a sanderling?"

On Ocean Beach, Snowy Plovers often "hang out" with other shorebirds, especially sanderlings. The two may be easily confused, although with binoculars the differences are easier to see. **Snowy Plovers** stand about 6 inches high with pale backs and plump profiles. They have dark markings across the forehead, behind the eyes, and forming a partial breast band. **Sanderlings** stand around 8 inches tall, with longer beaks and less distinctive markings.



SNOWY PLOVERS

If these shorebirds are resting hunkered down in depressions in the sand, they are almost impossible to distinguish from each other, as they both have the light sandy camouflage coloring on their backs. Watch their feeding behavior, though. Sanderlings will sprint together in the surf to snatch up the exposed crustaceans in the retreating waves. Plovers will pause, look, run, and seize their prey -- mostly flies and other insects on the kelp and other debris left by the high tide.



SANDERLINGS

Photos courtesy of Gary R. Nichols

BE THEIR GUEST

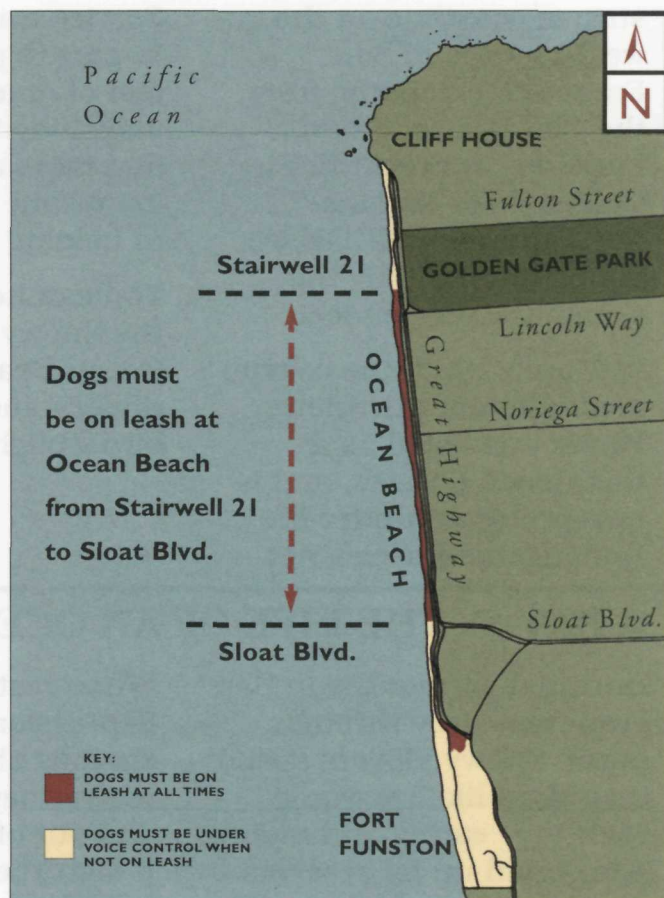
As a park visitor, we ask that you respect the wildlife by being the ideal guest in their home.

To ensure the protection of these threatened birds, all dogs must be leashed on Ocean Beach from Stairwell #21 south to Sloat Blvd.

You could be issued a citation and fined under the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) for not having your dog on a leash within this area.

You can walk your dog off-leash, under voice control, at the north end of Ocean Beach and south of the Sloat parking lot until you reach the Bank Swallow Habitat Restoration Site.

Do not collect or remove any surf-cast kelp, driftwood, or other natural debris as many birds, including the plovers, will forage off of it. You can also be sensitive to the needs of shorebirds by not flying your kite near them. The birds see a kite as an attacking predator.



If you notice any disturbance or threat to the plovers, please call (415) 561-5505. If you want to help out even more, join the NPS Snowy Plover Monitoring Team or help us educate others about this bird's plight.

There are a host of other volunteer opportunities within your park. Just call the Volunteer Office at (415) 556-3535 for more information.

Perhaps some day this story will have an inspirational ending:

"The Might of the Plovers!"

YOU can make the Difference!