

California State Parks
Western Snowy Plover Management
2003 Systemwide Annual Report Overview

Final 1-23-04

Background

- About one half of the Pacific coast breeding population of the WSP (4,000 birds) nest in the United States, the remainder on the coast of Mexico.
- About 1,800 birds (90%) of the birds nesting in the United States nest on the coastline of California.
- 33% of the 133 important “recovery locations” for WSP in California, as identified in the draft (May 2001) USFWS Recovery Plan, include lands in 45 State Park System units managed by the Department.
- 30 of the above 45 State Park System units are in “recovery locations” where goals have been established in the Recovery Plan for breeding bird numbers. The remaining 15 units are in recovery locations thought to provide only winter habitat or are locations where breeding goals have not yet been established.

Highlights for 2003

Management Activities

- **Public Education.** Continued to distribute WSP brochures developed last year by the Department that provides information to the public on the threatened status of WSP, on special rules and regulations in-place to provide increased protection of important habitat, especially nesting sites, and on what they can do to help minimize impacts.
- **Training.** Continued to provide WSP training to field staff, concessionaires, volunteers and others working in units with WSP habitat on basic natural history, stewardship responsibilities and precautions that must be observed when working around WSP habitat. Training provided to several hundred employees.
- **Field Management.** Continued WSP management programs at priority coastal units. Management actions included nest monitoring activity and special nest area protection (warning and interpretive signs and brochures, enforcement, fencing, nest enclosures, and predator control, as appropriate. WSP winter surveys are conducted in these units as well as others.

Major Results

WSP nesting was reported from 17 units managed by the Department in 2003, one unit more than last year.

A total of 548 total nests were reported in state park units, a 24 % increase in the number of nest documented in 2002.

Of the total nests, 344 were reported successful at hatching at least one egg, a 52% increase over 2002.

A total of 973 chicks were reported, an increase of 516 chicks from that reported in 2002. One major reason for this increase was that counts from Montana de Oro State Park were not made in 2002 but were in 2003 (260 chicks). However, the remaining increase of 256 chicks was due to more nests being reported and a higher hatching success rate.

Systemwide, 52% of the chicks that were either banded or others wise careful monitored (710 chicks) were reported to have reached fledging age (about 30 days from hatching), up from 35% in 2002.

Of the 548 nests reported in 2003:

- 320 nests (58%) were in units in San Luis Obispo County.

The most successful of these nests were in Oceano Dunes SVRA and Montana de Oro SP, where 66% of the reported nests hatched at least one chick.

At Oceano, 95 nests were reported, with 63 being successful. This is up from a total of 35 nests reported in 2002 and 25 being successful. Nests this year produced 162 chicks, with at least 107 (66%) of them reaching fledging age. Last years numbers were 62 chicks and 35 fledglings (56%).

At Montana de Oro, 150 nests were reported, with 67% (100 nests) being successful. This is up from a total of 109 nests last year, with 28-40% being successful. Increased success is attributed in large part to predator (skunk and red fox) removal efforts. The 150 nests this year were reported to have 260 chicks. The number of chicks that actually fledged was not documented because of the difficulty of counting chicks in this area once they have left their nests. Chicks were not banded.

Other park units in this region with nesting reported in 2003 included the Estero Bay/Villa Creek Beach unit with 34 nests, 17 being successful, and Morro Strand SB with 40 nests and only 3 being successful due mainly predation by crows.

- 161 nests (29%) were in units in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties.

Of these nests, 114 (71%) were successful in hatching 356 chicks, a 40% increase over the number of chicks hatched the previous year. The number of chicks fledged in 2003 (218 chicks) represents a 132% increase over 2002.

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. Since then, State Parks and USFWS have become increasingly involved in cooperative monitoring and management activities in the larger study area which includes State Parks 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. A few pocket beaches north of the City of Santa Cruz support some nesting. Intensive monitoring efforts in this area provides a comprehensive assessment of nesting activity and results. Adult WSP and their chicks are tagged with identifying leg bands (necessary for the most reliable information on numbers of chicks hatched and their fate). PRBO prepares and publishes annual reports on nesting activities for the study area.

In 2003, 53% of the total nests documented in the larger study area were on State Parks System lands.

Nest success on DPR lands in the study area was 71% and 68% on non-DPR lands. Fledgling success on DPR lands was about 63%, significantly higher than the 46% on non-DPR lands.

- 36 nests (7%) were in units in San Diego County.

At Silver Stand SB, all of the 22 nests reported were successful in hatching chicks, up from the 2002 nesting season when only 12 out of 24 nests were successful. However, like last year, less than 15% chicks produced reached fledging age primarily due to heavy predation by gull-billed terns.

At Border Field SP, 9 (64%) of the 14 nests reported were successful. Of the 23 chicks known to have been produced, 3-4 chicks (about 15%) were reported to have fledged.

- The remaining 31 nest (6%) were from Little River SB (4 nests, 1 chicks fledged), Manchester SP (1 nest, 1 chicks fledged), Half Moon Bay SB (13 nests, 10 chicks fledged; up from 4 nests with 2 chicks fledged in 2002), and McGrath SB (13 nests, 4 chicks; up from 2 nests reported in 2002).

The Department's complete 2003 Annual Report on systemwide western snowy plover management actions, results and recommendations for the next breeding season is on file in the Natural Resources Division in headquarters.