

California State Parks
Western Snowy Plover Management
2004 Systemwide Annual Report Overview

2-15-05

Management Activities

- **Public Education.** Continued to distribute western snowy plover (WSP) brochures developed in 2002 by the Department providing 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 and Monitoring.** 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. WSP monitoring information is obtained through cooperation and collaboration between State Parks, Point Reyes Bird Observatory Conservation Science, and other conservation organizations, agencies and volunteers.

Major Results

WSP nesting was reported in 19 units managed by the Department, up from 17 units in 2003. Nesting was reported for the first time in many years at Prairie Creek Redwoods and MacKerricher State Parks.

A total of 886 total nests were reported in state park units, a 62% 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% 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% increase over the number of chicks reported.

Systemwide, 32% 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% fledging rate for the 346 chicks in 2003. The decrease in fledging rate was primarily due to predation, despite continued predator control efforts in many locations.

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

- Estero and Morro Bay area units reported 400 nests, 45% of the systemwide total.

The largest number of nests were reported from Montana de Oro State Park, with 298 nests. Of these, 168 nests (or 60%) 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 8 successful nests (up from 3 nests in 2003). Only 44 chicks were reported at Estero, down from 54 chicks in 2003. Twenty chicks were reported at Morro Strand, up from 9 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%) were successful in hatching 479 chicks, a 35% increase over the number of chicks hatched the previous year. The number of chicks fledged in 2004 (189 chicks) represents a 13% 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.

In 2004, 60% of the total nests documented in the larger study area (State Park and other lands) were on State Park System lands, up slightly from 55% in 2003.

Nest success on DPR lands in the study area was 66%, and for no-DPR lands it was 69%. Fledgling success on State Park lands was 40%, essentially the same as on non-DPR lands (39%).

- Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area reported a total of 147 nests, with 110 being successful (75%). This is up from a total of 95 nests reported in 2003 and 63 being successful (66%). Nests this year produced 263 chicks, with 25% (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 9 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 fledgling success.

At Border Field SP, 9 of the 18 nests reported were successful. Of the 26 chicks known to have been produced, only 15% 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%). Only 1 of the 37 reported chicks fledged.

Big Basin Redwoods State Park (Waddell Creek area) had 1 nest and it was successful in fledging 1 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%) and 32 chicks were reported. Reliable information on fledgling success was not obtained because chicks were not banded.

- Mendocino and Sonoma area units reported a total of 6 nests.

Nesting was reported at Mackerricher State Park for the first time in many years. Four nests were initiated and 2 were successful. Three of the 6 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 2 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 over two decades. Both nests were successful and 3 chicks were reported to have fledged.

The Department's complete 2004 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 Headquarters.