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## **Rehabbed Snowy Plovers are Released** *The rare birds recently hatched at the Oregon Coast Aquarium*

*Newport, Oregon* – Two Western Snowy Plover chicks that hatched at the Oregon Coast Aquarium last June were released this week by U.S. Fish & Wildlife biologists; one in Washington and another in Oregon. The two plover chicks were rescued after being abandoned, and later two more abandoned eggs were hatched and reared in the Aquarium’s new Western Snowy Plover Exhibit. The second pair of plovers that were rescued will also be released after they have matured sufficiently.

The bird released in Oregon was brought back to the location where it was found as a hatchling north of Florence. When it was found, one of its siblings was dead and there were no adults present. It appeared to have been a predation event. “Before we released it, we color banded it so it could be identified in the future,” said biologist David Lauten, Oregon State University Faculty Research Assistant and the Oregon Natural Heritage Information Center. “This is not the first one we’ve done, but it’s always good to see a bird make it to fledging and get released,” said Lauten.

The Western Snowy Plover is a native shore bird that lives on the beach year-round. Recent counts indicate that only a total of about 150-200 birds remain on the entire coast of Oregon. The main reason for their declining population is loss of habitat. Snowy plovers need flat continuous areas of sand with no grass. They used to inhabit Oregon’s beaches up and down the coastline, but developments and introduced European beach grass have destroyed much of their habitat.

The Aquarium’s new Western Snowy Plover Exhibit was designed and constructed in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Western Snowy Plover Working Team. The exhibit will inform the public about the threats facing the Western Snowy Plover in Oregon and throughout the range and provide the opportunity for the public to observe Snowy Plovers in a natural setting.

Aquarium Director of Animal Husbandry, Jim Burke said the snowy plover exhibit and care has been challenging. “However, we did not do this alone.” Burke credited scientists at both ODFW and USFWS. “This interagency cooperation provided assistance both scientifically and financially and will benefit the Aquarium for years to come. Excellence in conservation is something we talk about a lot and strive for, and this is a great example of it.”

The Aquarium’s Curator of Birds, Karen Anderson, says she hopes the exhibit will introduce people to this remarkable bird and show how we can restore their dwindling population. “The birds do well when we give them a little room—they’re actually very hardy,” says Anderson, who has been

involved in the rescue and rehabilitation of several other Snowy Plovers in the past few years. In 2002 a rescued hatchling was raised and returned to Bandon where it was later seen nesting. In 2004 two adult birds were brought in with leg injuries. They both needed amputation of a leg, and both recovered and began bearing weight on the remaining limb immediately. They made amazingly quick recoveries and were released back into the wild, and one has since been seen tending a nest. In August 2004, the Aquarium cared for two abandoned hatchlings rescued from Ledbetter Point in Washington. They were also released back into the wild. These are success stories that Anderson cites as the impetus for an on-going project to rescue and rehabilitate snowy plovers at the aquarium and the new Western Snowy Plover exhibit. The exhibit is located in a sunny spot and is enclosed by a mesh that contains the birds, yet allows visitors to see them.

The Oregon Coast Aquarium is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit educational attraction dedicated to the highest quality aquatic and marine science programs for recreation and education so the public better understands, cherishes, and conserves the world's natural marine and coastal resources. Contact: Cindy Hanson, Public Relations Manager, at (541) 867-3474 ext. 5224 Visit the Aquarium web site for more information [www.aquarium.org](http://www.aquarium.org).

**Image Caption:** Oregon State University Faculty Research Assistant, David Lauten of the Oregon Natural Heritage Information Center releases a rehabilitated western snowy plover. Photography credit: Liz Kelly of the US Fish & Wildlife Service Newport Field Office.