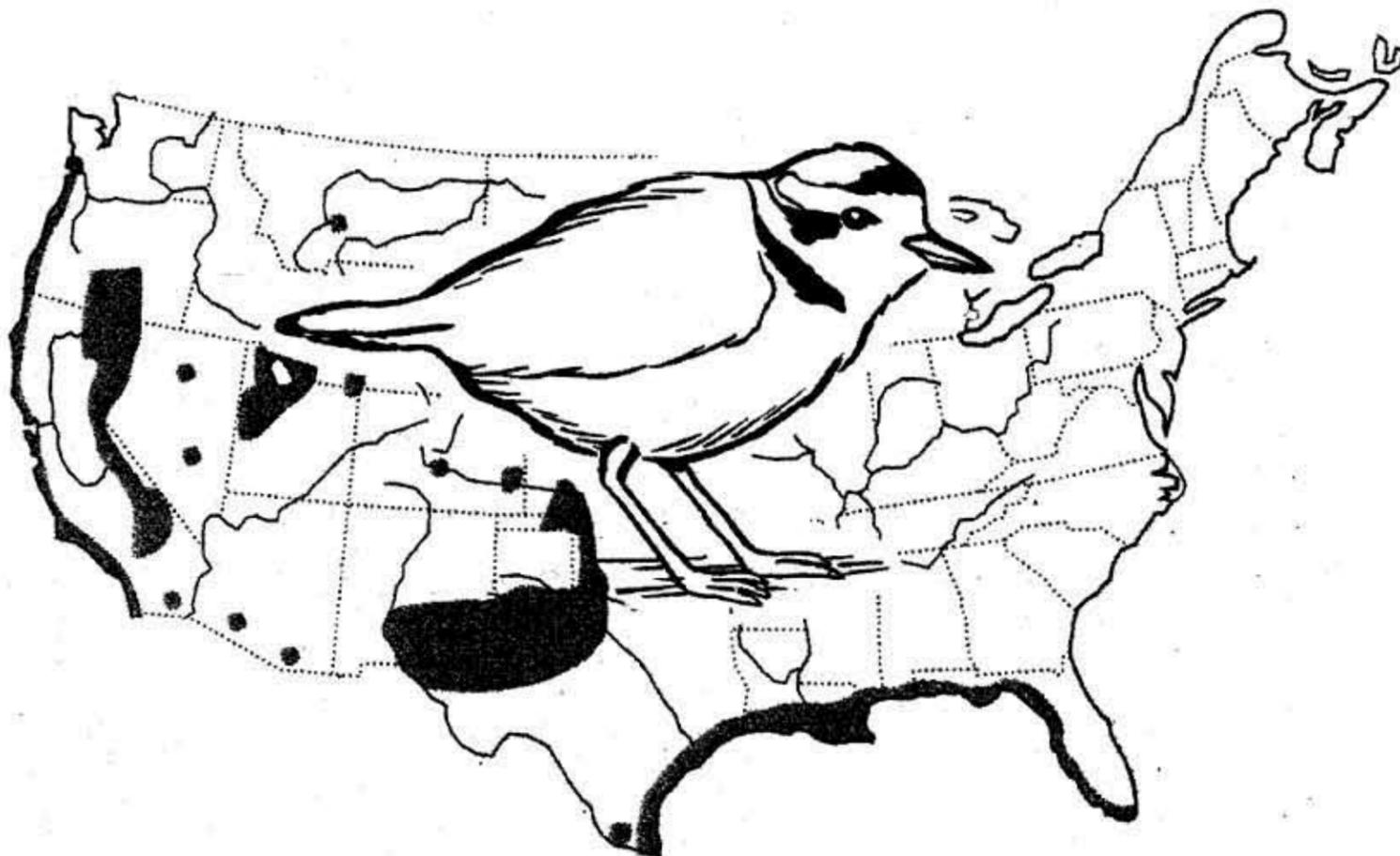




**THE BEACH
BREED ON
FEED AND**

SNOWY PLOVERS

Snowy Plover Distribution in the United States



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photographs by Clair Postmus.
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Visit the Nature Center, 3333 Sanibel-Captiva Road.

Did you know that snowy plovers...

(*Charadrius alexandrinus* - char-AD-ree-us alex-AN-dreen-us):

- are listed as a threatened species in the state of Florida?

As of 2004, Florida has only an estimated 200 pairs of snowy plovers.

- are small, sand (snowy)-colored birds that are hard to see unless they are moving?

Adult snowy plovers measure about six inches in length and weigh 1 1/2 ounces (42 grams) - *only as much as six quarters*. Their "camouflage" coloring helps protect them from predators (animals that would eat or harm them).

- make their nests directly on the beach by scraping a small depression in the sand?

Snowy plover eggs are vulnerable to predators, humans, and dogs.

- are capable of breeding (producing young) when they are eleven months old?

The average life span of a snowy plover is 2.7 years. The oldest plover recorded was a 15-year-old male.

- breed on Sanibel but not on neighboring islands, such as Captiva or Fort Myers Beach?

These threatened birds need a *natural beach* with a *gradual slope* (3 degrees or less). *Sanibel Island has the only significant breeding snowy plover population in southwest Florida.*

- nest between the high tide wrack line and dune vegetation on Sanibel?

People, dogs, kites and beach furniture should not be in this area during snowy plover breeding season (*February through August*).

- lay cream-colored eggs with black speckles that make them hard to see on the beach?

Snowy plovers usually lay three 1/8 inch (33mm) oval eggs, each weighing 8 1/2 grams.

- live year-round on Sanibel and nest from mid-February until the end of August?

During snowy plover nesting season, humans also want to use the beach.

- make easy prey (food) for a number of predators?

Crows, night-herons, gulls, ghost crabs, ants, snakes, and raccoons eat snowy plover eggs, chicks and, sometimes, adults. Snowy plover parents pretend to have a "broken wing" in order to lure a predator away from chicks.

- may abandon their nests if they are stressed by humans, dogs, kites or predators?

Human activity and beach furniture near staked-off, protected areas can disturb nesting birds. *If an adult is off its nest for more than a few moments, its eggs will cook in the sun's heat.*

- perceive dogs as predators, even when the dogs are leashed?

Please keep dogs well away from protected areas on the beach.

- see kites flying near or over their nests as predators?

Please fly kites as far away from staked-off sites as possible.

- are usually silent except when they have chicks?

Parents make a *purrr purrr* sound to call their chicks. Chicks *peep* until they fledge (are able to fly).

- take 28 to 32 days to hatch?

One recorded nest took 36 days. Chicks weigh only as much as a quarter (7 grams) when they hatch.

- start to run about and feed themselves almost immediately after hatching?

Snowy plovers eat small insects and crustaceans.

- fledge when they are four to five weeks old?

Fledglings are the size of adults, but have shorter tails.

Here's how you can avoid stressing Snowy Plovers:

Stay out of the area between the dune vegetation and the high tide wrack line.

Place beach furniture/umbrellas below the high tide wrack line.

Keep dogs away from staked-off nesting areas.

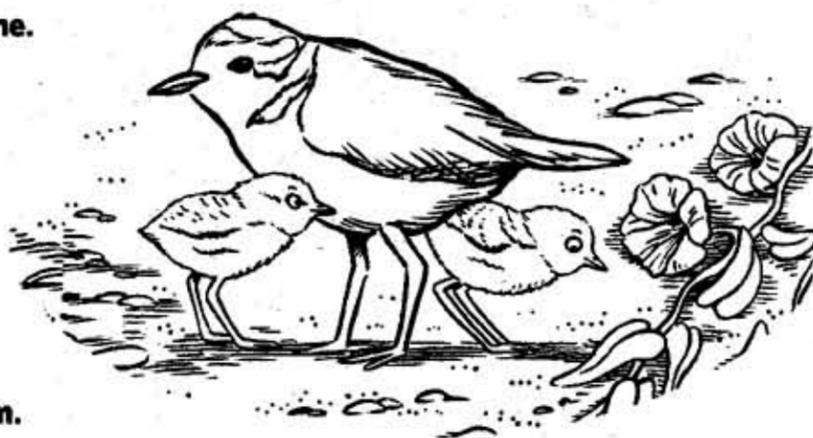
Resist picking up snowy plover eggs or chicks.

Refrain from chasing snowy plover adults and chicks.

Play games and fly kites well away from snowy plover nesting enclosures.

Admire snowy plovers from afar, but avoid approaching them.

Build a ramp in your sandcastle moat, or in any hole you dig in the beach, so that snowy plover chicks can climb out.

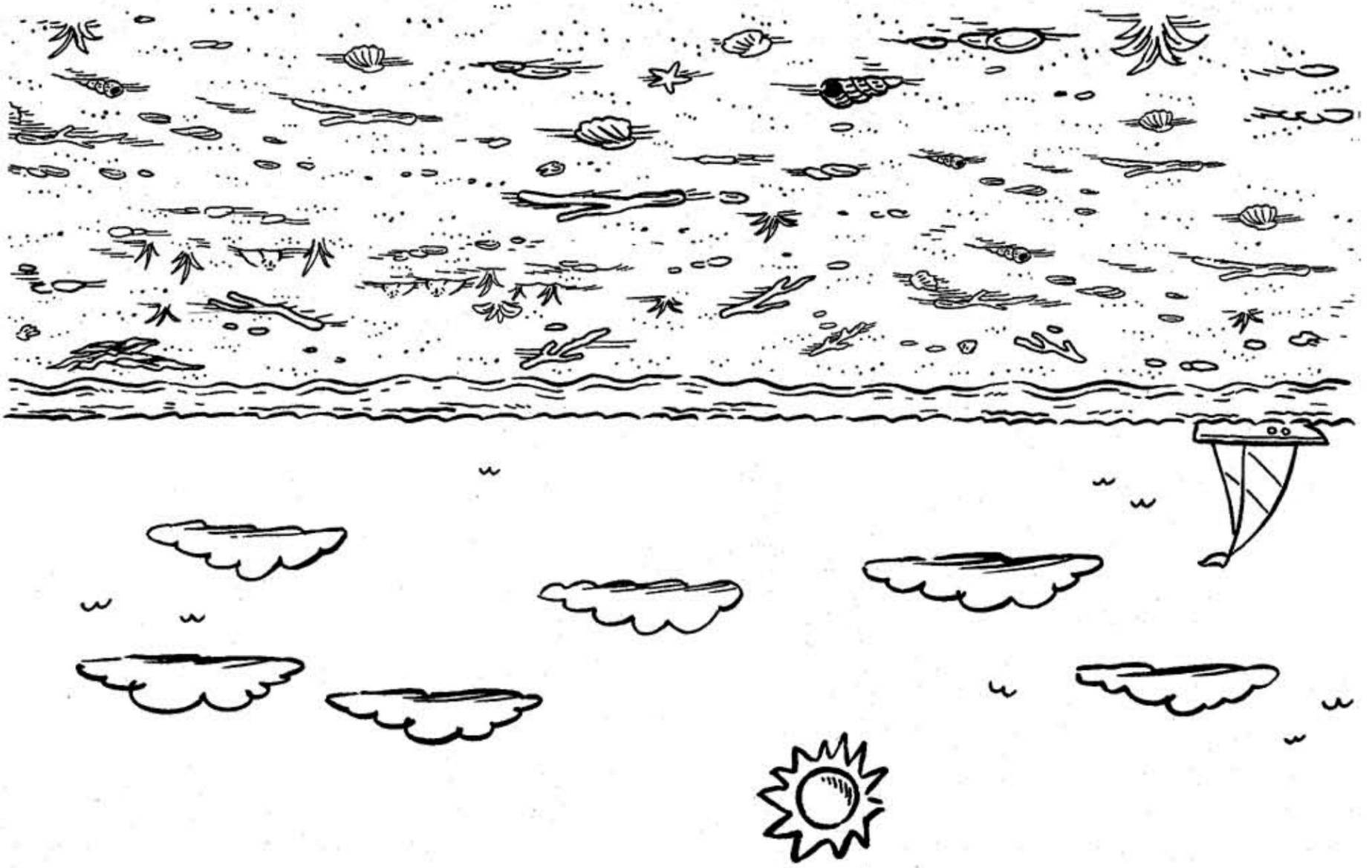


WHAT WILL YOU DO TO HELP SNOWY PLOVERS?

Report snowy plover nests that have not been staked-off to the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF), 472-2329.

Phone the Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (CROW), 472-5133, if you see an injured snowy plover or chick.

Can you find the birds in this picture?

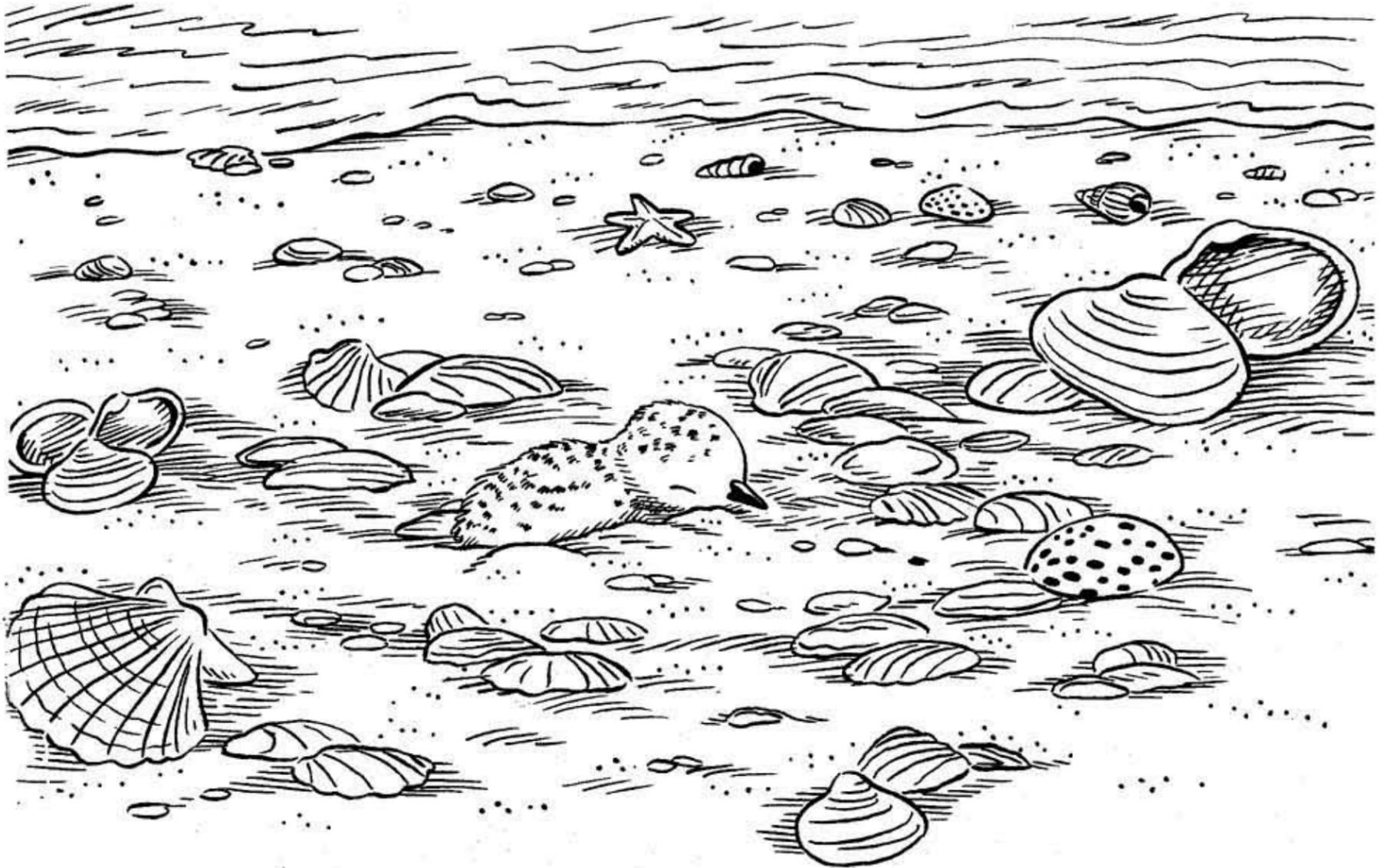


Four to five weeks after it hatches, a snowy plover chick is able to escape predators by flying



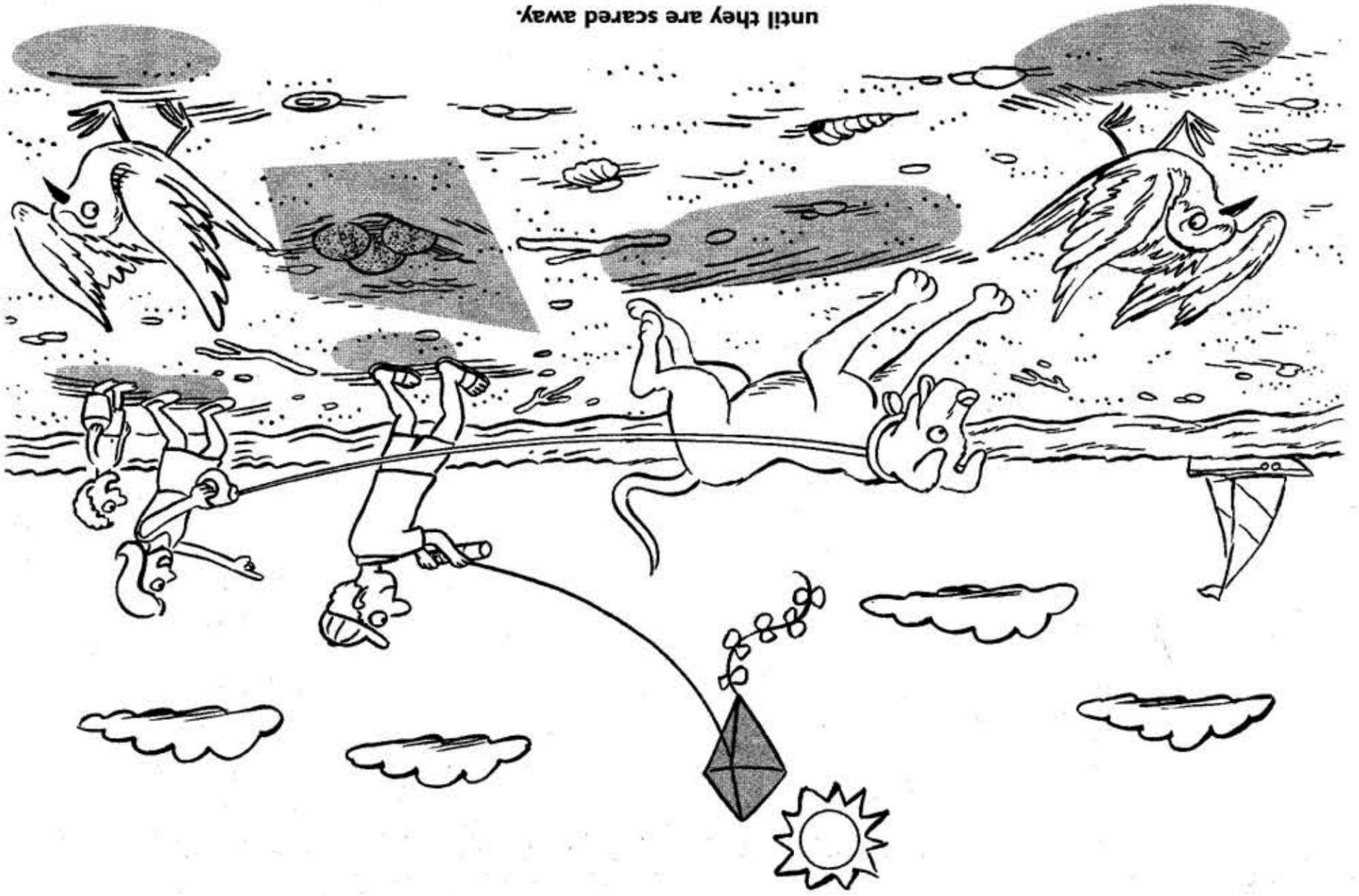


Snowy plovers are so small and pale, they are hard to see -

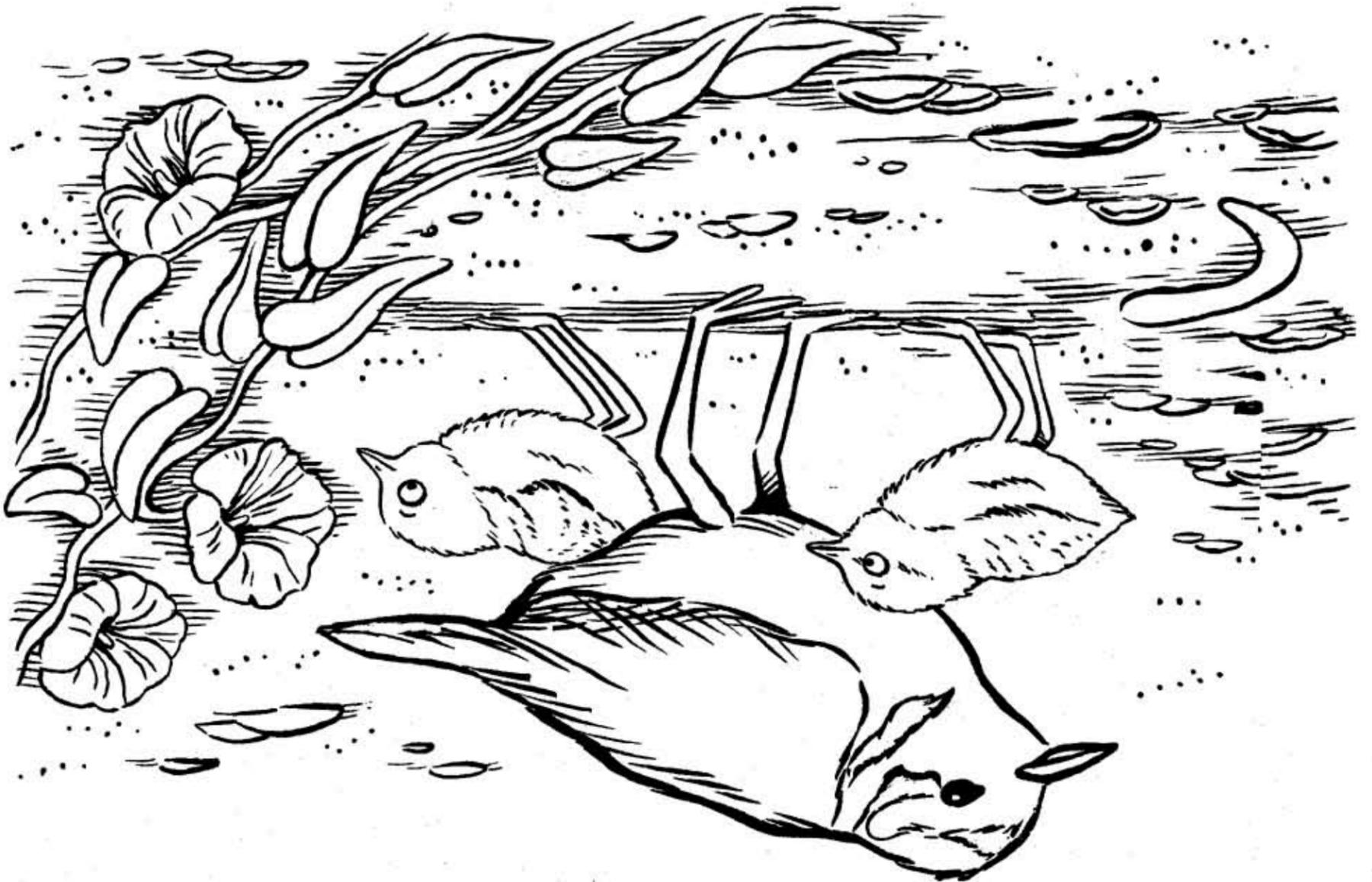


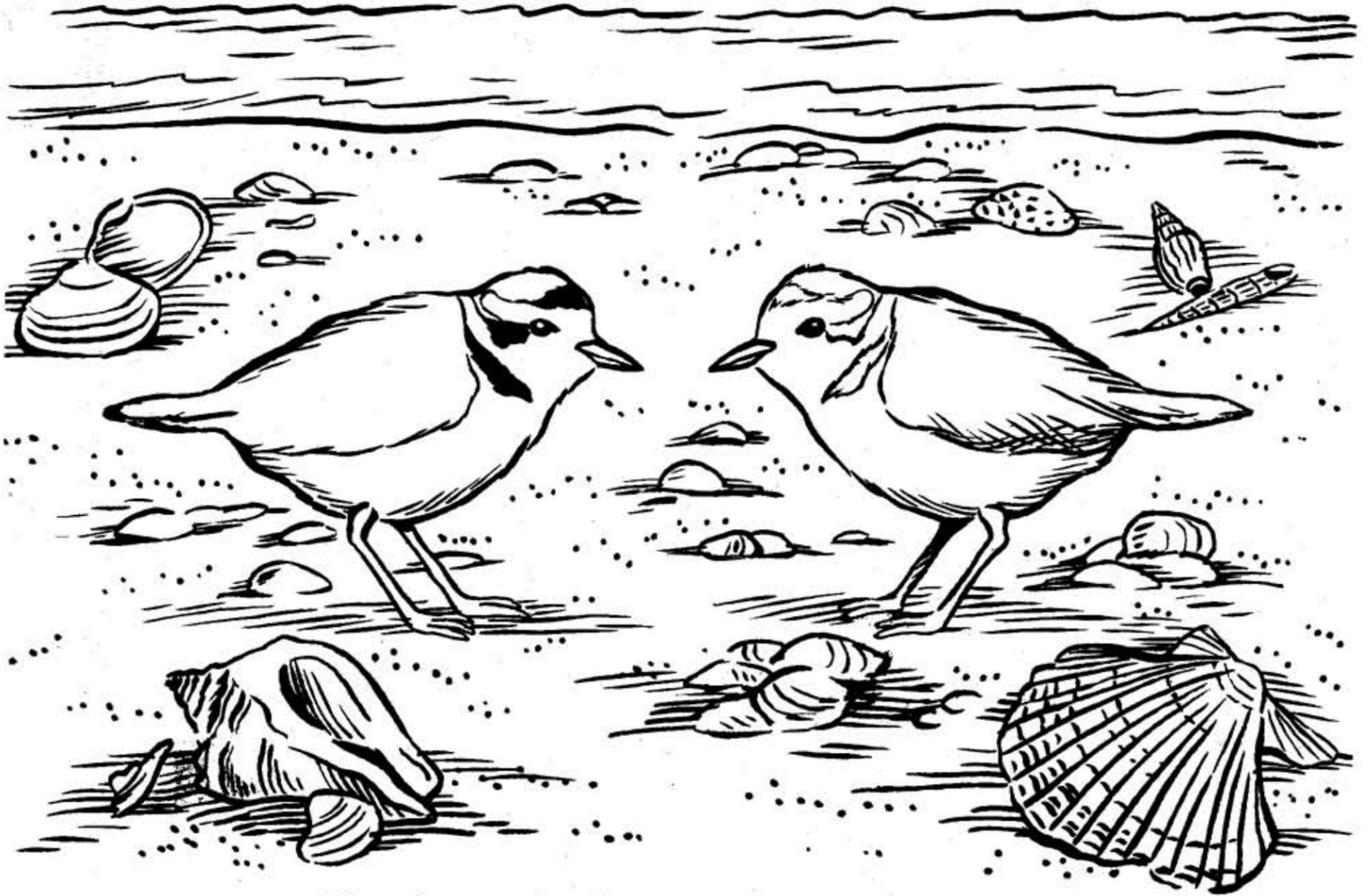
To avoid predators, a chick may flatten onto the sand and look just like a seashell (camouflage).

until they are scared away.

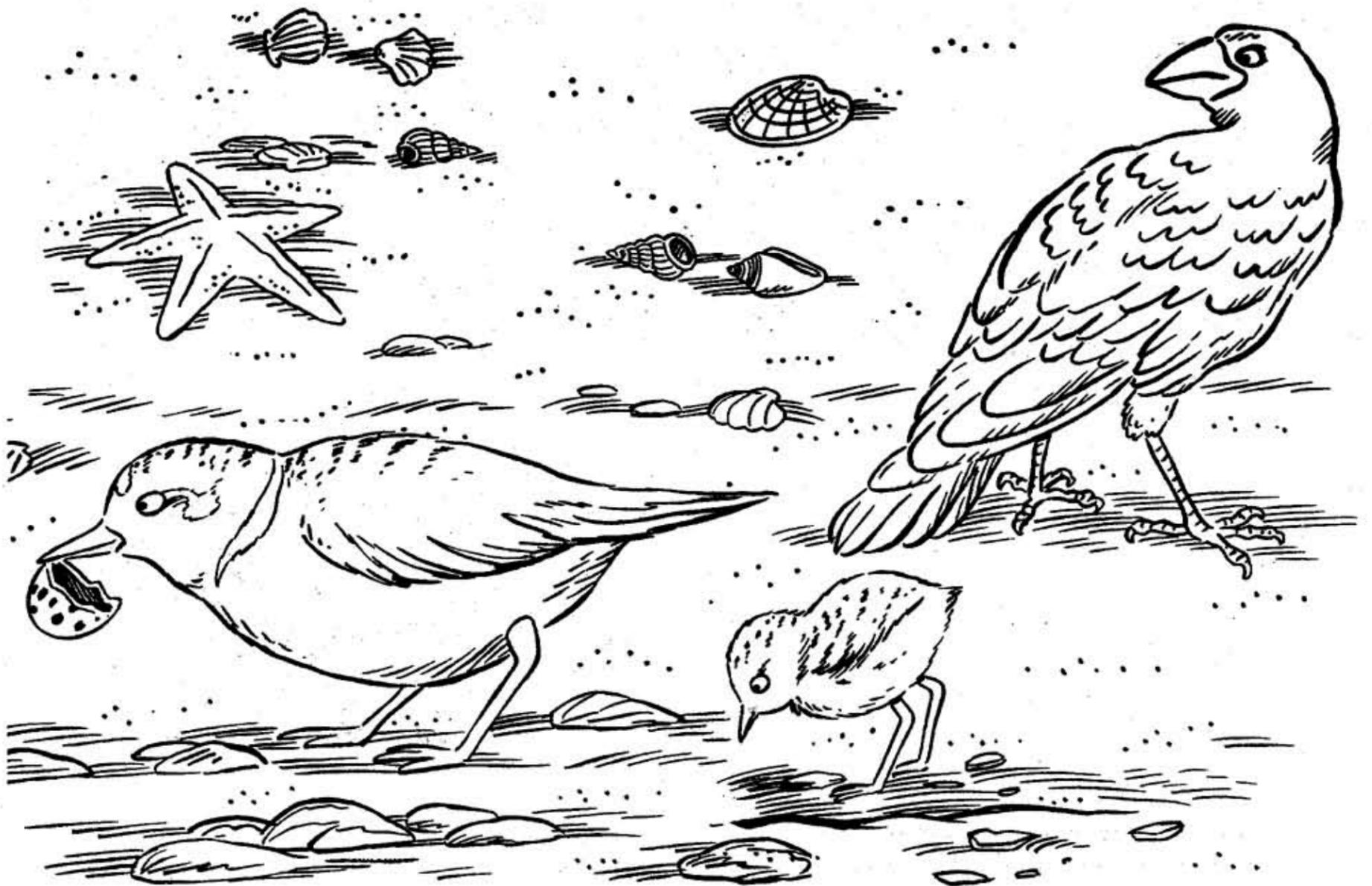


Chicks sometimes snuggle under their parents (brood), for comfort or for protection.



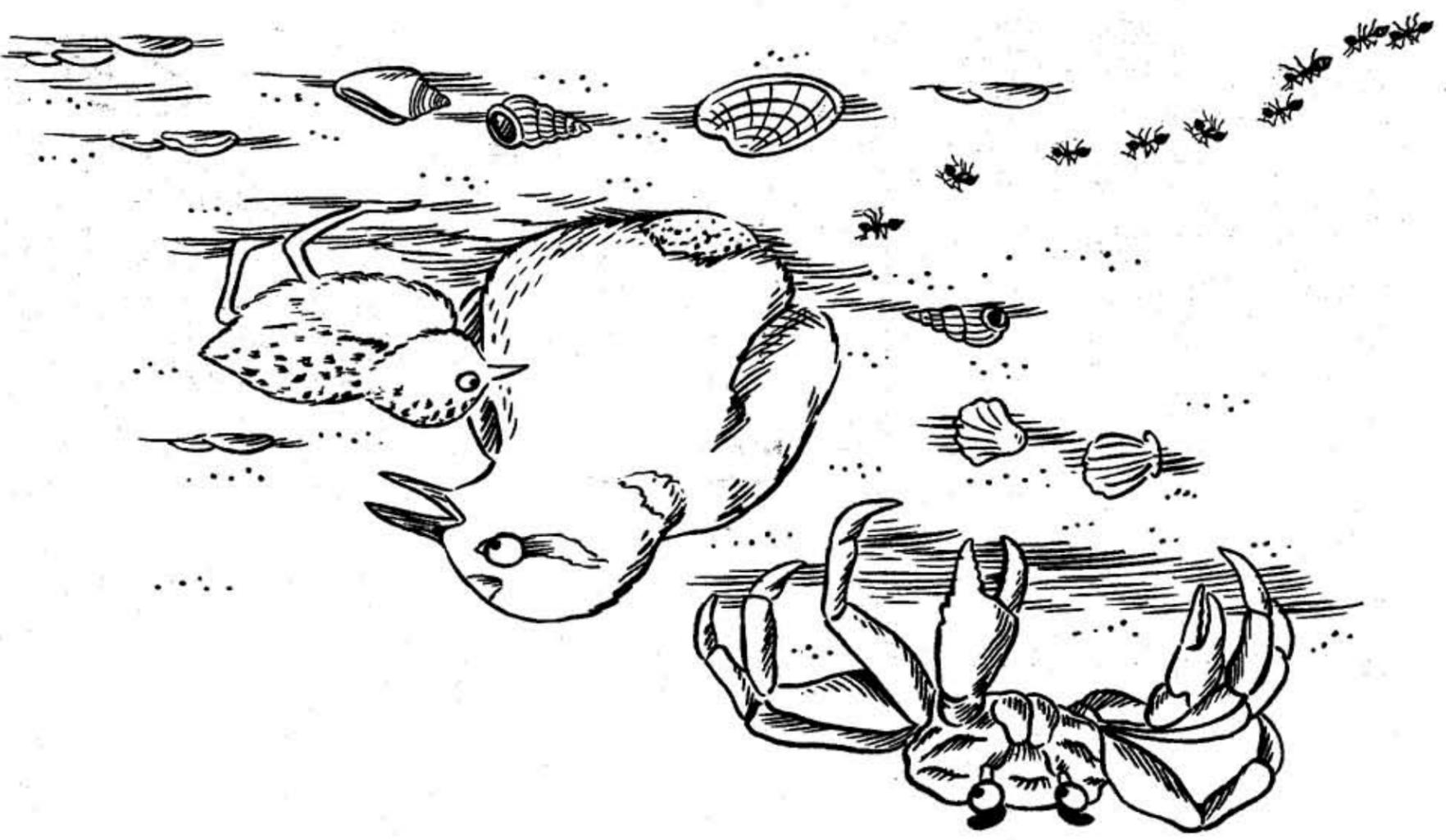


The male snowy plover has darker markings than the female.

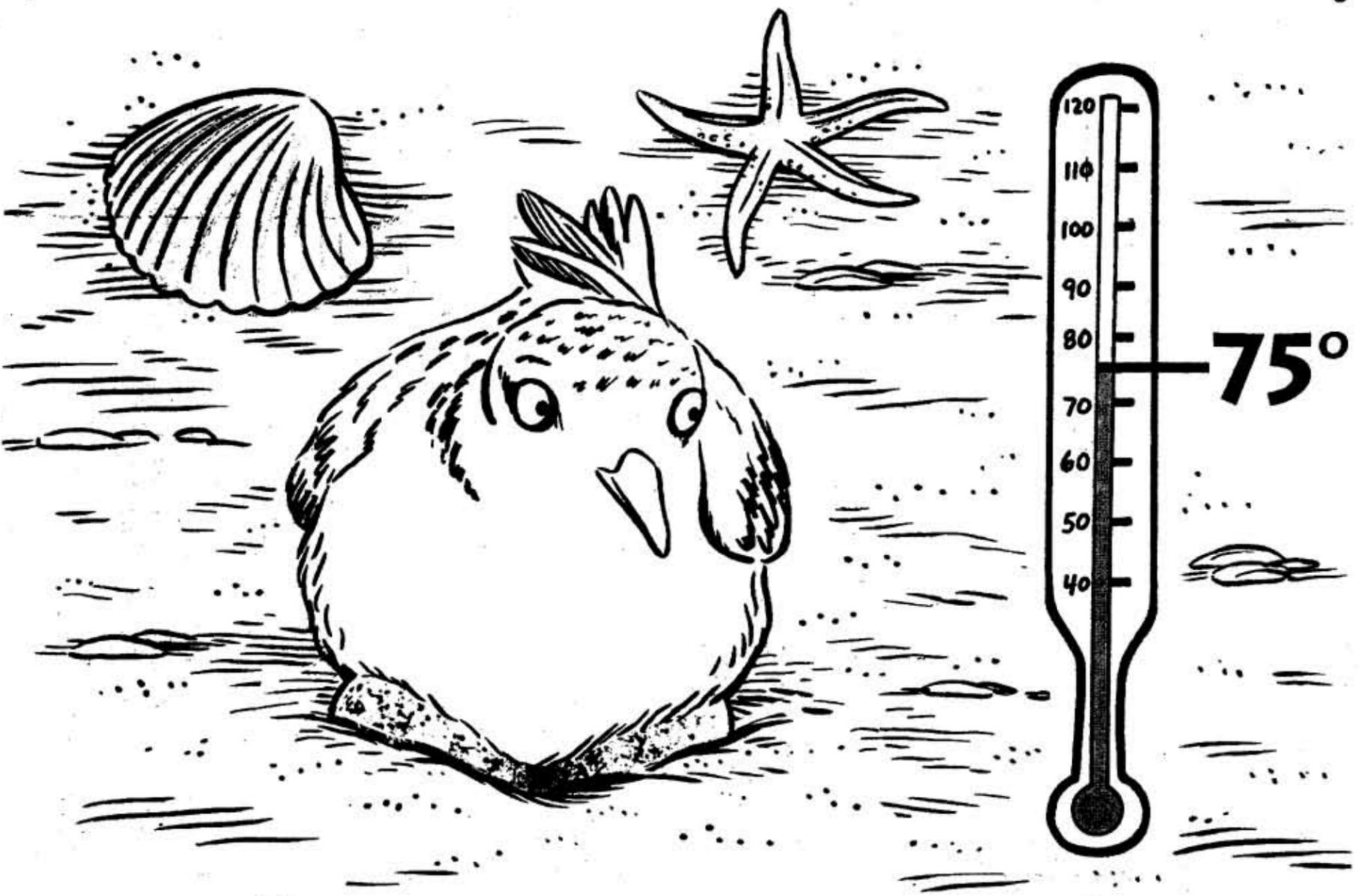


A parent carries the egg shells away because they attract predators.
Chicks quickly learn to find food (forage).

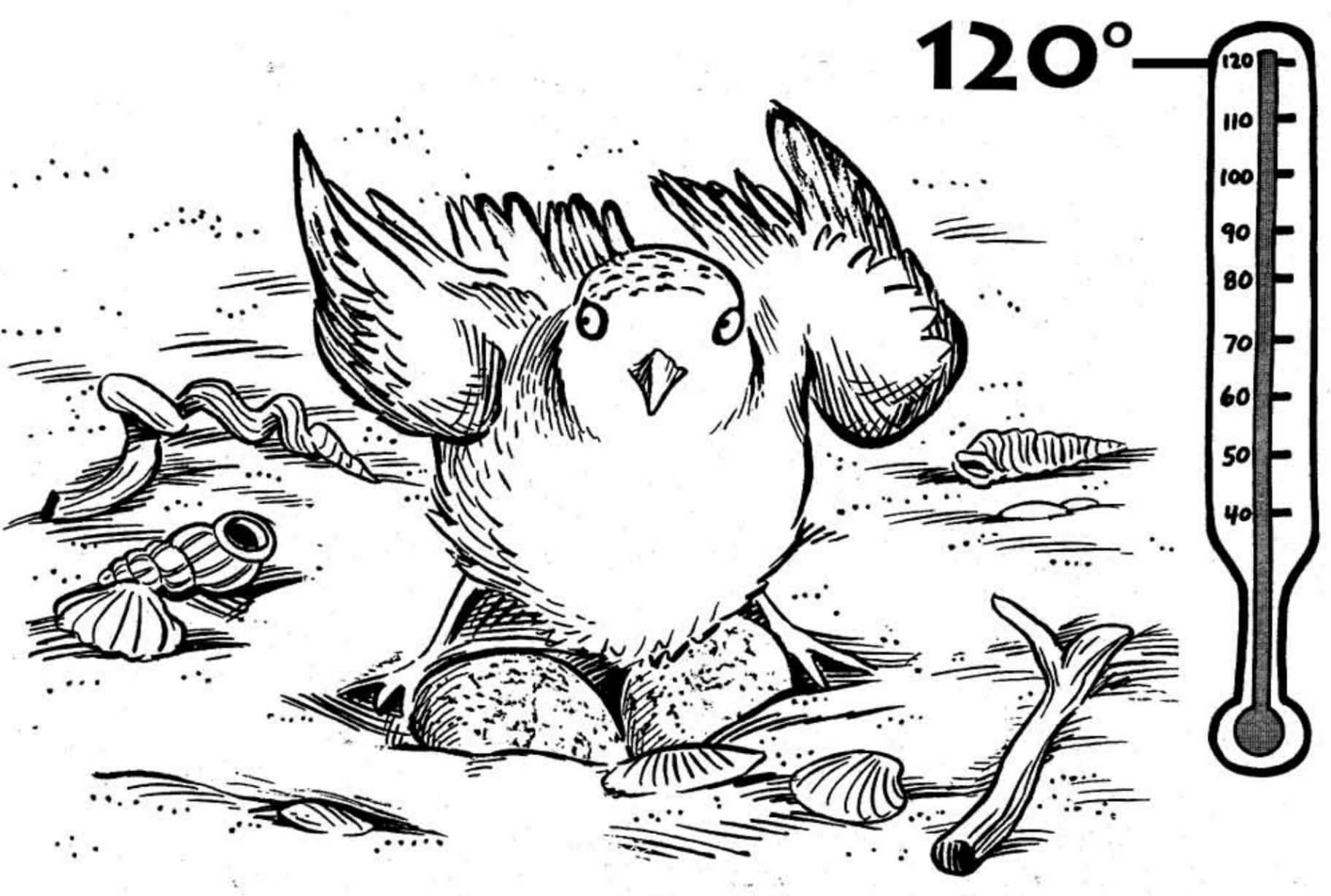
The male scrapes a shallow depression in the sand. The female deposits her eggs in the "scrape".



When they hatch, snowy plover chicks are so small they weigh only as much as a quarter - they are very vulnerable to predators.



In cooler weather, the adult sits on the eggs (incubates).



In hot weather, the adult stands over the eggs (shades).