

# Birds on West Coast Beaches

## *How You Can Help*

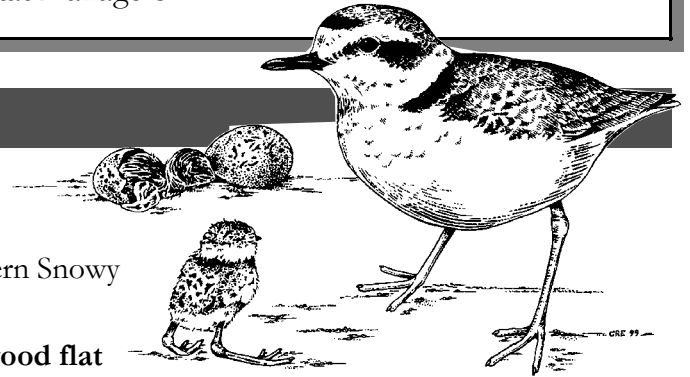


Beaches and dunes of the Pacific United States are sandy habitats found along coastlines, lagoons, estuaries, and sand spits. Beaches are popular recreation destinations for people, and provide year-round habitat for many types of birds.

This document highlights the importance of beach habitat to the life-cycles of birds, and provides bird-friendly beach recreation tips for beach visitors and habitat managers.

### Bird-friendly Beach Recreation Tips

- ✎ **Walk around flocks** of roosting and feeding birds to avoid disturbance.
- ✎ **Walk on the wet sand** to avoid disturbing nesting Western Snowy Plovers and California Least Terns.
- ✎ Avoid creating perches for predatory birds. **Leave driftwood flat** on the sand and dismantle forts.
- ✎ **Respect signs** designating restrictions in sensitive habitat.
- ✎ **Pack-out trash** and do not feed wildlife.
- ✎ **Keep your pet leashed and do not chase birds.**



A beach-loving family: Western Snowy Plover with his hatching chicks. *Artwork by Carleton Eyster.*

### Beaches are Habitat for Nesting

On U.S. Pacific coast beaches, nesting season occurs March through September. During this sensitive period, birds must find a mate, establish a nesting site, incubate eggs, and raise young.



California Least Tern nesting on beach.  
*Photo courtesy of LA Wetlands.*

Birds that nest on beaches are highly adapted to the shifting sands and sparsely vegetated environment. Once able to move to different beaches for nesting when old ones eroded away, birds today have few alternatives due to loss of beach habitat caused by development, recreational activities, increased predator pressures, and invasive plants.

Flightless chicks of federally threatened Western Snowy Plovers and endangered California Least Terns are particularly vulnerable to disturbances from off-highway vehicles, off-leash dogs, and other recreational activities.

Fortunately, managers, with the help of hundreds of volunteers, are actively protecting beach-nesting birds in innovative ways:

- Biologists monitor nests and young in many areas to determine breeding success;
- Educational programs are conducted to increase public awareness of beach habitat;
- Nesting habitat above the surf zone is often roped off from public use;
- Protective fencing, called exclosures, surround eggs to prevent disturbance and predation;
- Habitat restoration projects are used to increase the amount of beach and dune habitat and protect endangered plant life;
- Managing non-native and native predators of beach-nesting birds, nests, and chicks.

## Beaches are Habitat for Resting



**Pacific Flyway**

Migrating between northern breeding grounds and southern wintering homes, millions of birds follow the Pacific Flyway - one of four flyways that span the Americas. Like truck stops to truckers on a long highway, beaches and dunes are places where weary and hungry migrating birds can rest and refuel before continuing their migration along the Pacific Flyway.

With many bird populations in decline and human recreation needs increasing, human disturbance to resting and feeding birds on beaches is a growing concern. Birds that are frequently disturbed by human activities may have reduced opportunities to forage and rest, which could have negative impacts on their health and survival. By recreating safely on beaches, you can help reduce human disturbance to birds.

**Beach Birds of the Pacific United States**  
(\* nest on beaches)

Shorebirds

- American Golden-Plover
- Black-bellied Plover
- Dunlin
- Greater Yellowlegs
- Killdeer\*
- Least Sandpiper
- Lesser Yellowlegs
- Long-billed Dowitcher
- Marbled Godwit
- Pacific Golden-Plover
- Pectoral Sandpiper
- Red Knot
- Ruddy Turnstone
- Sanderling
- Semipalmated Plover
- Short-billed Dowitcher
- Snowy Plover\*
- Western Sandpiper
- Whimbrel
- Willet

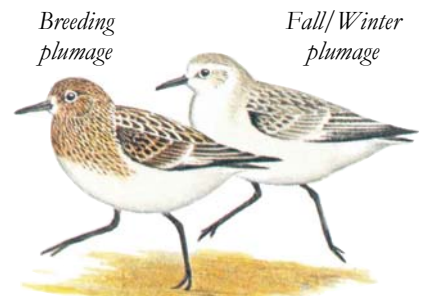
Gulls & Terns

- California Gull
- California Least Tern\*
- Caspian Tern
- Common Tern
- Elegant Tern
- Forster's Tern
- Glaucous-winged Gull
- Heermann's Gull
- Herring Gull
- Mew Gull
- Ring-billed Gull
- Royal Tern
- Thayer's Gull
- Western Gull

Pelicans

- American White Pelican
- Brown Pelican

**Beach Bird Identification Tip**

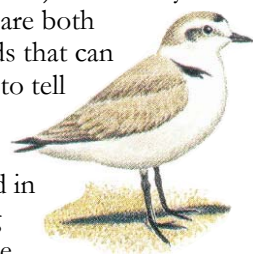


Breeding plumage

Fall/Winter plumage

Artwork: Jerry Bueggel

Sanderlings (above) and Snowy Plovers (right) are both small shorebirds that can be challenging to tell apart. Longer-billed Sanderlings often feed in flocks, running and probing the wet sand. 'Snowies' have sandy colored backs and dark markings on their face and breast. Foraging plover-style, they watch for prey, then run and grab it with their tweezer-like bills.



## Get Involved!

- 🦅 Join PRBO Conservation Science to support our beach bird monitoring, research, and education projects. Visit [www.prbo.org](http://www.prbo.org), email us at [prbo@prbo.org](mailto:prbo@prbo.org), or call (415) 868-1221.
- 🦅 Get to know a beach near you by attending nature walks and learning about beach wildlife and plants.
- 🦅 Be a 'citizen scientist' with your local National Marine Sanctuary (<http://www.sanctuaries.nos.noaa.gov/>).
- 🦅 Support government legislation that protects coastal habitat.
- 🦅 Help protect and restore beach and dune habitat. Contact your local state park, Audubon Society chapter (<http://www.audubon.org/>), US Fish & Wildlife Service (<http://www.fws.gov/>), or National Park Service (<http://www.nps.gov/>) for volunteer opportunities.