

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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Snowy Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

This local Gulf coast breeder is declining in Florida and elsewhere in its range. The Snowy Plover's small size and inconspicuous plumage make it nearly invisible to beachgoers, often resulting in the unintentional destruction of its nests. It breeds in appropriate habitat on the coast of the northwestern United States, the western interior states, the Gulf coast, the Antilles and the Bahamas, and Peru and Chile.

Habitat. Snowy Plovers require open dry sand near dunes for breeding. Access to inner dunes is essential for brood protection; therefore, shallow dunes and dunes with steep fore slopes are not suitable habitat. Open areas within the dunes enhance re-nesting after losses due to storms or disturbance. Limiting disturbance by people and their dogs is necessary for the birds to breed successfully.

Snowy Plovers build a shallow, open scrape nest within sight of the Gulf and near the front dune line. Later nesting attempts are typically placed farther back in the dunes but are still on open, flat areas. Nests are located near objects, such as logs, debris, or small clumps of vegetation and are frequently located near Least Tern colonies. Three buffy eggs with black markings are laid from late March to mid-July. Incubation lasts about 26 days, and the young are capable of flight at about 30 days of age. Based on the extended breeding season, Stevenson and Anderson (1994) suggest that 2 broods may be raised per season. The birds quickly abandon nesting attempts when they are disturbed by people.

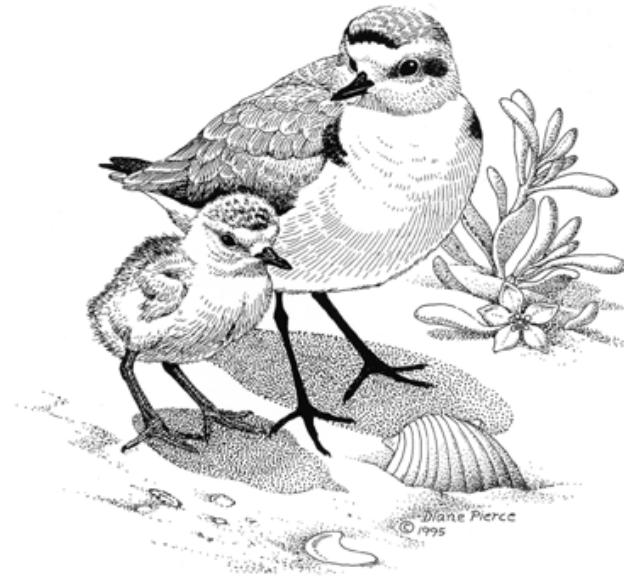


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Snowy Plovers feed on aquatic invertebrates, beetles, flies, small mollusks, and seeds (Howell 1932).

Seasonal Occurrence. Records of Snowy Plover nesting occur for March through September. Although some individuals migrate, arrival and departure dates are unknown. At least a portion of the Panhandle population overwinters in northwest Florida.

Status. The Snowy Plover is a resident species in Florida. The majority of the breeding birds are located in the Panhandle, especially on publicly owned lands. Their distribution is patchy on the Gulf coast. Their numbers and distribution have steadily decreased in the past 30 years, due to continued development of beachfront property into residential and recreational areas. For this reason, the Snowy Plover is listed as a Threatened Species by the state and is under review by the federal government (Wood 1991). In 1989 a statewide survey conducted by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission [editor: now Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission] counted at least 167 pairs; all but 22 of these were located in the Panhandle (Chase and Gore 1989).

Snowy Plovers breed from Pensacola to Marco Island (Howell 1932, Sprunt 1954) but, because of the absence of sandy beaches, are absent from the Big Bend portion of the Gulf coast. While a majority of the birds in the Panhandle breed in protected parks and U.S. Air Force property, a significant number nest on private land. In central and southern Florida, breeding occurs only in a few protected parks, such as Caladesi Island, Fort DeSo Park, and Cayo Costa and on isolated peninsulas. No authenticated breeding records exist from the Keys or Atlantic coast. East coast records are probably vagrants from the Bahamas (Stevenson and Anderson 1994.).

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Sponsored by Stanley and Annette Stedman

Snowy Plover

