



NORTH AMERICAN SECTION No. 4

Editor

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Colour marking

Currently and recently active colour marking projects were listed in the last issue of the Bulletin (no 26, p 36).

Persons observing a colour marked bird are asked to send details of the sighting to the bander who marked the bird if possible and to the U.S. Banding Laboratory, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Office of Migratory Bird Management, Laurel, Maryland 20811, U.S.A.

Shorebird Surveys

The International Shorebird Survey and Maritimes Shorebird Survey schemes (see previous Bulletins) were continued in 1979: any participants who may be able to count wintering populations of shorebirds in North or South America are asked to contact one of the following: for areas in Canada - Dr. R.I.G. Morrison, Canadian Wildlife Service, 1725 Woodward Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1G 3Z7; for all other areas - B.A. Harrington, Manomet Bird Observatory, Manomet, Massachusetts 02345, U.S.A.

Publication of Shorebirds in Marine Environments

The collected papers resulting from the shorebird symposium sponsored by the Pacific Seabird Group and held at Pacific Grove, California, in January 1977, were published in June 1979 under the title 'Shorebirds in Marine Environments' as part of the series 'Studies in Avian Biology' (No. 2, publication of the Cooper Ornithological Society). The volume is edited by Frank A. Pitelka, and consists of a collection of 25 papers written by 39 authors: the papers include an introduction by the editor, a group of 15 dealing with the distribution, migration and conservation of shorebirds, and a group of 9 dealing with their ecology. The geographical area covered is mainly the Pacific Coast, from Alaska to California, but there are also reports from Peru, Costa Rica, the Northeast American coast and three from Britain. The volume is reviewed elsewhere in this Bulletin.

WSG Subscriptions for 1980 are now due and a renewal form is enclosed with this issue. See also the general notices section for details of the new subscription rates.

STATUS AND BREEDING BIOLOGY OF THE SNOWY PLOVER *Charadrius alexandrinus* IN CALIFORNIA

by Gary W. Page and Lynne E. Stenzel

During 1977 and 1978, we studied several aspects of the breeding of Snowy Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus* in California. A major stimulus for working with this species was a concern expressed by many people that the number of Snowy Plovers breeding on the state's heavily used beaches was declining owing to increased use of these areas for recreation. We suspected that this was the case but found little published information on the Snowy Plover from which we could definitely establish evidence of a decline. Very little was known about the past and present breeding numbers in the state.

Survey of California's Breeding Population

In 1977, with financial support from the California Department of Fish and Game, the Union Oil Company Foundation, and some members of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, Gary Page and Susan Peaslee began a state-wide survey of breeding Snowy Plovers by covering all the beaches on the northern coast of California. This survey was conducted in May and June, a period during which the plovers exhibit a minimal amount of migrational activity. We tried to cover all beach habitat, count all adult birds and locate nests and broods. When nests, which are shallow depressions in the sand containing three eggs, were found, descriptions of their sites were made to obtain information on nesting requirements.

In 1978, Lynne Stenzel and Susan Peaslee covered the central and southern California coast and Phil Henderson and Gary Page the interior of the state. In the interior, Snowy Plovers nest around dry, unvegetated margins of alkaline lakes. Nancy Spear obtained estimates of the number of Snowy Plovers breeding on the Channel Islands off Southern California, thus completing an inventory of the state.

An estimated 956 plovers were found on the mainland coast, 218 on the Channel Islands and 2194 in the state's interior, giving a total of 3368 Snowy Plovers for California. We obtained data showing that it was possible to find on any one census an average of 72% of the birds found by all censuses at one coastal area, under reasonably difficult census conditions. We have no similar information on detection rate for the interior, but feel that the majority of the birds were found both on the coast and in the interior.

The most surprising finding of the survey was that the majority of birds were found in the interior rather than on the coast. The interior breeding areas were generally less disturbed by people than those on the coast and there was some evidence that breeding numbers on coastal beaches may be reduced by heavy recreational use. Through a comparison of records of eggs collected mostly during the first four decades of this century with the survey data, we found evidence that development of beaches and nearby harbour facilities has resulted in the extirpation of Snowy Plovers from some sections of the coast, particularly in Orange, Los Angeles and southern Santa Barbara counties. Future surveys should allow us to determine whether a decline in the plovers' use of the coast is still occurring.