

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER NESTING ON THE OREGON COAST

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In the Pacific Northwest, the Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) is primarily a migrant, occurring in flocks along the coast during spring migration from mid-April to mid-May and in fall migration from July through September. Peak numbers occur in late April and late July. Occasional small flocks of non-breeding birds remain through the summer (Paulson 1993) and may be found in suitable habitat in coastal and inland British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon (H. B. Nehls pers. comm.). The species' breeding range, encompassing the North American arctic and subarctic (Paulson 1993), extends south locally in British Columbia to the Queen Charlotte Islands, Iona Island near Vancouver, and Le Blanc Lake inland (Campbell et al. 1990). South of this range, four nests have been recorded from coastal Washington and the interior of Oregon. The first Semipalmated Plover nest recorded in Oregon was found at Stinking Lake on Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Harney Co., in 1987 (Ivey et al. 1988). Ivey and Baars (1990) reported a second nest from Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, at Harney Lake, in 1989. Two successful nests were found along the Pacific coast at Ocean Shores, Grays Harbor County, Washington in 1973 (Morris 1974). Birds have been observed subsequently at these sites, but no additional nests have been found (Nehls pers. comm.) Here we report the first and second documented Semipalmated Plover nests along the Oregon coast.

On 6 June 1993, while conducting surveys for Snowy Plovers (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) on the south dredge spoil of the Coos Bay North Spit, Coos Co., Casler and Hallett observed an adult female Semipalmated Plover incubating a nest. An adult male Semipalmated Plover was flicking bits of shell toward the incubating bird, which tucked them around itself, apparently adding to the nest bowl's lining. After watching the birds for several minutes we approached and found a nest heavily lined with shell fragments and containing three darkly mottled eggs. When the eggs were "floated" to determine their stage of development, all three sank and lay flat on the bottom of the container, indicating that they were new (Hays and LeCroy 1971). Both adult Semipalmated Plovers were highly vocal and did vigorous broken-wing and tail-dragging displays while we were near the nest.

On 8 June, the nest contained four eggs measuring 32.6 ± 0.8 mm \times 24.4 ± 0.4 mm (Figure 1). Again, both adults were present and actively defended the nest area. Only three eggs remained in the nest on 26 June; the fourth was lost to unknown causes. The eggs hatched on 30 June and 1 July. We saw the brood regularly through late July, and at least two of the three chicks fledged, as we saw the juveniles flying in early August.

On 18 May 1994, we found a second nest approximately 150 meters from the 1993 nest location. Three of the four eggs hatched on 8 and 9 June 1994; the remaining egg was infertile. We used a circular walk-in nest trap to capture and band both adults with an aluminum U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service band on their right leg and two of three chicks on their left leg (Figures 2 and 3). Although we did not observe this brood regularly, on 9 July we saw a banded fledgling Semipalmated Plover with a flock of about 20 adult Semipalmated Plovers on the Coos Bay North Spit.

On 28 June 1994, we saw an adult Semipalmated Plover making a nest scrape approximately 15 meters from the 1994 nest, and on 1 July a pair of Semipalmated Plovers was copulating near this scrape. The male was unbanded; we could not tell if

NOTES

the female was banded. Subsequent searches of the area did not reveal successful nesting. The presence of the unbanded male suggests that at least three Semipalmated Plovers were engaged in breeding at this site in 1994.

Both Semipalmated Plover nests and the nest scrape were located on top of low shell-covered rises. The nest bowls were heavily lined with shell fragments and, while readily distinguishable from the sparsely lined Snowy Plover nests nearby, could be confused with Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) nests, which are also heavily lined. The Semipalmated Plover eggs were smaller than Killdeer eggs and much darker and more heavily mottled than Snowy Plover eggs.

When approached, unlike the Snowy Plovers, which typically skulked away from the nest before displaying, the Semipalmated Plovers tended to call while standing close to their nests. Both members of the pairs were observed incubating. Both adult Semipalmated Plovers associated with the 1993 nest stayed with the chicks until fledging. The 1994 brood was not observed regularly, so it is not clear if both adults tended the brood. Broods in both years used the same stretch of beach along the bay east of the south dredge spoil. In addition, the 1994 brood used an area surrounding the dredge spoil and recently cleared of vegetation.

At 124° 19' 45" N, 43° 21' 30" W, the Semipalmated Plover nests at Coos Bay are the southernmost known for this species along the Pacific coast. The Semipalmated Plovers used nesting habitat similar to that of Snowy Plovers, as have all nesting Semipalmated Plovers detected to date in Oregon and Washington. The discovery of successful nests in 1993 and 1994 and apparent nest attempt in 1994 suggest this area may be used intermittently, if not regularly, by a small number of



Figure 1. Semipalmated Plover nest at Coos Bay, Coos County, Oregon, 8 June 1993.

Photo by Bruce Casler

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Figure 2. One- or two-day-old Semipalmated Plover chicks at Coos Bay, Coos County, Oregon, 9 June 1994.

Photo by Bruce Casler



Figure 3. Adult male Semipalmated Plover at Coos Bay, Coos County, Oregon, 9 June 1994.

Photo by Bruce Casler

NOTES

nesting Semipalmated Plovers. Birders should watch for evidence of Semipalmated Plovers nesting to document further the extent to which this species nests in the Pacific Northwest.

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