

News Release



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TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR SNOWY PLOVER VOLUNTEERS AT HALF MOON BAY STATE BEACH

Volunteers make a difference. Along the San Mateo County coast, trained volunteers play a major role in protecting the Western Snowy Plover—a small shorebird that lays its eggs on the sand at a few California beaches every summer. Volunteers are needed to protect these birds. A training workshop for new volunteers is scheduled for Saturday, December 10, 2011.

The snowy plovers, which are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, may be found on several local beaches during the winter months. In the spring and summer, the plovers congregate on the few beaches that still provide nesting habitat, including Half Moon Bay State Beach—a busy recreational beach where a protected area is set aside for the plovers to nest.

Volunteers in the Half Moon Bay State Beach Plover Watch program monitor the beach to help protect the plovers and point them out to beach visitors. Public education—sometimes including presentations for school groups—is an important part of the volunteer program.

When volunteers find a plover nest—well-camouflaged eggs laid in a depression in the sand—they call in help to build a wire “exclosure” around it to prevent predators such as ravens and gulls from taking the eggs. When the eggs hatch, about four weeks later, the plover chicks are

cared for by the male parent for almost a month until they can fly (fledge). The chicks are particularly vulnerable during the weeks before they fledge. They feed themselves by foraging for small insects and crustaceans up and down the beach and easily can be lost to predators or through human disturbance.

The Plover Watch volunteers help make it possible for people and plovers to share the beach. The work of volunteers and the cooperation of visitors to the beach allow the snowy plovers to use the beach at Half Moon Bay for wintering and nesting.

The state park Plover Watch volunteers monitor and protect the snowy plovers and their habitat. Volunteers spend at least four hours per month monitoring on the beach or helping with specific projects. Volunteers also help survey beaches up and down the county during the west coast snowy plover survey that occurs twice each year. Throughout the year volunteers track snowy plovers that have unique color bands on their legs to learn their migration patterns and nesting results. Active volunteers receive the benefits of ongoing training opportunities, free passes for local state parks, and the satisfaction that they are helping preserve an important part of California's natural environment.

The one-day training workshop for prospective Plover Watch volunteers will be held on Saturday, December 10, 2011, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., at the Half Moon Bay State Beach office located at 95 Kelly Avenue, in Half Moon Bay. Volunteers who attend this workshop will be prepared to help with the countywide survey in January. To register for the free workshop or for more information, call Ranger Nelle Lyons or Paul Langan at (650) 726-8804 (if voicemail press 7 #) or e-mail hmbplovers@hotmail.com.