

SNOWY PLOVER FIELD INTERNSHIP

Intern needed approximately March - August 2008. The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory seeks an intern to assist biologists in studies of nesting threatened Western Snowy Plovers in the San Francisco Bay. Intern will have the opportunity to learn survey and nest monitoring techniques, bird identification, and data management. Responsibilities: survey plover nesting areas, assist with banding, track nesting success, and conduct avian predator surveys, clean up equipment and enter data. Start at sunrise and work in the field under harsh conditions, including **mud and sun**. Position involves driving on dirt levees in remote areas with one other person. May need to use own vehicle, but will be reimbursed. We seek a 3 to 6 month commitment. Dates may be flexible (15 to 30 hours per week, depending on availability).

Project Description

We plan to determine Western Snowy Plover breeding success at salt pond restoration sites in the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, to inform management strategies that will increase Snowy Plover numbers and reproductive success.

The Pacific coast population of the Western Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*) was listed as a threatened species in 1993 (USFWS 1993). Declines in Western Snowy Plover numbers are attributed to poor reproductive success largely due to habitat loss and degradation, and human disturbance (USFWS 1998). The South San Francisco Bay is one of the largest Pacific coast Western Snowy Plover breeding areas remaining in California. In 1981, an estimated 22.4% of breeding California snowy plovers nested in the South Bay salt ponds (Page et al. 1981). In 2002, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game purchased 15,100 acres of salt evaporator ponds in the South San Francisco Bay. Because of concerns regarding the conservation of tidal-marsh dependent wildlife species, a massive effort has begun to restore much of these salt ponds to tidal marsh. However, the salt pond complexes currently provide valuable breeding and wintering habitat for Snowy Plovers (Draft Recovery Plan). The Salt Pond Restoration Management Team (PMT) plans to contribute to the recovery of the Western Snowy Plover by providing habitat to support 250 breeding birds within the project area, and maintaining a 5-year average productivity level as required by the Draft Recovery Plan (1 fledged chick per adult male). To plan and manage the restoration, the team needs to assess the ability to increase plover nesting success in managed ponds by managing water levels, monitoring predator effects, and managing predators when necessary. We propose to study plover breeding success in the South Bay salt ponds. Results will inform adaptive management of the south bay salt pond restoration sites.

The PMT has already started managing ponds for Snowy Plovers, offering an ideal opportunity to collect important information. Our objectives are to evaluate plover breeding success under different water management regimes, in order to assist with the creation of effective salt pond management criteria. Through collaboration with the PMT, USFWS, California Department of Fish and Game, and San Jose State University, we have the opportunity to increase Snowy Plover habitat quality and reproductive success in the South Bay salt ponds.

During the breeding season, 50 nesting adult snowy plovers and their chicks (25 nests) will be banded at Eden Landing. We will locate selected broods every two days until they fledge. Our goal is to determine the number of hatched chicks that survive to fledging. Data in the form of reports and presentations will be shared to aid in adaptive management during the ongoing restoration.

ABOUT THE BIRD OBSERVATORY

Mission: The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitats through science and outreach, and to contributing to informed resource management decisions in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Description: Since its beginning in 1981, the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory has been an authority on waterbirds and landbirds that rely on the San Francisco Bay and its surrounding environments. Birds use the Bay Area as breeding habitat, migration stopover habitat, and wintering habitat.

Our programs, the Waterbird Program and Landbird Program collect crucial data that shape our understanding of the population ecology and behavior of these Bay Area birds. Through public education and our volunteer citizen scientists, our Outreach program fosters awareness amongst Bay Area residents of the sensitivity and importance of birds and their habitats to our society and natural heritage, and the value of bird conservation to our community.