

Western Snowy Plovers and Their Look-Alikes



Western Snowy Plover

Size: 5-7", 13-18cm

Description: A small whitish plover with pale brown upper parts; black legs, slender black bill and small black mark on each side of breast.

Black band around neck does not meet at the breast as does band of semipalmated plover. This small sand-colored plover has a perfect camouflage on sandy shores.

Habitat: Flat sandy beaches, salt flats, and sandy areas with little vegetation.

Range: Resident along Pacific Coast from British Columbia to Mexico, and along Gulf Coast from Texas to Florida panhandle.

Nesting: 2 or 3 buff eggs spotted with black in a sandy depression lined with a few shell fragments or bits of grass.

Feeding: Along the coast they take crustaceans and beach flies.



Sanderling

Size: 8", 20cm

Description: Chunky body, short straight black bill, black legs and prominent white wing stripe. Breeding adults have rusty head and neck. Winter birds have gray head and look almost white.

Habitat: Breeds on tundra. Winters are spent on ocean beaches, sandbars, mudflats and lake and river shores.

Range: Breeds from Baffin Island eastward to Alaska. Winters from Massachusetts and British Columbia southward to southern South America. Also found in Eurasia.

Nesting: Four olive eggs, often with brown markings, are found in lichen-lined hollow on the ground.

Feeding: Feeds in wash zones on sandy beaches. Follows retreating waves, probing sand for crustaceans, mollusks, and flies.



Semipalmated Plover

Size: 6-8", 15-20cm

Description: A brown-backed plover with white under parts and one complete black breast band. Bill stubby, yellow-orange, with dark tip. Immature has all black bill and brownish breast band.

Piping plover similar but much paler above. Larger killdeer has two black breast bands.

Habitat: Breeds on sandy or mossy tundra. During migrations found on beaches, mud flats, shallow pools of salt marsh, and lake shores.

Range: Winters regularly from California south and Carolina south along Gulf Coast; rarely found farther north.

Feeding: Like other plovers, the semi-palmated forages in short bursts. Feeds mainly on small crustaceans and mollusks.