

ABSTRACTS FOR *CONDOR* 103(4) NOVEMBER 2001

FEATURE ARTICLES

HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS AND NEST SUCCESS OF SNOWY PLOVERS ASSOCIATED WITH CALIFORNIA LEAST TERN COLONIES

ABBY N. POWELL¹

U. S. Geological Survey, Western Ecological Research Center, Department of Biology, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA 92182

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¹Present address: Alaska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, AK 99775, e-mail: ffanp@uaf.edu

Abstract. Nest success of Snowy Plovers (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) was estimated at six sites in San Diego County, California, to determine the effects of habitat characteristics and social factors on predation risk. Egg predation was expected to be lower for plovers nesting among Least Terns (*Sterna antillarum*) because of benefits associated with nesting under the “protective umbrella” of a colonial species. Snowy Plovers nested adjacent to objects and in areas with more vegetation cover than random sites in beach and fill habitats and in areas with more debris cover in beach and salt pan habitats. Estimated nest success from 1994–1997 was 50%, and most predation was attributed to corvids, primarily Common Ravens (*Corvus corax*). Social factors, including distance to nearest Least Tern and Snowy Plover nests, predicted nest success whereas habitat characteristics did not. Nest success was greatest for plovers nesting closest to an active tern nest and nesting at intermediate distances to conspecifics. Nest success also varied among years and sites, with two sites consistently less successful over the four years. Nests within tern colonies received some mitigation of egg predation. Plover nests initiated prior to the arrival of Least Terns were less likely to hatch eggs than later nests; nevertheless, Snowy Plovers in southern California initiated nesting well before Least Terns.

Key words: *Charadrius alexandrinus, habitat selection, Least Tern, nest success, predation, Snowy Plover, Sterna antillarum.*

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