

Shorebirds of California

Plovers



Charadriidae - Plovers

- **Globally** ~66 species in 10 genera
- **California:** 9 common to uncommon species in 2 genera
 - *Charadrius*
 - *Pluvialis*



Plovers — Family: *Charadriidae*

■ Characteristics

- Small to medium size
- Upright posture
- Large eyes
- Short, often thick bills
- Short necks
- Feed from the surface, run and stop on feet which have *vestigial hind-toes*
- Long, narrow wings suited for rapid, long-distant flight
- Prefer open habitats: tundra, shortgrass prairies, ag fields, shorelines, estuaries, mudflats



Charadriidae - Plovers

■ Visual feeders

- Run, Stop, Wait, Run
- High level of rods, some nocturnal feed
- Snowy Plover –; charging fly swarms
- Killdeer: feeds on beetles, frogs, grasshoppers



■ Diet:

- primarily invertebrates, especially Polychaete worms,
- also small crustaceans, larvae, sometimes seeds, berries



Some Plovers employ “Foot trembling”

- Plovers, including Semipalmated, Black-bellied and Ringed, employ foot trembling to bring prey to surface
- Foot trembling is thought to imitate sense of changing tidal conditions; prey come to surface on rising tide to swim, feed and mate.
- *Notomastus latericeus* causes water to outflow from burrow, alerting plover to their presence
- *Arenicola marina* comes to the surface to defecate, creating casts which plovers spot



N latericeus



A marina



Plenkowski, 1983
Cestari, 2009

Charadriidae - Plovers

■ Breeding

- Primarily seasonally monogamous, some long-term pair bonds
- A few polygynous or sequentially polyandrous (Mtn. Plover)
- Most solitary nesters
- a few semi-colonial (some Lapwings)
- shallow scrape nests
- Oval to pyriform eggs, (2) 3 or 4 eggs
- Cryptically colored chicks
- Chicks precocial level 2 (mobile, downy, follow parents, find own food)



Killdeer nest with one egg, chick

Family = Charadriidae

Plovers of California

	N Am pop	Breeds
Black-bellied Plover	200,000	AK/Canada
American Golden Plover *	150,000	Arctic
Pacific Golden Plover*	16,000	Arctic
Snowy Plover	20,000 **	Bay Area +
Semipalmated Plover	150,000	Arctic
Killdeer	many	Bay Area +
Mountain Plover	9,000 **	Great Plains

** Endangered species or population * uncommon to rare in N. Calif.

Charadriidae - Plovers

■ Migration

- Most plover species migratory
- a few tropical species sedentary
- Pluvialis (especially Golden Plovers) epic migrants
 - Altitudes of 15 – 20,000 feet typical
 - At speeds of 50 MPH or greater
 - AGPL – over Atlantic Canada to S.A. 2,500 miles non-stop
 - PGPL – Alaska to Pacific Islands non-stop up to 2500 miles!

