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A Tiny Surgery Patient: Threatened Snowy Plover's Fractured Wing Repaired; Reminder To Public To Stay Clear of Shorebird Nesting Areas

Fairfield, CA – A threatened shorebird is resting comfortably after International Bird Rescue's team of waterbird specialists performed a delicate surgery to repair the tiny bird's fractured wing.

The adult male Western Snowy Plover, which weighs 33 grams, was brought in earlier this month by San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory (SFBBO) biologists monitoring nests at the Eden Landing Ecological Reserve in Union City, CA.

On arrival, x-rays revealed the bird had suffered a bad wing fracture, with breaks in three places. Wing (humerus) fractures generally require surgical pinning if a wild bird is to have any hope of being able to fly again.



These surgeries are challenging in tiny birds due to the minuscule size (only six inches in length). Bird Rescue's clinical team understood the importance of trying to repair this bird's damaged wing for hopeful return to the wild, especially as [Western Snowy Plovers are a Species of Special Concern within California](#), and classified as Threatened status on the federal Endangered Species list.

The delicate surgical repair required intense focus, but this feisty little bird did great through anesthesia and Dr. Rebecca Duerr, Bird Rescue's Director of Research & Veterinary Science, was able to align and pin the broken bone segments to facilitate proper healing.



Bird Rescue is happy to report that after 20 days in care, this tiny patient is doing well, running around his enclosure and eating on his own. The wing pin will be removed soon and physical therapy will begin in earnest. Since the bird has been healing well thus far, we are guardedly optimistic about his prognosis for being able to fly again.

About Snowy Plovers

Along the San Francisco Bay there are about 200 nesting Western Snowy Plovers, including about 125 at Eden Landing Ecological Reserve, where they breed almost exclusively on salt panne habitat located in former salt production ponds.

Male Snowy Plovers are good fathers. Though their offspring are able to feed themselves, the fathers watch over their chicks and will valiantly chase off predators or gather chicks underwing to shield them from weather or other dangers.



Along the Pacific Coast, from the State of Washington to Baja Mexico, these birds build their nests on sandy beaches and their nesting areas are easily disturbed by hikers and beach goers, especially off-leash dogs. Some birds have been observed to have expanded their nesting grounds during beach shutdowns, so extra

caution is needed even in areas beachgoers have frequented in the past. You can help protect this species by being extra cautious when you visit the beach or wetlands – give birds plenty of space and pay attention to signage that indicates nesting birds may be nearby. You can also help spread the word and educate others about Snowy Plovers – little birds like these might be hard to spot if you don't know to look for them!

Photo captions:

1: Using a custom anesthesiology and oxygen rig, the Western Snowy Plover with a wing fracture had its wing pinned. Photo: Dr. Rebecca Duerr – International Bird Rescue

2: X-ray of pinned wing

3: Western Snowy Plover after surgery with clinic staff gloved hands.

About International Bird Rescue: 2020 is Bird Rescue's 49th Anniversary. In 1971 after 800,000 gallons of crude oil spilled into the bay, concerned individuals led by a registered nurse named Alice Berkner jumped into action, bringing International Bird Rescue to life. We have always had to pave a road where there is none. Staff and volunteers work with tenacity alongside clients, partners, and the public to find solutions. Today, we research best practices at our crisis response hospitals in California and Alaska and share them worldwide. Our mission is to inspire people to act toward balance with the natural world by rescuing waterbirds in crisis. We dream of a world in which every person, every day, takes action to protect the natural home of wildlife and ourselves.

Learn more at <https://www.bird-rescue.org/>

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