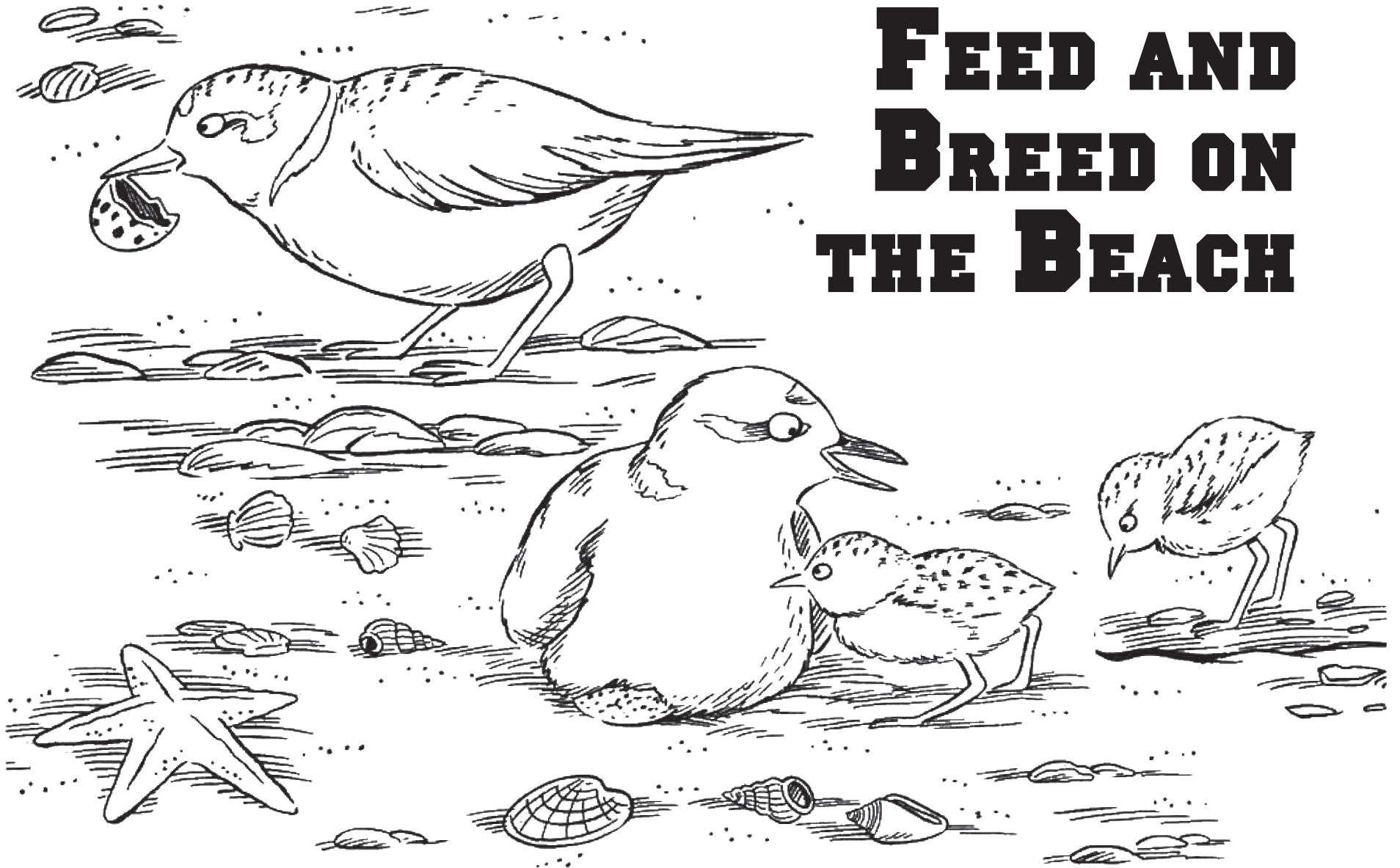


# SNOWY PLOVERS

**FEED AND  
BREED ON  
THE BEACH**



# Did you know that Snowy Plovers...

## (*Charadrius alexandrinus* – char-AD-ree-us alex-AN-dreen-us):

### - are listed as a threatened species in the state of Florida?

As of 2006, Florida had only an estimated 225 pairs of Snowy Plovers.

### - are small, sand (snowy)-colored birds that are hard to see unless they are moving?

Adult Snowy Plovers measure about six inches in length and weigh 1 ½ ounces (42 grams) – **only as much as six quarters**. Their “camouflage” coloring helps protect them from predators (animals that would eat or harm them).

### - make their nests directly on the beach by scraping a small depression in the sand?

Snowy Plover eggs are vulnerable to predators, humans, and dogs.

### - are capable of breeding (producing young) when they are eleven months old?

The average life span of a Snowy Plover is 2.7 years. The oldest plover recorded was a 15-year-old male.

### - breed in Florida only on Panhandle and Gulf coast beaches?

These threatened birds need a **natural beach** with a **gradual slope** (3 degrees or less). Sanibel Island, Fort Myers Beach and Siesta Key have some of the only significant breeding Snowy Plover populations in southwest Florida.

### - nest between the high tide wrack line and dune vegetation?

People, dogs, kites, and beach furniture should not be in this area during Snowy Plover breeding season (**February through August**).

### - lay cream-colored eggs with black speckles that make them hard to see on the beach?

Snowy Plovers usually lay three oval eggs, each measuring 1/8 inch (33 mm) and weighing 8 ½ grams.

### - live year-round on southwest Florida barrier islands and nest from mid-February until the end of August?

During Snowy Plover nesting season, humans also want to use the beach.

### - make easy prey (food) for a number of predators?

Crows, night herons, gulls, ghost crabs, ants, snakes, and raccoons eat Snowy Plover eggs, chicks, and, sometimes, adults. Snowy Plover parents pretend to have a broken wing in order to lure a predator away from chicks.

### - may abandon their nests if they are stressed by humans, dogs, kites, or predators?

Human activity and beach furniture near staked-off, protected areas can disturb nesting birds. **If an adult is off its nest for more than a few moments, its eggs will cook in the sun's heat.**

### - perceive dogs as predators, even when the dogs are leashed?

Please keep dogs well away from protected areas on the beach.

### - see kites flying near or over their nests as predators?

Please fly kites as far away from staked-off sites as possible.

### - are usually silent except when they have chicks?

Parents make a **purrt purrt** sound to call their chicks. Chicks peep until they fledge (are able to fly).

### - take 28 to 32 days to hatch?

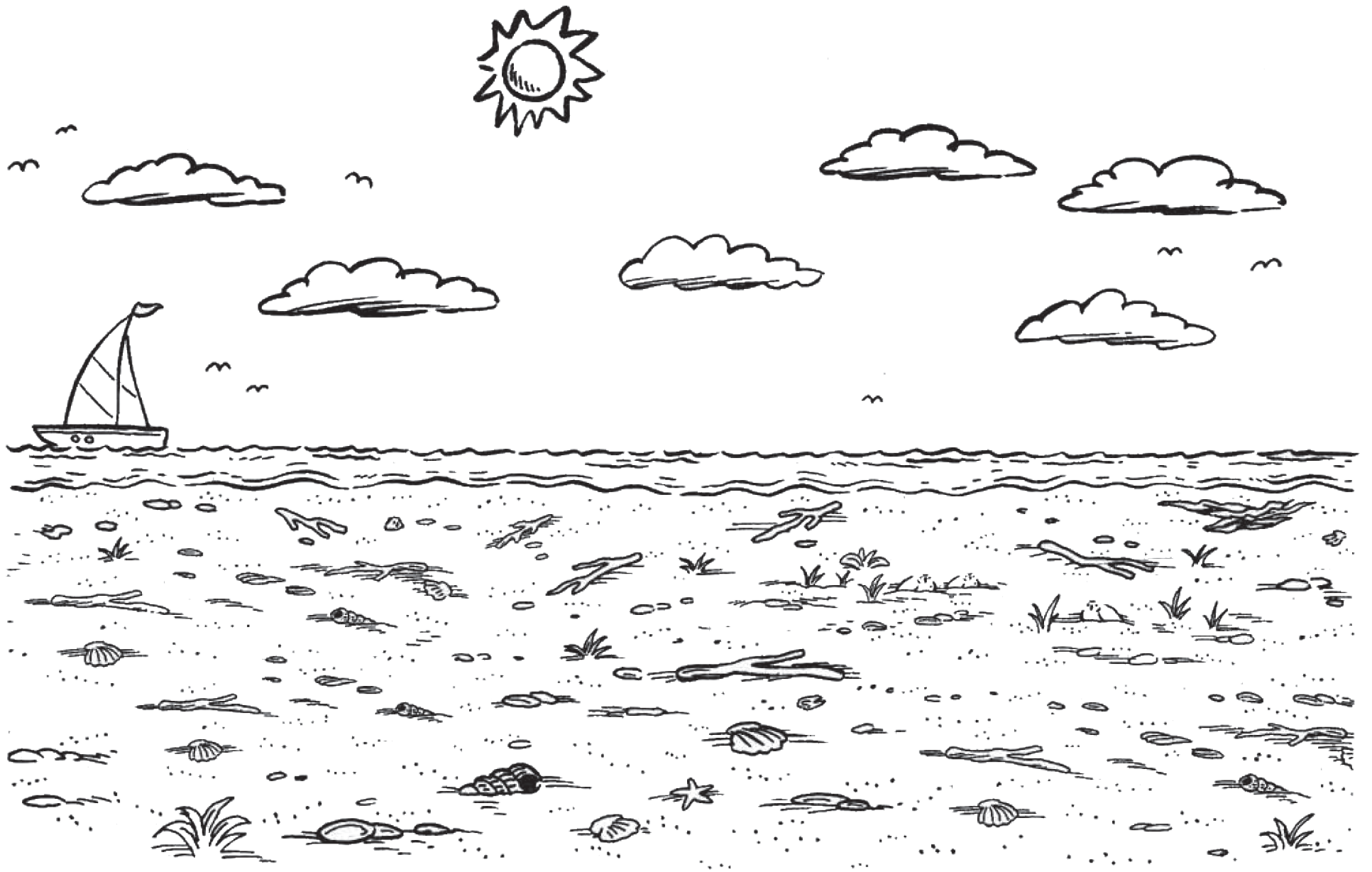
One recorded nest took 36 days. Chicks weigh only as much as a quarter (7 grams) when they hatch.

### - start to run about and feed themselves almost immediately after hatching?

Snowy Plovers eat small insects and crustaceans.

### - fledge when they are four to five weeks old?

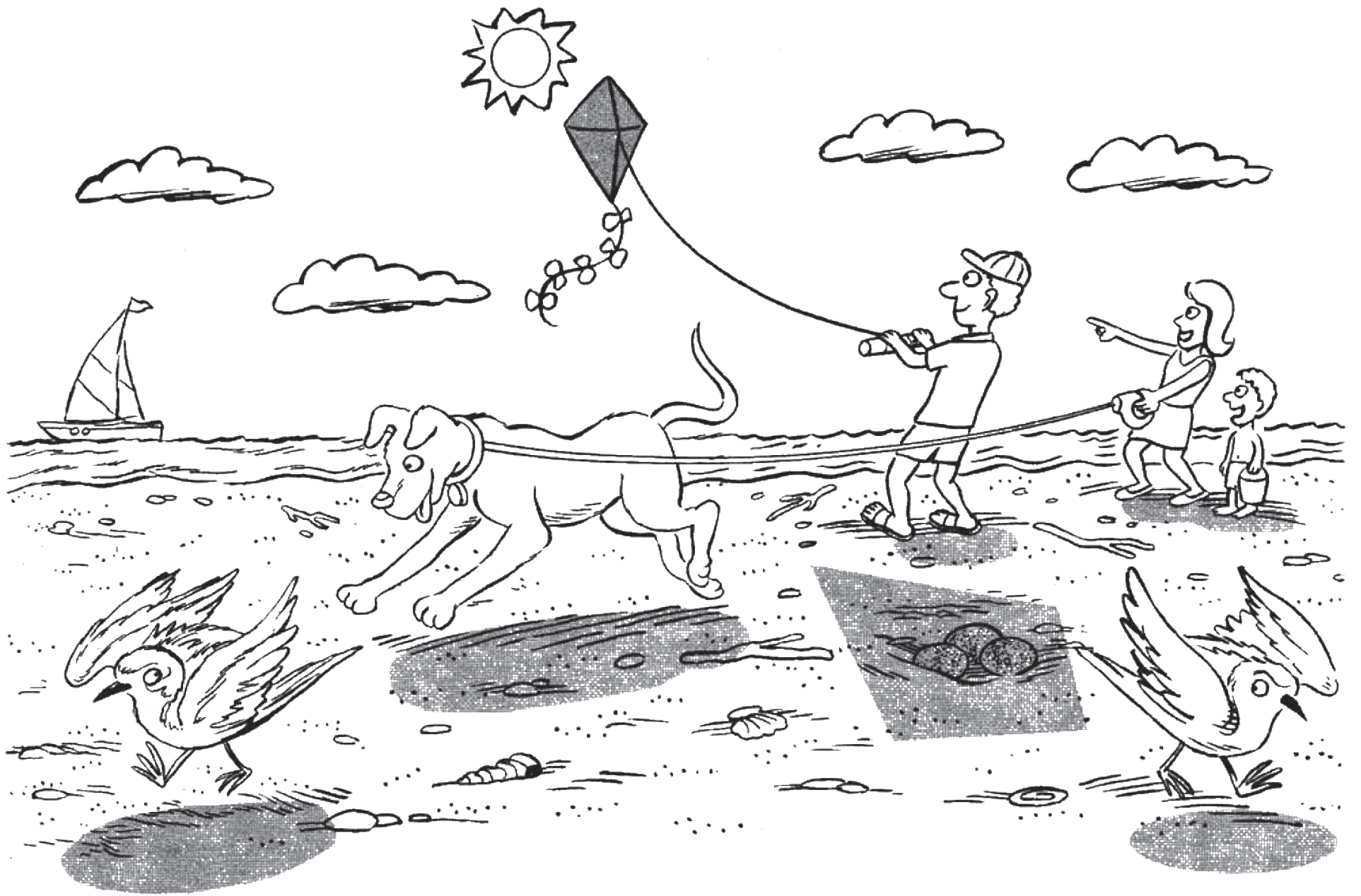
Fledglings are the size of adults but have shorter tails.



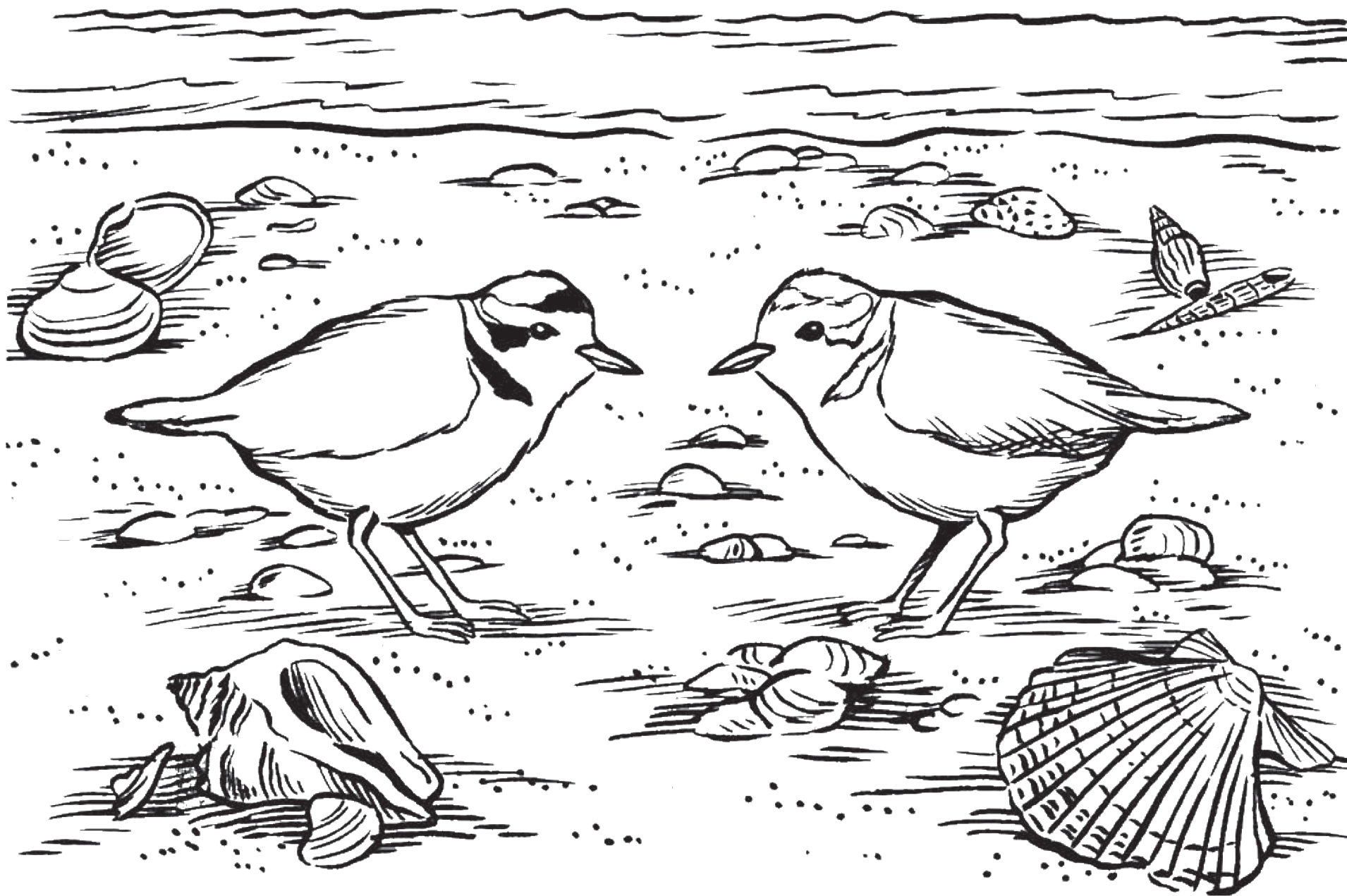
**Can you find the birds in this picture?**



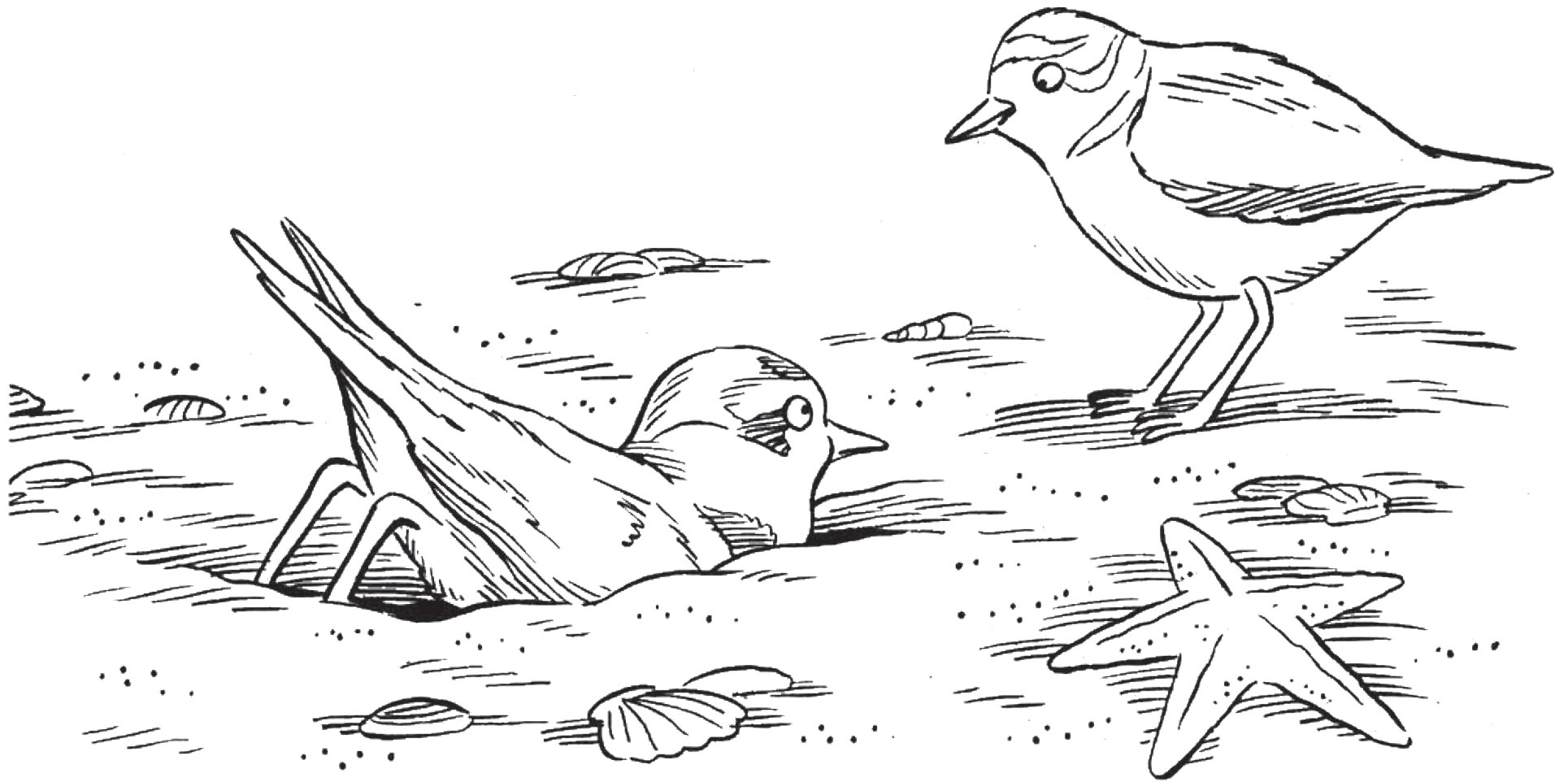
**Snowy plovers are so small and pale, they are hard to see.**



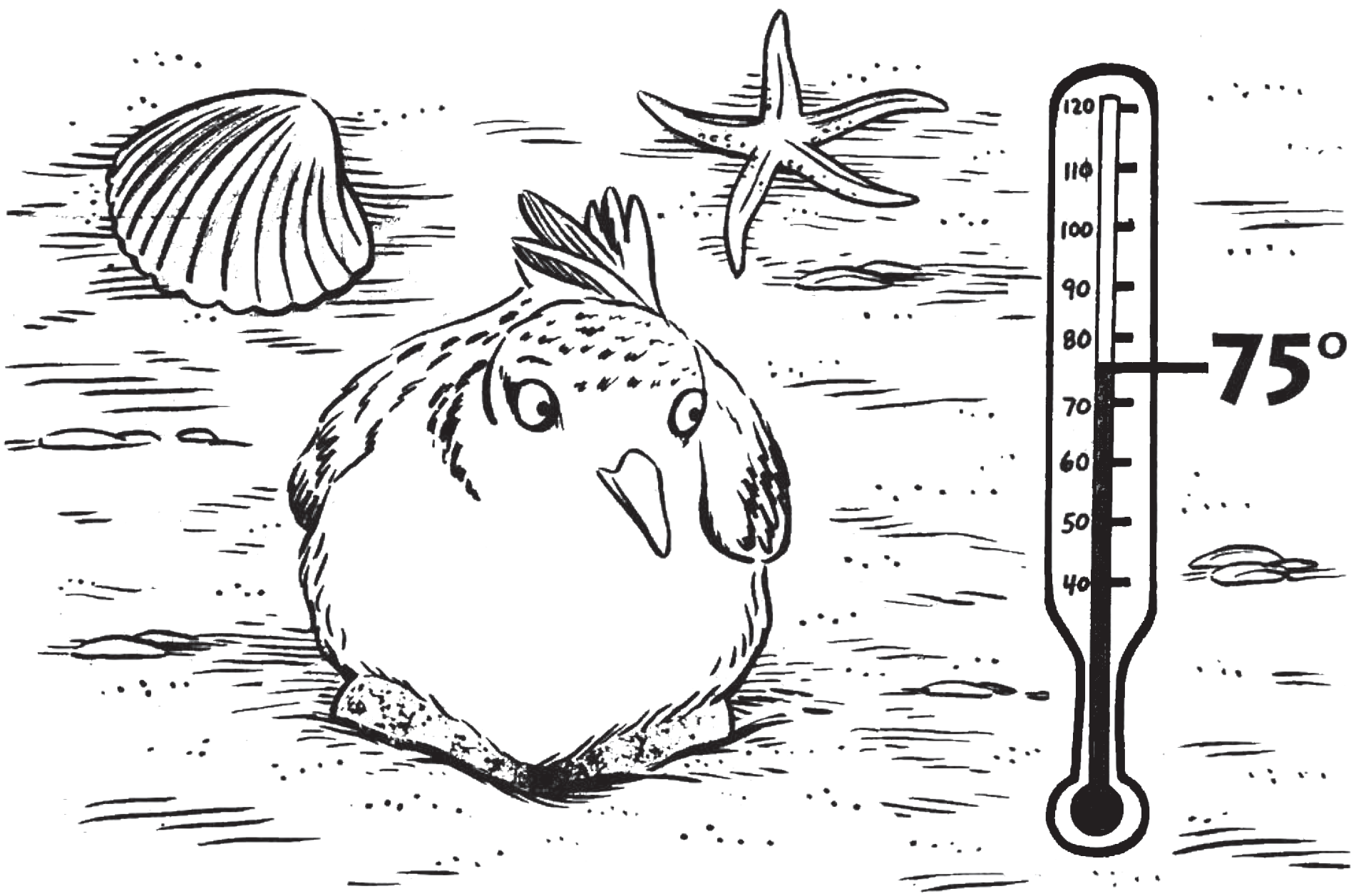
**until they are scared away.**



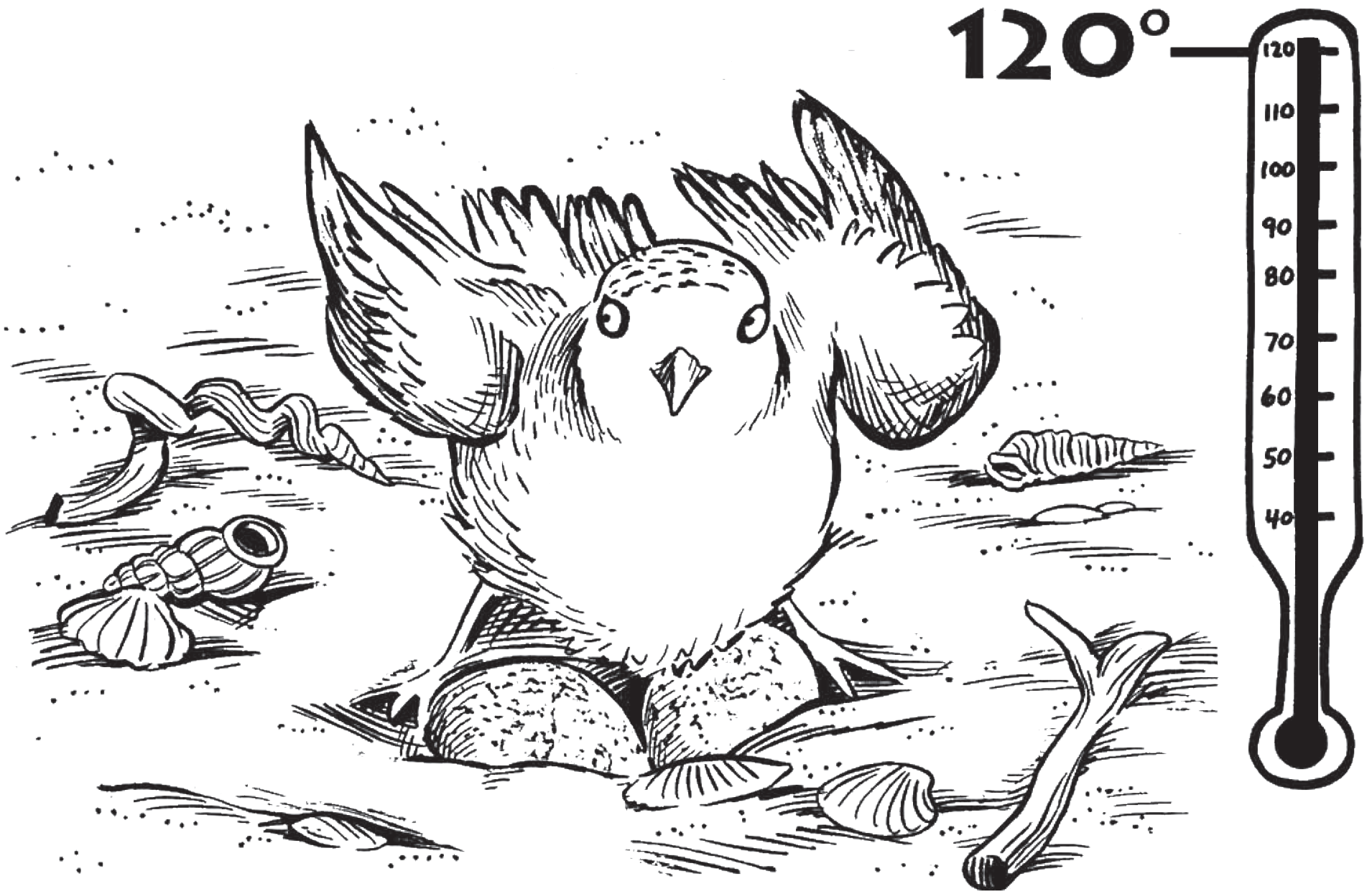
**The male snowy plover has darker markings than the female.**



**The male scrapes a shallow depression in the sand. The female deposits her eggs in the “scrape”.**

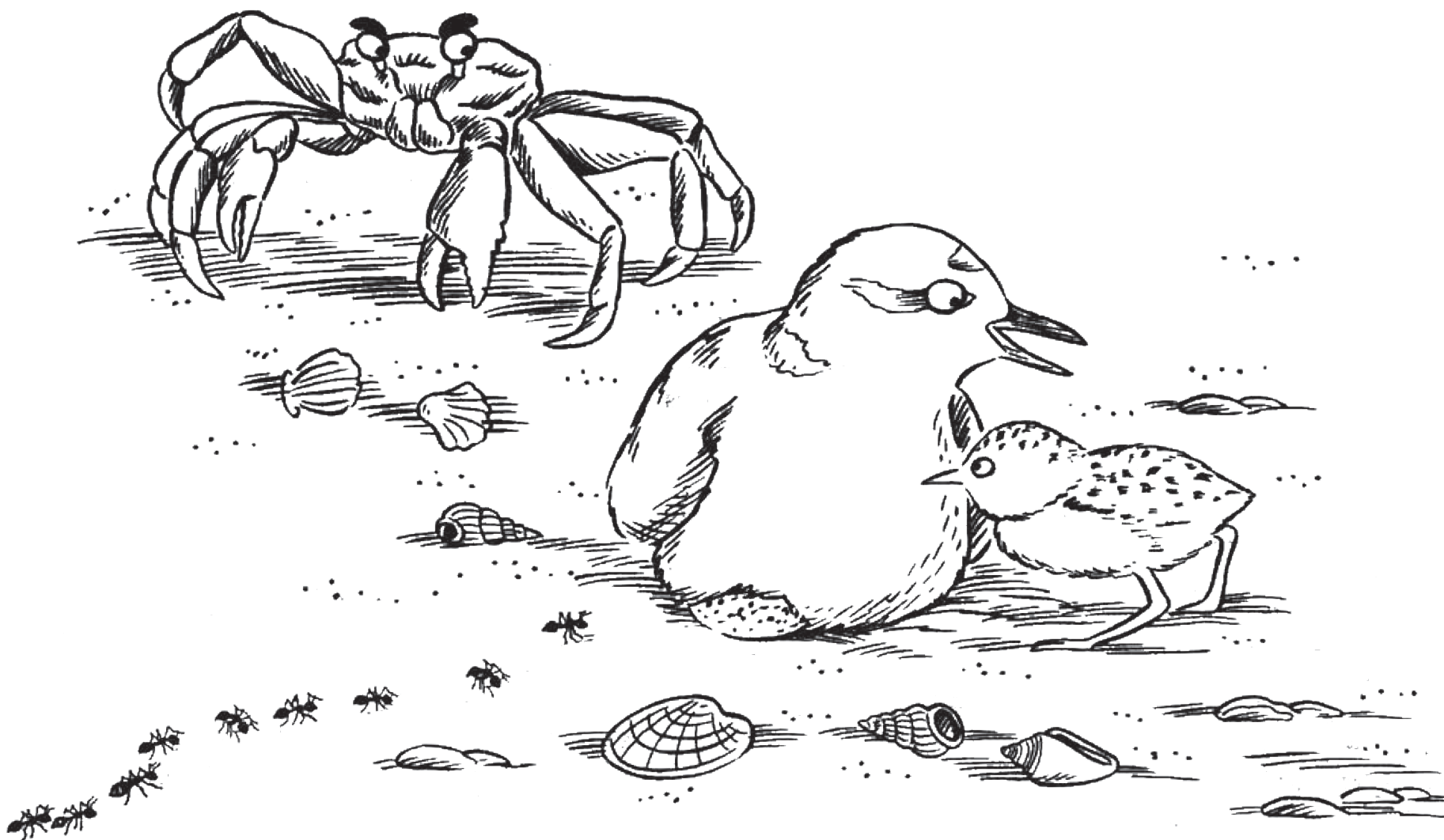


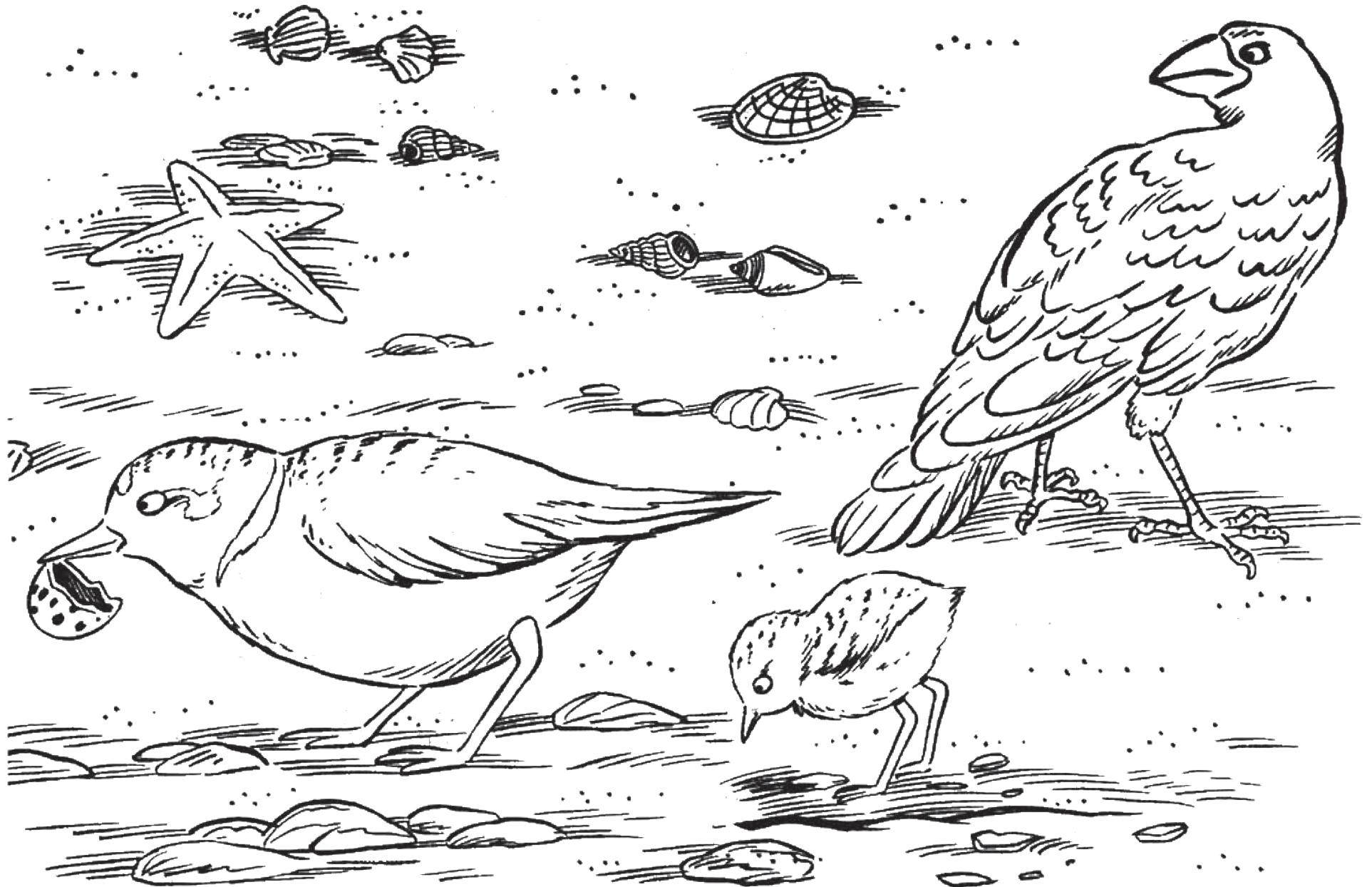
**In cooler weather, the adult sits on the eggs (incubates).**



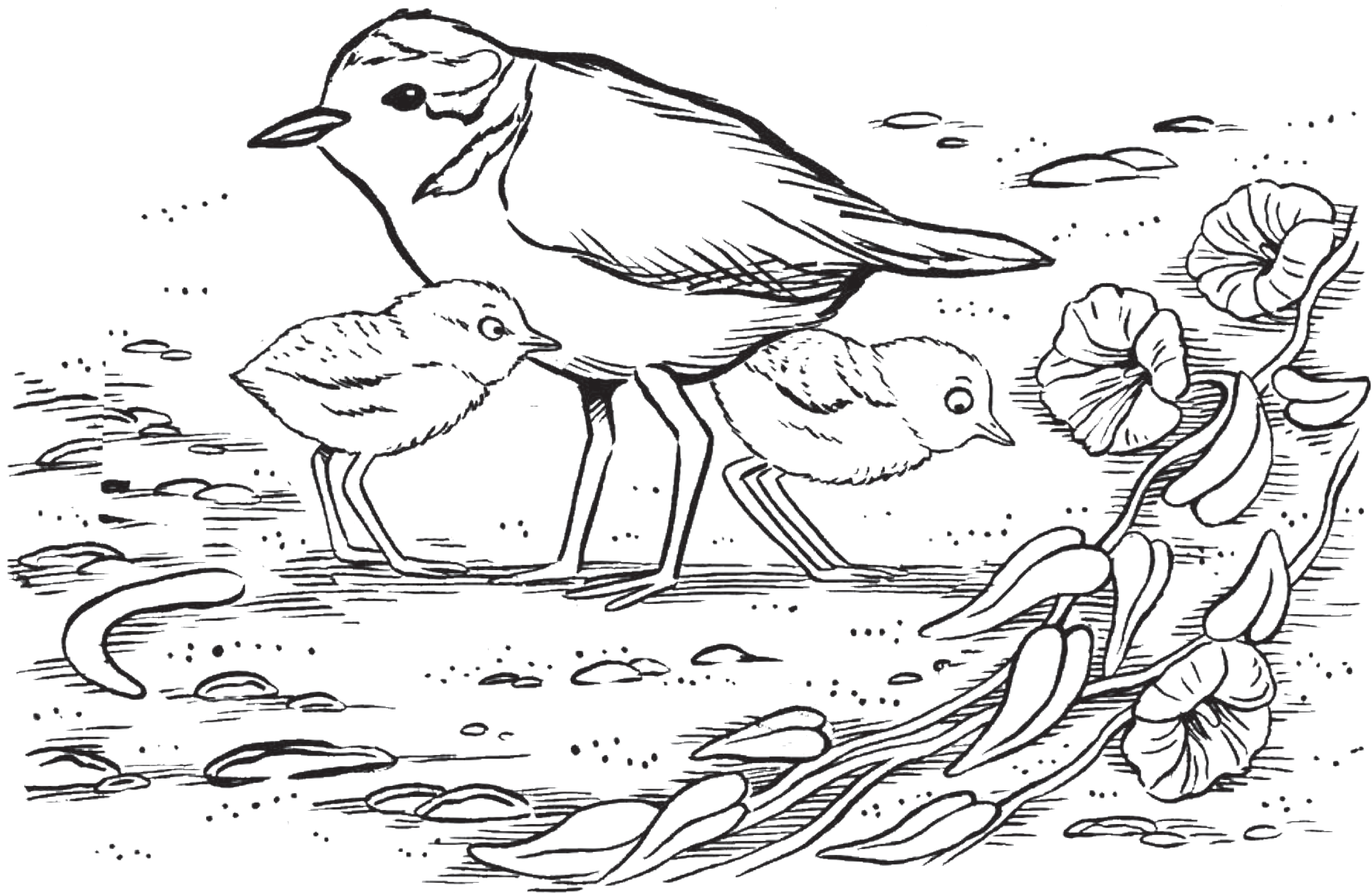
**In hot weather, the adult stands over the eggs (shades).**

**When they hatch, snowy plover chicks are so small they weigh only as much as a quarter - they are very vulnerable to predators.**

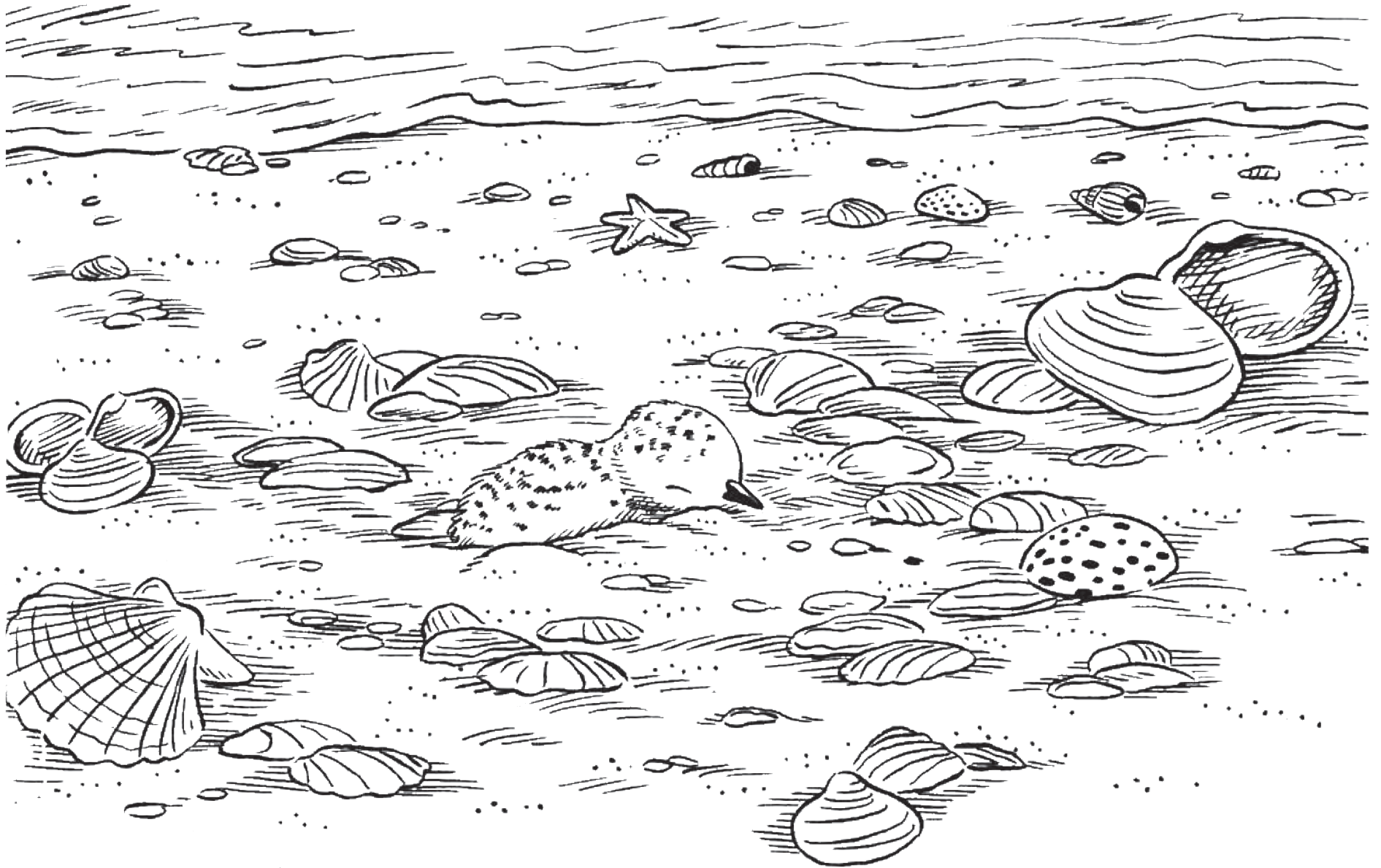




**A parent carries the egg shells away because they attract predators.  
Chicks quickly learn to find food (forage).**



**Chicks sometimes snuggle under their parents (brood), for comfort or for protection.**



**To avoid predators, a chick may flatten onto the sand and look just like a seashell (camouflage).**



**Four to five weeks after it hatches, a snowy plover chick is able to escape predators by flying.**

# Where we share the beach with SNOWY PLOVERS:

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**Walk low.** Stay near or below the high tide line. Try to avoid the wrack line (debris left by recent tides) where camouflaged chicks may be feeding.

**Walk without pets.** *Even leashed dogs* can cause extreme distress to shorebirds which view them as four-legged predators.

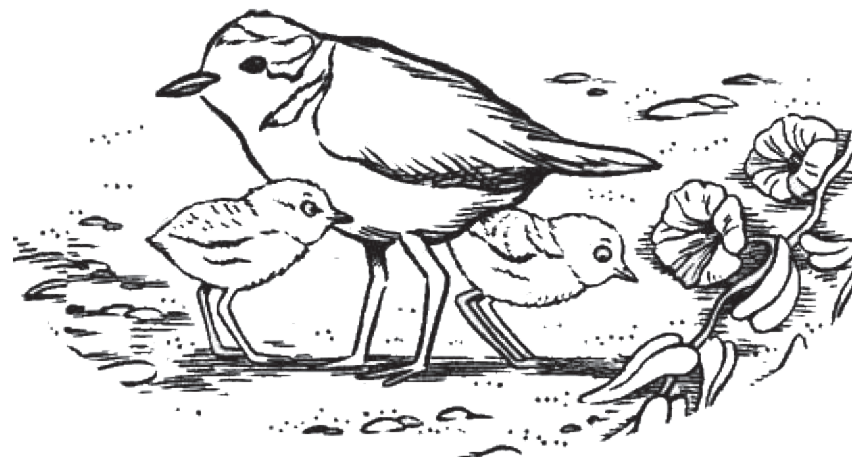
**Play away from nests** and posted areas. Shorebirds may not know the difference between flying toys (frisbees, balls or kites) and predatory birds.

**Avoid** walking *between* adults and chicks.

**Clean up.** Snacks and the remains of picnics attract raccoons, crows, and other predators of chicks, and litter can entangle wildlife.

**Not your chips!** Share the beach but not your food. Feeding wildlife attracts predators. Also, our food usually is not healthy for wildlife.

**Build a ramp** in your sandcastle moat, so that flightless Snowy Plover chicks can climb out (in case you forget to fill in any holes you dig before leaving the beach).

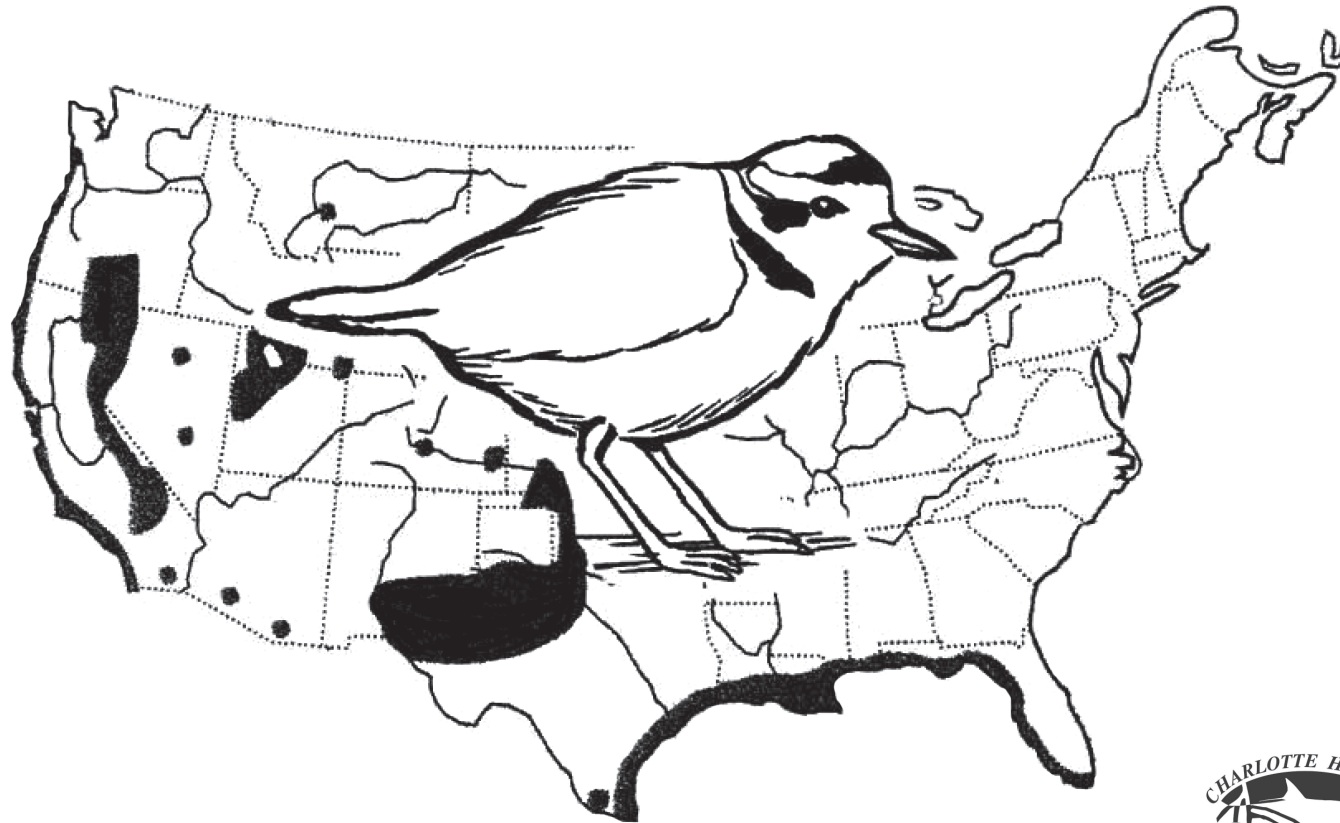


**If Snowy Plovers run or fly away as you approach, you are too close!**

To learn more about Snowy Plovers, visit: [www.MyFWC.com](http://www.MyFWC.com), [www.FIShorebirdAlliance.org](http://www.FIShorebirdAlliance.org), and [www.sccf.org](http://www.sccf.org)

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# Snowy Plover Distribution in the United States



Coastal Wildlife Club



Florida Shorebird Alliance



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***Snowy Plovers Feed and Breed on the Beach*** may be downloaded from these websites:

[www.chnep.org](http://www.chnep.org)    [www.coastalwildlifeclub.org](http://www.coastalwildlifeclub.org)    [www.FIShorebirdAlliance.org](http://www.FIShorebirdAlliance.org)    [www.sccf.org](http://www.sccf.org)

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