



Washington Department of
FISH & WILDLIFE

Monitoring plovers and larks in coastal dune habitat

Credit: WDFW

A WDFW wildlife diversity grant project

Washington populations of streaked horned larks and western snowy plovers face unique conservation challenges including rising sea levels, invasive plants, and predation. Their highly camouflaged ground nests are also vulnerable to trampling and disturbance by beachgoing recreationists. This project seeks to fill information gaps on distribution, demographics, and habitat use of coastal Washington populations of streaked horned larks and western snowy plovers. It will also provide current nest survival rates for both species.



Credit: Ecostudies Institute

Project name: Multi-species monitoring in coastal dune habitat on partner lands to advance recovery of western snowy plover and streaked horned larks

Primary species benefitting: Western snowy plover, streaked horned lark

Grant total: \$103,563

Grantee & associated entity: Gary Slater, Ecostudies Institute

Webpage: ecoinst.org

Productivity measures (the rates at which nests hatch and chicks fledge) are critical for estimating population growth, and are not well understood for plovers and larks on the Washington coast. Where larks go outside of the nesting season is also poorly understood, and different populations may face unique threats that should be accounted for in conservation decision-making.

During this project, researchers will GPS tag larks to understand their movements and habitat use outside of the breeding season. The project will also identify potential threats to species conservation, initiate lark nest monitoring, and continue plover nest monitoring efforts along the Washington coast.



Credit: Ecostudies Institute

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Project goals and outcomes

- Deploy and retrieve archival GPS tags on streaked horned larks and identify migration routes, habitat use, and nonbreeding season movements.
- Determine one year of lark nest survival rates through nest monitoring, marking individual birds as a foundation for continued population monitoring to estimate annual adult survival and subsequent population growth.
- Continue monitoring snowy plovers at Griffiths-Priday State Park and estimate a second year of nest survival rates.

Informing habitat management and reducing human disturbances

Both plovers and larks face numerous threats due to habitat loss, predation, and human disturbance. EcoStudies-led snowy plover monitoring at Griffiths-Priday State Park complements ongoing WDFW-led plover monitoring at Grayland Beach State Park and other coastal sites.

This project will continue to build new information on both species and further inform habitat management and ways to reduce the threat of human disturbance. EcoStudies has been monitoring streaked horned larks in the South Puget Sound for over 10 years, and monitoring the coastal population will increase our understanding of Washington larks' population status.



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