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## Snowy Plovers in the Rainwater Basin

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SNOWY PLOVERS IN THE RAINWATER BASIN

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While conducting shorebird surveys in the Rainwater Basin of southcentral Nebraska in spring, 1995, I observed two Snowy Plovers (*Charadrius alexandrinus*). Both sightings were on 6 May, one at the Kissinger Basin Wildlife Management Area in Clay County, and the other at Ayr Lake in Adams County.

When I arrived at Kissinger Basin WMA, the weather was poor with steady rain and strong, northeast winds. At 8:15 a.m. I noticed a pale plover feeding on the far side of the wetland. I noted the black bill and legs, dark auricular patch, and slender appearance, and I identified the bird as a Snowy Plover. It was smaller and slimmer than a nearby Semipalmated Plover. The mantle and upperwings were very pale-brown and contrasted with the white underparts. The bill was short, slim, and black. The forehead was white with a diffuse black patch above it. There was also a diffuse black auricular patch and a black bar across each shoulder. The bird was actively foraging alone in the mud along the wetland edge. It would crouch low to the ground, make a run of 25 feet or more, and then snap at a prey item. This active foraging behavior is typical of Snowy Plovers. Since the black markings on the head were not sharply defined, I concluded that the bird was probably a female. It was still present at 8:40 a.m. when I left.

Later that morning, I stopped at Ayr Lake south of Hastings to survey shorebirds. At 10:30 a.m. I spotted a very pale plover, which I recognized as a Snowy Plover. It resembled the Snowy Plover I had seen earlier that morning. However, the black markings on this bird were better defined, indicating that it was probably a male. When I left at 10:45 a.m., the bird was still present. Although this sighting was less than 15 miles from Kissinger Basin, I believe that two birds were present.

Snowy Plovers are rare vagrants in Nebraska, with 22 previous records, mostly in May. Monthly records are March (1), April (3), May (10), June (2), July (1), August (3), and September (2). Only 11 of the 22 records are documented with a description, specimen, or photograph. Records are concentrated in southeast Nebraska, particularly in the Rainwater Basin. Recent summer records from Lake McConaughy suggest possible breeding there.

Acknowledgment

I thank Ross Silcock for providing information on other Nebraska records of this species.