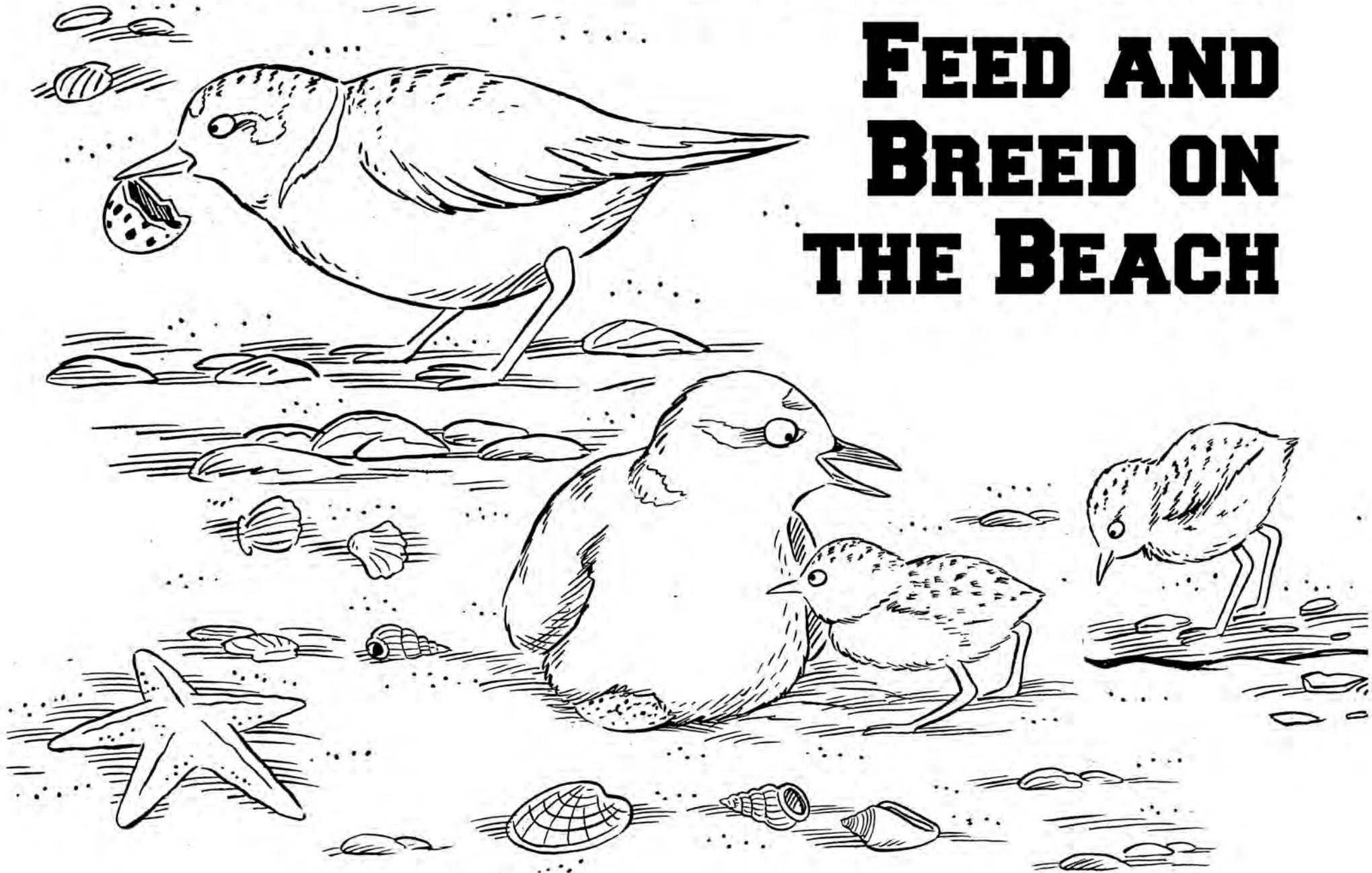


# SNOWY PLOVERS

**FEED AND  
BREED ON  
THE BEACH**



# Did you know that Snowy Plovers...

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

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

As of 2011, 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 1½ ounces (42 grams) – only as much as 17 pennies. 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 Snowy 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 - 20% of the female’s weight.

**- 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?**

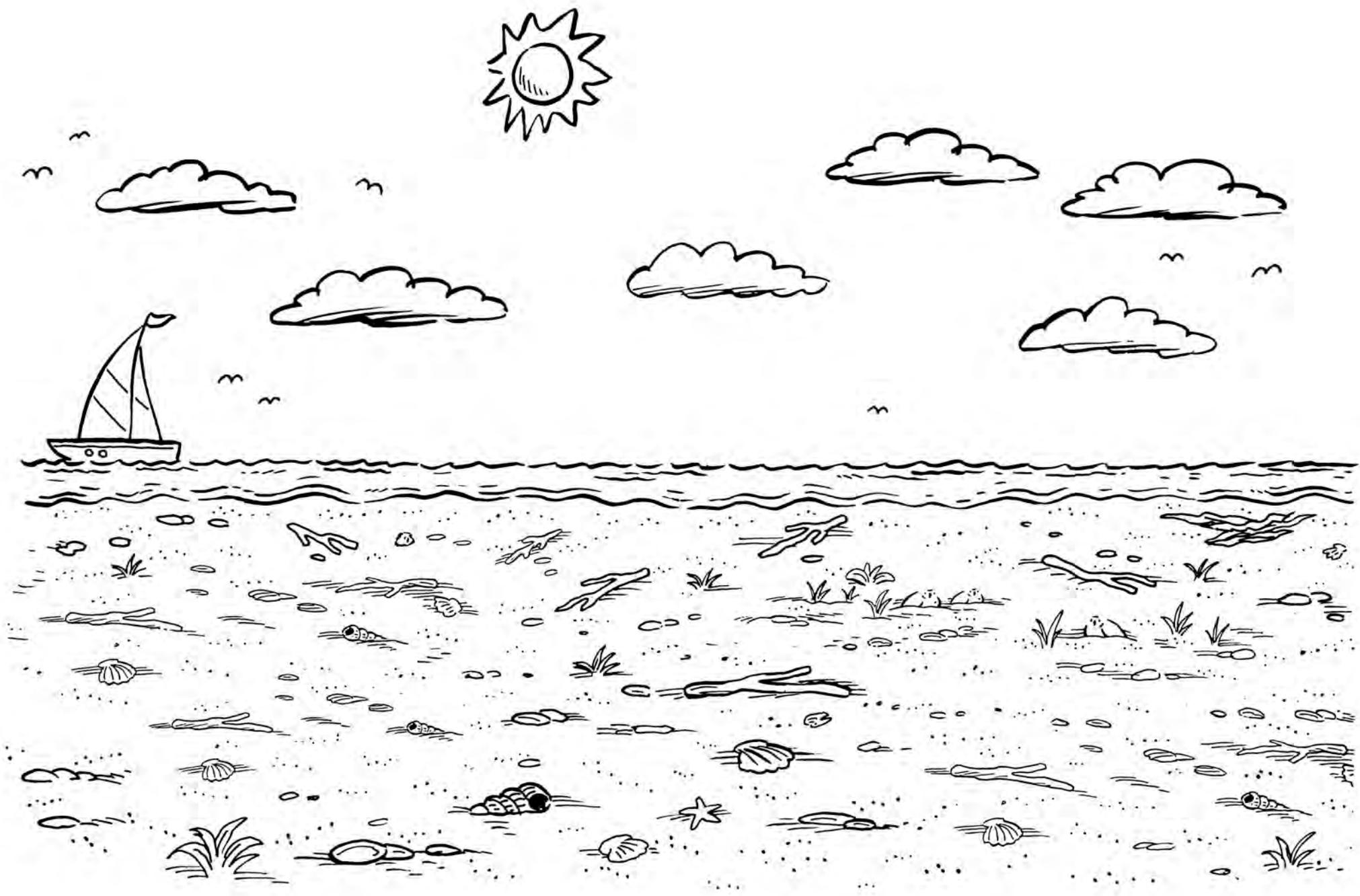
One recorded nest took 36 days. Chicks weigh about 1/4 ounce (7grams) - only as much as 3 pennies - when they hatch.

**- start to run about and feed themselves almost immediately after hatching? (Precocial)**

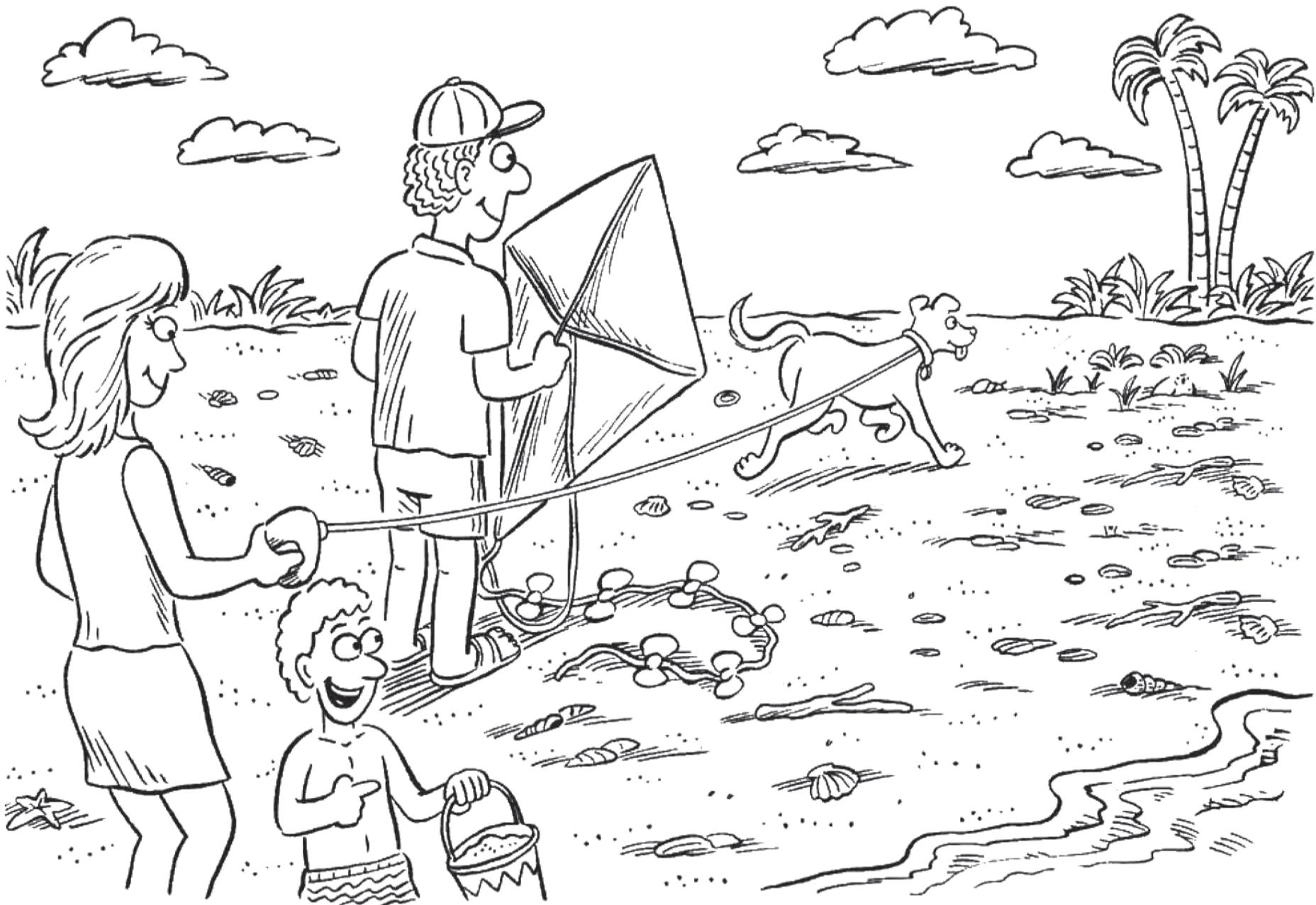
Snowy Plovers eat small insects and crustaceans.

**- fledge when they are 4 to 5 weeks old?**

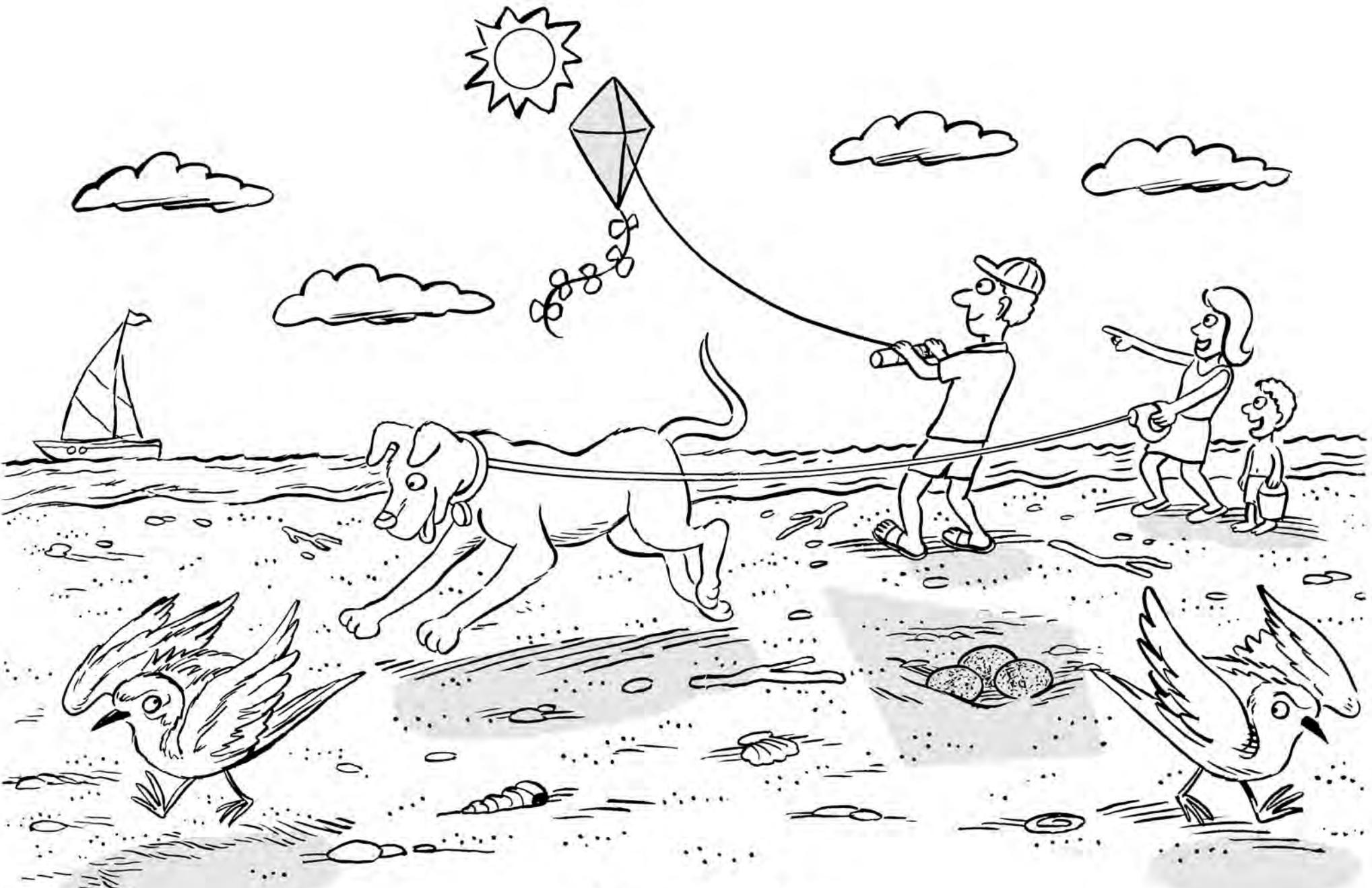
Fledglings are the size of adults but have only pale markings, if any.



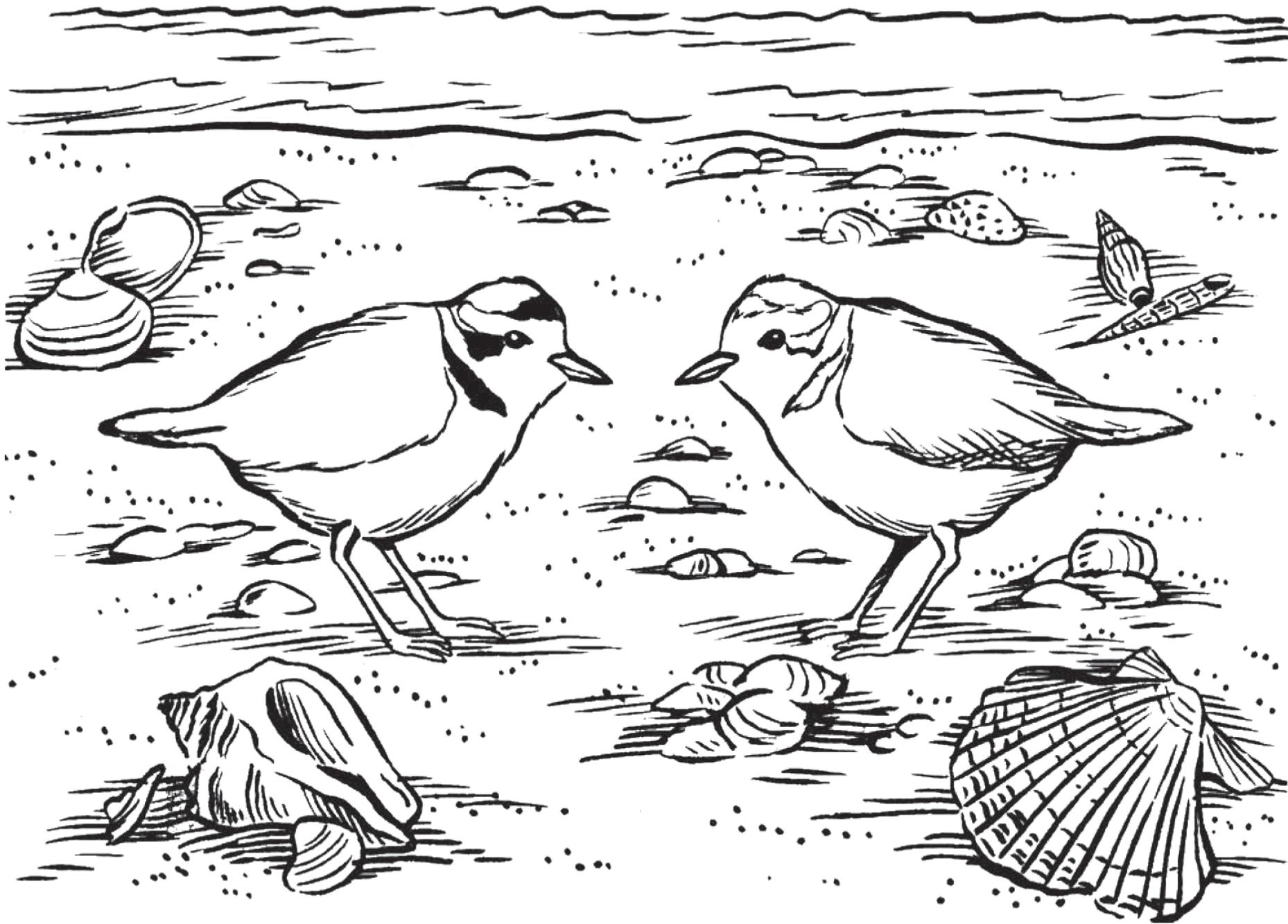
**Can you find the birds in this picture?**



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



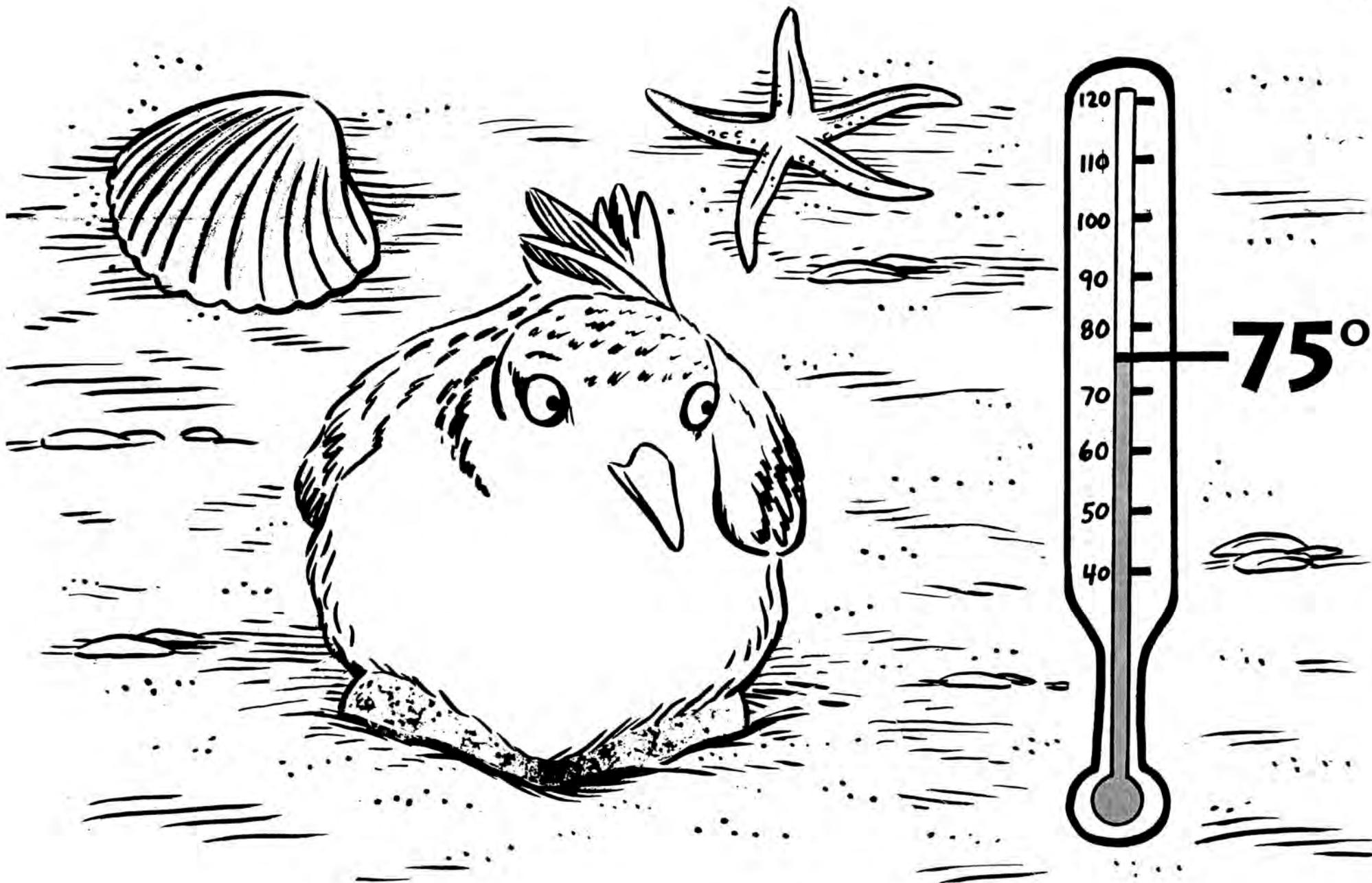
until they are scared away.



The male Snowy Plover has darker markings than the female.

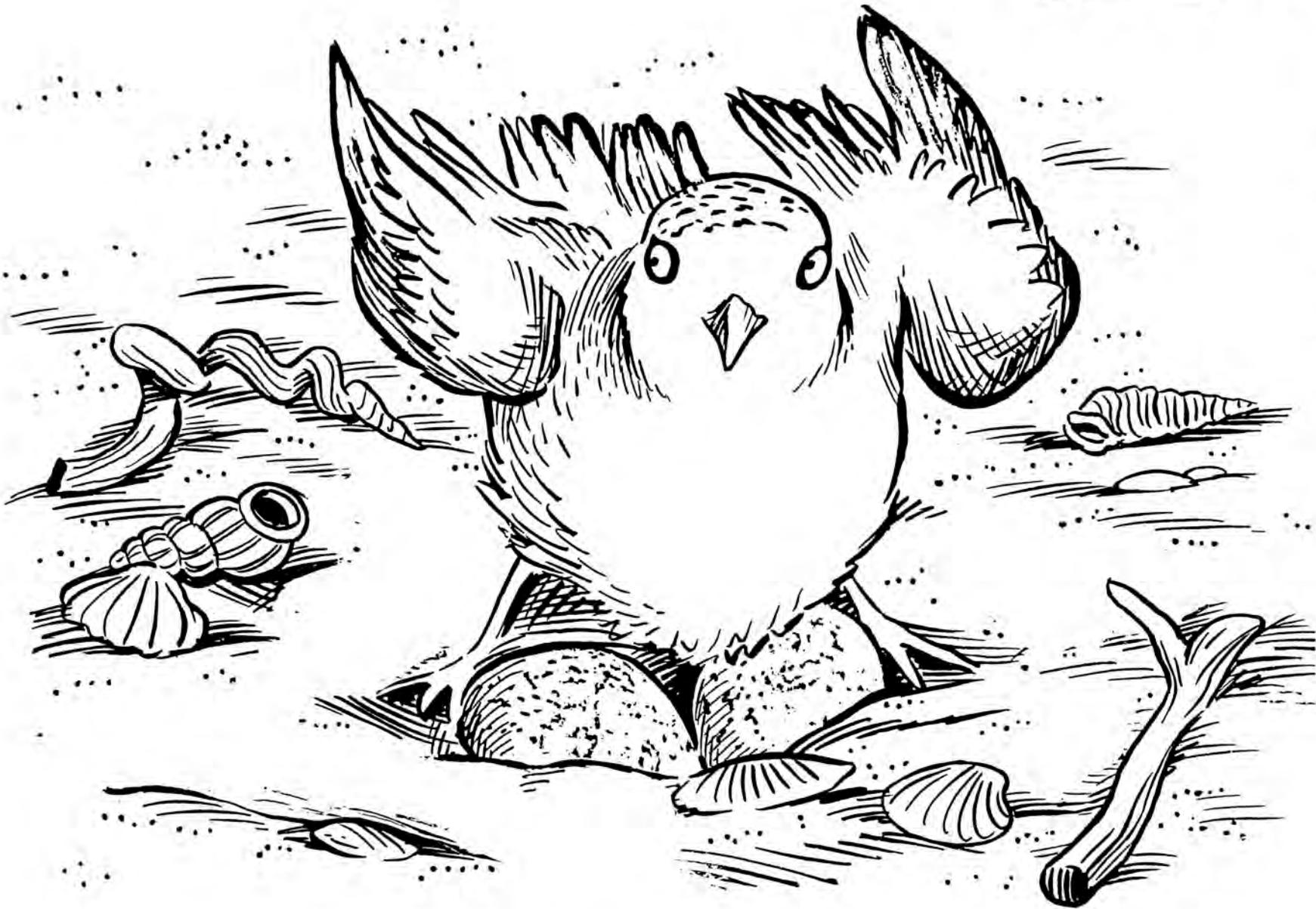
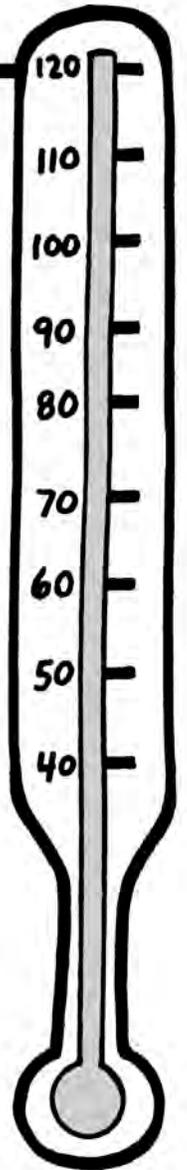


The male scrapes a shallow depression in the sand. The female deposits her eggs in the “scrape”.



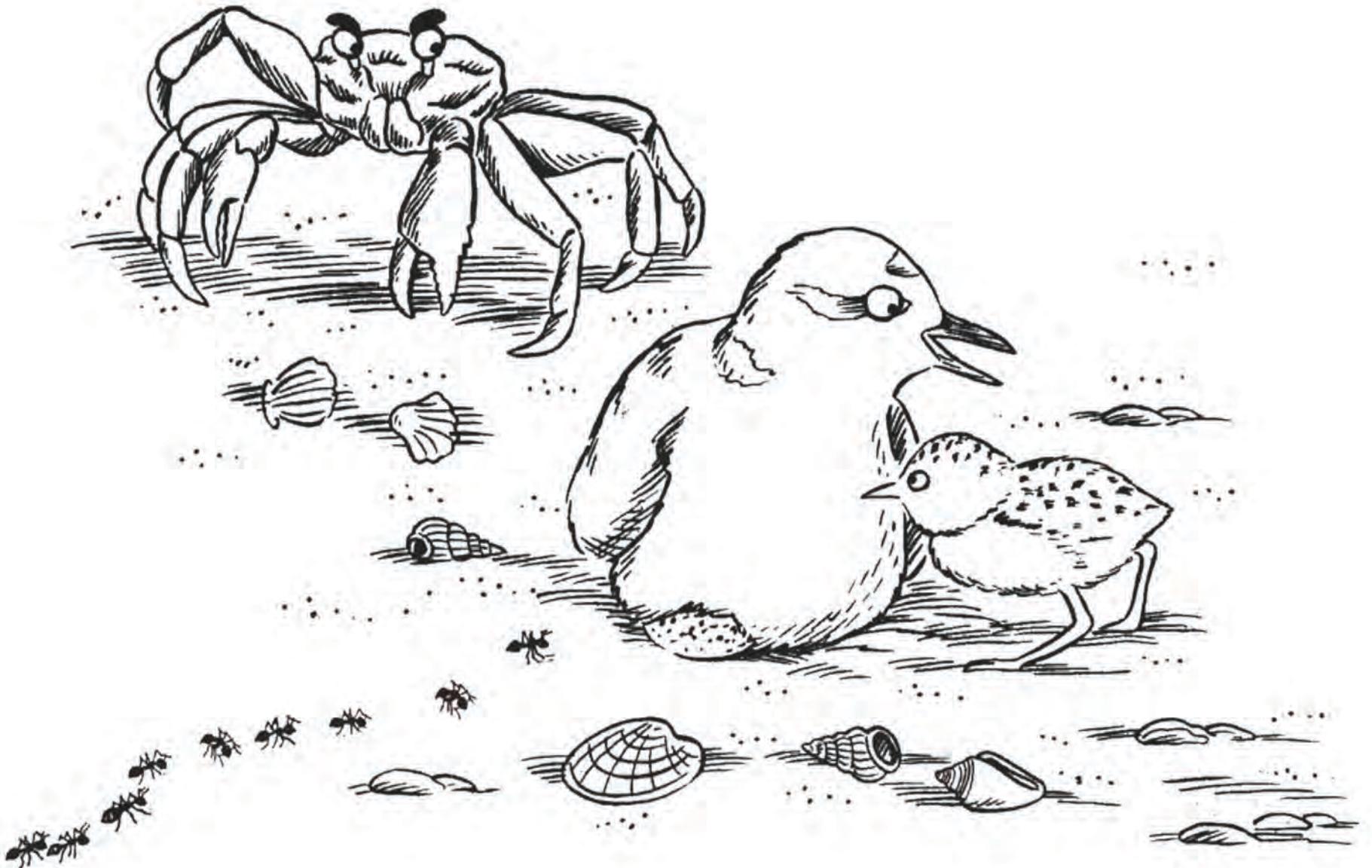
In cooler weather, the adult sits on the eggs (incubates).

120°



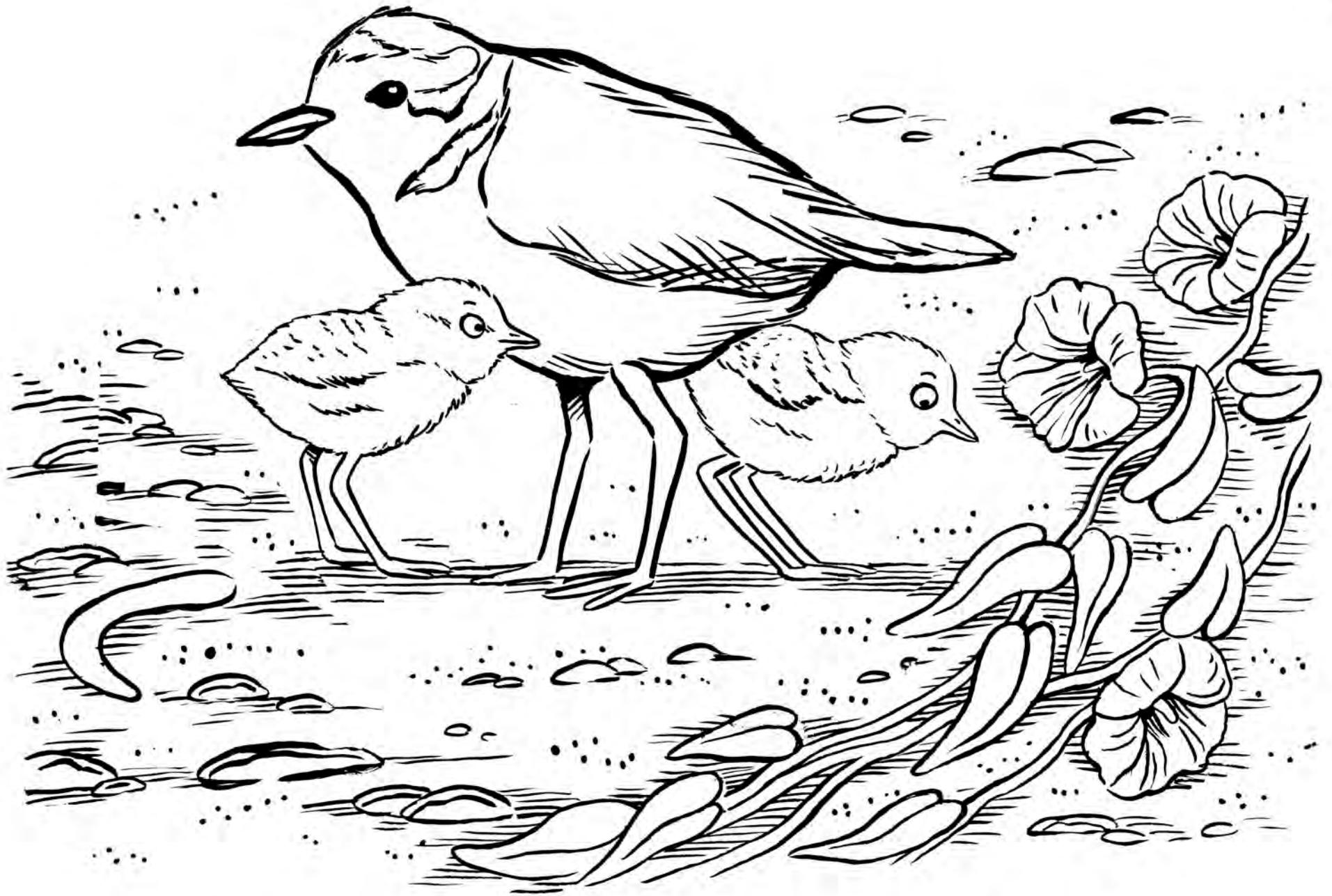
In hot weather, the adult stands over the eggs (shades).

When they hatch, Snowy Plover chicks are so small they weigh only as much as 3 pennies - they are very vulnerable to predators.

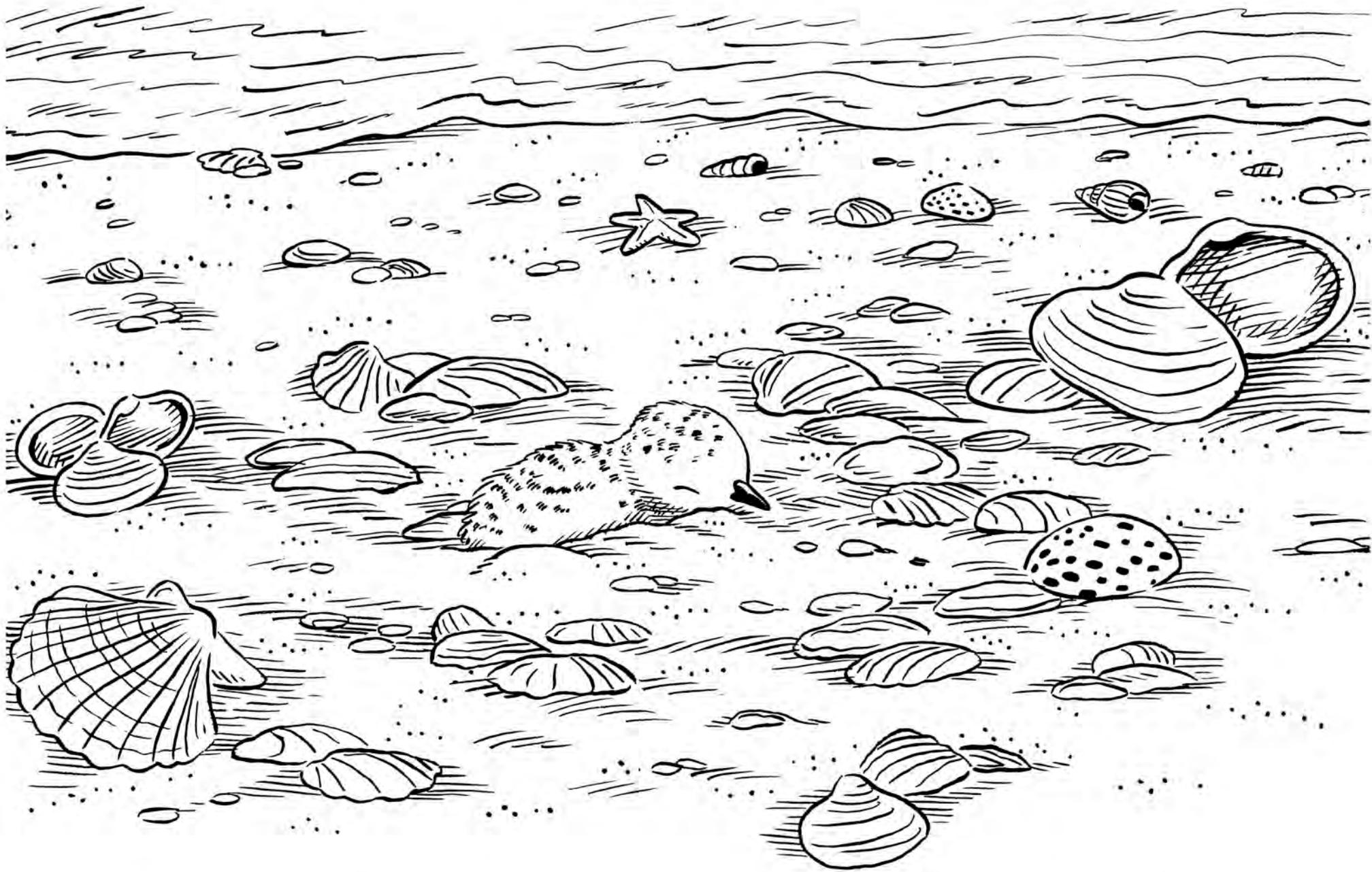




**A parent carries the egg shells away because they attract predators.  
Chicks quickly learn to find food (forage).**



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).



4 to 5 weeks after it hatches, a Snowy Plover chick is able to escape predators by flying.

# Here's how you can avoid stressing Snowy Plovers:

Stay out of the area between the dune vegetation and the high tide wrack line.

Place beach furniture/umbrellas below the high tide wrack line.

Keep dogs away from staked-off nesting areas.

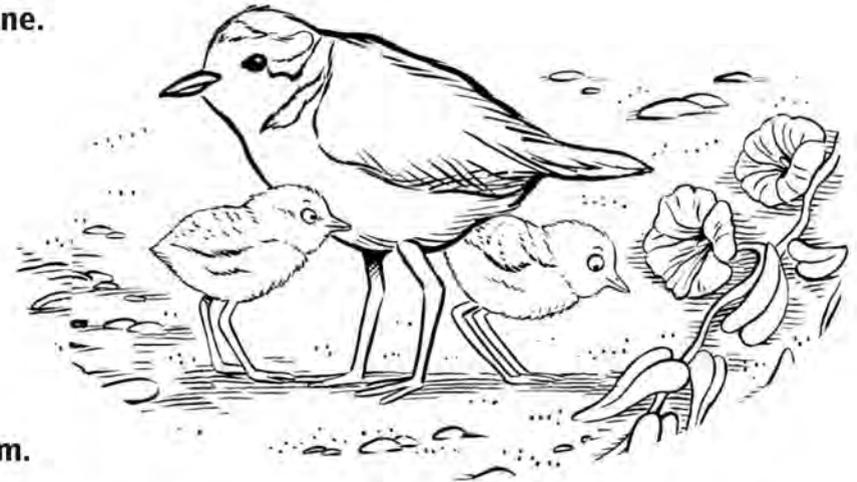
Resist picking up Snowy Plover eggs or chicks.

Refrain from chasing Snowy Plover adults and chicks.

Play games and fly kites well away from Snowy Plover nesting enclosures.

Admire Snowy Plovers from afar, but avoid approaching them.

Build a ramp in your sandcastle moat, or in any hole you dig in the beach, so that Snowy Plover chicks can climb out.



## WHAT WILL YOU DO TO HELP SNOWY PLOVERS?

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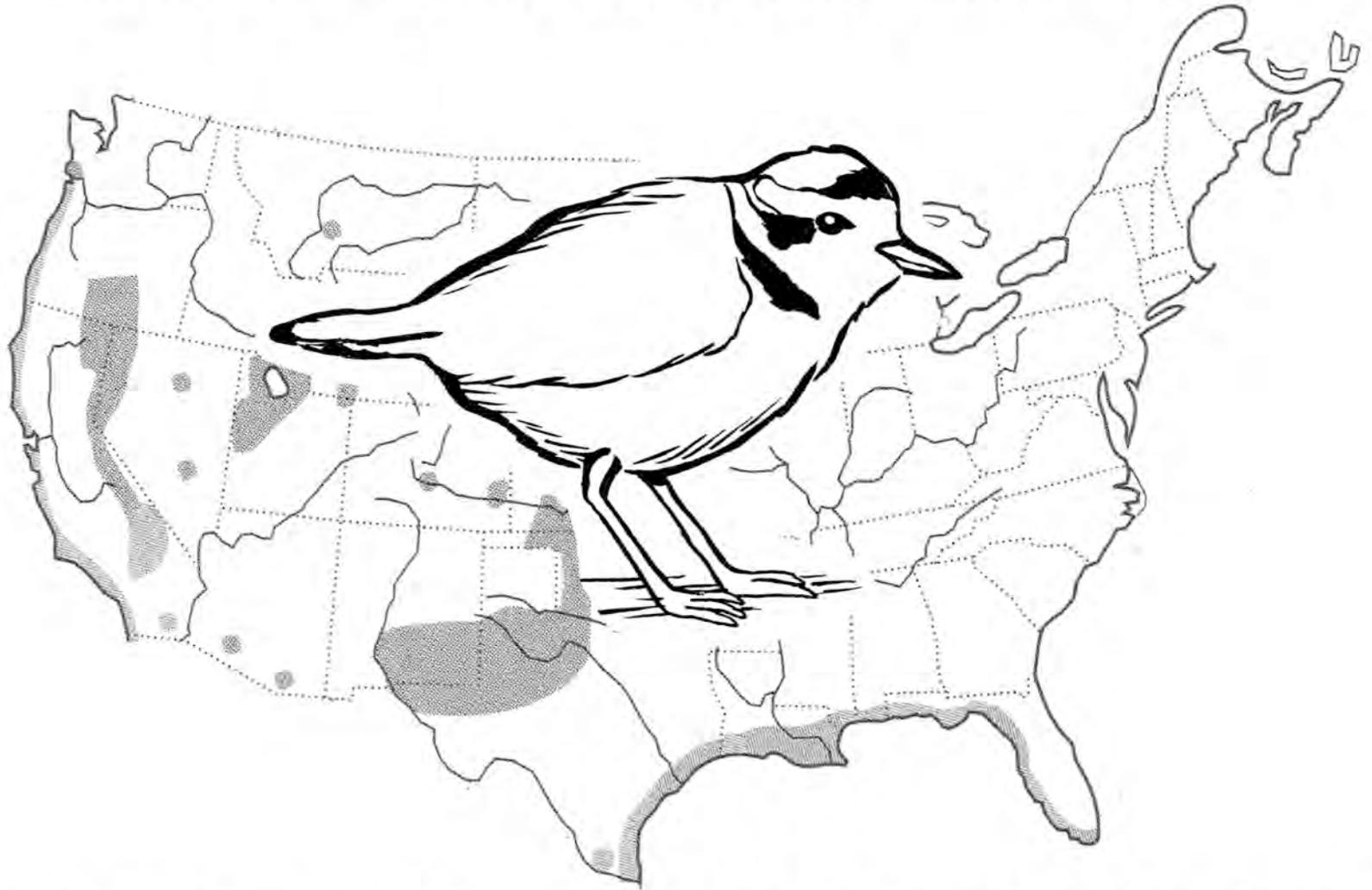
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Report Snowy Plover nests that have not been staked-off to the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF), 472-3984. Phone SCCF or the Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (CROW), 472-5133, if you see an injured Snowy Plover or chick.

# Snowy Plover Distribution in the United States



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photographs by Clair Postmus.  
Text by Claudia Burns and Bev Postmus.  
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