

The Boy and the Sandpiper



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On a bright sunny morning, a boy named Leo pulled on his red bucket hat and ran down to the beach. His yellow t-shirt flapped in the salty wind. He loved the beach more than any other place. The sand was warm under his canvas sneakers, and the waves went whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. Leo had big dark brown eyes that sparkled with curiosity, and a quick bright smile that showed his freckles.



Leo's favorite thing at the beach was the sandpipers. They were tiny birds, about the size of a sparrow, with long thin legs and slender beaks. They dashed along the wet sand like little wind-up toys. Their mottled brown and white feathers blended with the beach, and their round dark eyes were always watching for tiny crabs and bugs. Leo could watch them for hours.



One morning, Leo sat on a driftwood log and watched a sandpiper race back and forth. Its thin legs moved so fast they were a blur. "You're so busy!" Leo laughed. The sandpiper stopped, looked at him with its head tilted, then dashed off again. Leo's mom sat nearby in her wide-brim sun hat, smiling her kind crinkly smile. "They're feeding," she said. "They have to eat a lot to stay strong."



Leo noticed something strange. Some sandpipers weren't just feeding—they were sitting very still on the sand. "Mom, why is that bird just sitting there?" he asked. Mom put down her tote bag and walked over. "That sandpiper is probably on its nest," she said. "Sandpipers build their nests right on the sand. They make a little dip and lay their eggs there."



Leo's eyes went wide. "On the sand? But people walk here! And dogs run here!" Mom nodded. "That's true. The nests are very hard to see. The eggs and baby birds are mottled brown and white, just like the beach. People and dogs can step on them without meaning to. It's a big problem for the birds." Leo looked at the little bird sitting so still. He felt worried.



Just then, a golden dog with floppy ears and a red collar came bounding across the sand. It was chasing a seagull and having a wonderful time. The dog didn't see the sandpiper on its nest. "Oh no!" Leo cried. He jumped up and waved his arms. "Hey, doggy! This way!" The dog turned, its tail wagging. Its wet sandy paws kicked up sand as it trotted over to Leo.



A woman jogged up. "Sorry!" she said. "Biscuit loves the beach, but he gets distracted." She clipped a leash to Biscuit's red collar. Leo looked back at the sandpiper. It was still sitting on its nest, safe. Leo let out a big breath. "That was close," he said. Mom put her hand on his shoulder. "Sandpipers need our help," she said. "Their nests are right where we play."



Leo thought hard. He thought about the sandpipers dashing and feeding. He thought about the nests hidden in the sand. He thought about Biscuit the dog, who didn't mean any harm. "Mom," he said slowly, "what if we made signs? Signs that tell people to watch out for nests? Then everyone would know." Mom smiled her crinkly smile. "That's a wonderful idea, Leo."



At home, Leo and Mom got to work. Mom found some smooth pieces of wood in the shed. Leo painted them bright yellow, like his t-shirt. Then he painted big black letters: PLEASE GIVE THE BIRDS SPACE. Mom drew a little sandpiper on each sign. "These will help everyone remember," she said. Leo's red bucket hat sat on his head as he painted carefully.



The next morning, Leo and Mom carried the signs to the beach. Mom brought a hammer and wooden stakes in her tote bag. Leo carried a sign in each hand. They found the places where the sandpipers were nesting. "We'll put the signs a little away from the nests," Mom said. "That way, people and dogs will stay back." Leo nodded and helped push the stakes into the sand.



A family with a beach ball walked by. "What are the signs for?" a girl asked. Leo pointed to a sandpiper sitting on its nest. "That bird is on its nest," he said. "The eggs are right there in the sand. If we step there, we might break them." The girl looked closely. "I see it!" she said. "I'll tell my little brother to stay away." She ran off to play, careful to go around the sign.



Biscuit the dog came bounding again, but this time his owner saw the sign. "Come, Biscuit!" she called. "Let's go around." Biscuit wagged his tail and followed her. Leo watched the sandpiper on its nest. It looked calm. Other sandpipers dashed along the water's edge, feeding. "The signs are working!" Leo said. Mom gave him a high five. "You did a good thing, Leo."



Weeks passed. Leo visited the beach often. One day, he saw something tiny moving near a sign. Three little sandpiper chicks! They were fluffy and brown, with long thin legs like their parents. They stumbled over the sand, peeping softly. Leo's heart felt full. "They hatched!" he whispered. He stayed far away so he wouldn't scare them. The signs had kept them safe.



Leo sat on his driftwood log and watched the chicks learn to feed. Their parents showed them how to poke their beaks into the wet sand. Other beachgoers saw the signs and walked around. Dogs stayed on their leashes. Leo smiled his bright smile. He knew that beaches were not just for playing. They were homes for many animals, and everyone could help protect them.



Mom sat beside him in her green shirt and sun hat. "You know, Leo," she said, "you made a big difference. Those signs will help sandpipers for a long time." Leo looked at the little chicks. "I just wanted to help," he said. "And I learned that even small things can make a big difference." Mom hugged him. The waves went whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, and the sandpipers dashed along the shore.



Now Leo always carries a little wooden sign in his hand when he goes to the beach. He knows that sandpipers build their nests right on the sand, and that people and dogs can step on them without meaning to. But with signs and care, the nests stay safe and the birds stay happy. Leo knows that beaches are important habitats for many animals. And everyone can help protect them.