

# Word about the Hood

## Victoria Update

### PHILLIP ISLAND SEASON UPDATE

**Vivien Morris, Research Officer, Phillip Island Nature Parks**

We have noticed an increase of e-bikes on beaches with tracks being seen going up to Observation Point which is nesting habitat for fairy terns as well as roosting habitat for many migratory shorebird species including far eastern curlew. E bikes were also recorded riding across the rocks to get towards Smith's Beach where a pair of Hooded Plovers routinely nest. As e-bikes become more popular and accessible, so does the risk of crushing egg and chicks for beach nesting shorebirds. Nature Parks are working on improving education around e-bike use on beaches as they become more popular.



*Hoodie parent, with the two chicks either side, Smith's Beach. Photo: Phillip Island Nature Parks.*

The Sharing Our Shores campaign ran again on Phillip Island between 1<sup>st</sup> December 2025 – 30<sup>th</sup> April 2026. The program has strong support across the region, including 75 local businesses, and combines beach safety messaging with simple actions people can take to protect wildlife.

- Stay on tracks and avoid walking on dunes
- Keep your distance from wildlife
- Keep dogs on leads and cats indoors
- Take your rubbish with you
- Slow down for wildlife when driving

Education and compliance efforts were also increased over summer, with Nature Parks officers running 44 beach patrols as part



*Jon Fallaw (Ranger) & Kim Dunstan (Community Engagement Officer) at a Sharing our Shores pop up at Smiths Beach. Photo: Phillip Island Nature Parks.*

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of Operation Soho, working alongside Bass Coast Shire Council and the Conservation Regulator to both enforce regulations and educate visitors.

Community engagement has also played a key role, with more than 500 people attending pop-up information stalls at Cape Woolamai and Smiths Beach through the Woolamai Beach Surf Life Saving Club's Nippers program, and further sessions were held at My Community Library in Cowes and Inverloch.

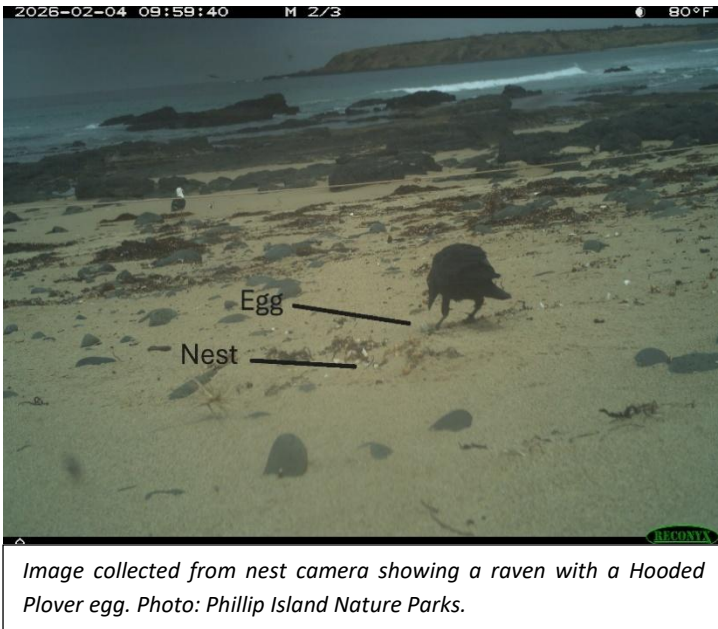


Image collected from nest camera showing a raven with a Hooded Plover egg. Photo: Phillip Island Nature Parks.

To help identify the causes of egg failure Nature Parks staff and interns put wildlife cameras facing nests. One of the cameras this season caught a series of images starting with two eggs in the nest followed by a raven and only one egg in the nest, and then a raven with the egg outside of the nest. In the background of the image below you can see the Hooded Plover adults performing their distraction display for a Pacific Gull. It's unknown whether the gull was there the whole-time off camera and that's what gave the raven the opportunity to predate the eggs or not, but we have regularly been suspecting ravens as the cause of failure on this beach due to their footprints.

Following the Birdlife guidelines, cameras will not be used on this beach for at least a year to ensure we don't teach the ravens to associate cameras with eggs, and we will continue our more cautious approach to refuges since this beach sees fewer visitors than most of our Hoodie sites.

### WEDDINGS, PARTIES, ANYTHING....

#### Judy Galewski, Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover Great South West

I am a Beach-nesting Bird volunteer at Bridgewater Beach in southwest Victoria, and these are the threats they don't warn you about:

- Weddings, lots of weddings. Last summer there were two on the same dangerously hot day. Dangerous to the chicks of course. Only one wedding this summer, but so close to the rope fence that the signs spoiled the wedding photos and had to be removed. Luckily, the Hoodies were between nests, and they just stepped back and watched.
- Parties, at night, all night, with the obligatory bonfire and a dozen utes, out of sight and as close to the Hoodies as possible. A party in 2023 ran over and killed the one and only Hoodie chick.
- Funerals, the scattering of ashes and flowers, shouldn't be a problem. Except when they gather in front of a Hoodie nest and take a vehicle on the beach.
- Vehicles launching boats killed two of three chicks in 2023. But they didn't die in vain as vehicles launching boats are now required to use a spotter, stay in a restricted launching zone and are no longer allowed to park on the beach.



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- Photographers with massive cameras who believe sitting under the rope fence is appropriate. See photo. The ravens took note and the eggs were gone by the next morning.
- Two hundred German cruise ship passengers visited with a Hoodie nest right in the middle of the main beach. The passengers were very respectful of rows of pink cones and the three Hoodie volunteers standing guard. The Hoodies continued to sit, undisturbed.
- Paragliders commonly fly up and down Bridgewater Beach and turn before they reach Hoodie territory and the cliffs. But the other day, paragliders spent an hour circling the nest on the main beach at dusk. And yes, they did know that there was a nest there.
- The Tri-State Games on the beach for four hundred participants with disabilities, two years in a row. These games could have been an enormous threat but great communication with cooperative organisers meant the Hoodies and chicks moved away to a safe distance and the participants were contained in the games area.
- Surf Lifesaving patrols accompanied by one hundred fluoro pink nippers less than 100 metres from a Hoodie nest. Again, fantastic communication between Anne-Maree (a Hoodie volunteer who is also a surf lifesaver), the patrol captains and Amy (the publicity officer for the surf lifesavers) has meant the welfare of the Hoodies has become paramount. When the Hoodies nested west of the Clubhouse, the whole patrol, nippers and all moved east. When the Hoodies nested east of the Clubhouse, everyone moved west. Learning about Hoodies has been a great activity for nippers on days of bad weather. Amy's fabulous Facebook posts have been shared across the whole community. Having the local surf lifesavers come on board supporting the Hoodies has been the greatest success in threat mitigation this season.



*Hazards our Hoodies endure including close up photographers. Photo: Anne-Maree Burgoine.*

### NEW GUARDIANS FOR OUR HOODED PLOVERS IN THE OTWAYS!

#### Sylvia van der Peet, Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover Otway Coast

In late 2025, **BirdLife Australia** and the **Great Ocean Road Coast & Parks Authority (GORCAPA)** hosted a joint workshop to bolster local conservation efforts. The last in-person training in Apollo Bay had been in September 2022. Following roughly thirty initial inquiries, eleven dedicated individuals attended the **Hooded Plover volunteer training workshop** at the Apollo Bay Golf Club on Saturday, November 29th. We were thrilled to welcome so many potential new volunteers to the program in the Otway region.

#### Training & Induction

Following the practical workshop, attendees were encouraged to complete their final induction phase: the **“Induction to Speaking with the Public”** module on the Beach Nesting Birds website, which seven people completed. This ensures all volunteers are fully prepared to engage with the community and represent BirdLife Australia effectively before beginning fieldwork.

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### Fieldwork & Coordination

To get volunteers started, several mentorship options were established:

- **Weekly Beach Checks:** Conducted by GORCAPA Conservation Ranger, Inala Swart, every Monday between 11:00 am and 12:00 pm.
- **Peer Mentoring:** Volunteers can also coordinate with Regional Volunteer Coordinators, Sylvia and Frank, to arrange field sessions.

### Key Contacts

Participants were provided with a dedicated contact list for ongoing support:

- **Meg Cullen:** Manager, Beach-Nesting Birds
- **Inala Swart:** GORCAPA Conservation Ranger (Apollo Bay)
- **Sylvia van der Peet:** Regional Volunteer Coordinator (Apollo Bay)
- **Charlie Filosa:** GORCAPA Community Engagement Officer

### Digital Communication and Staying Connected

In mid-January, Charlie Filosa launched a **Hooded Plover Volunteer WhatsApp group**. This platform has already become a vital tool for sharing real-time sightings, coordinating beach checks, and maintaining team morale.

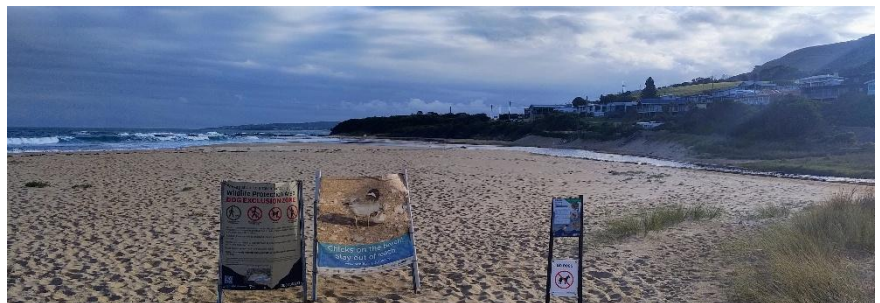
The group's first official outing took place on Monday, January 19th, at the Apollo Bay Recreation Reserve. With Inala actively mentoring new recruits in the field, we are optimistic that the next nesting season will see a significant increase in volunteer presence across the Otway area.

### Going Forward

This year has seen a lot of failed nests, we suspect mostly due to predation by foxes and in one or two cases Ravens. We're hoping that the increase in new beach guardians will see increased success for Hoodies in the Otways.



*Hoodie News A-frame with artwork by Inala Swart, our local GORCAPA Conservation Ranger. Photo: Frank van der Peet.*



*Exclusion Zone, Chick Banner and Chick Info Signs on the Skenes Creek Beach. Photo: Frank van der Peet.*

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### EVERY PAIR OF EYES MAKES A DIFFERENCE

#### Bron Ives, Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover Surf Coast

There have been nine chicks on the Surf Coast this season, so far five of them have fledged. For anyone who has ever stood on a cold and windy beach watching a chick pick its way across the wrack line or a reef, you know exactly how hard that is to achieve.

Last season eight chicks fledged across the Surf Coast, some say ten chicks, a record that showed what passionate, coordinated efforts can achieve. This season the momentum continues with one chick still on the beach at Red Rocks as this goes to press.

Pt Roadknight continues to be the Surf Coast's most important breeding sanctuary. Three resident pairs call it home year-round, and this season three chicks successfully fledged there. Last season, the pair at Pt Roadknight achieved something never locally recorded before, three separate nests hatching in a single season. This is no accident. Protective topography, experienced parent birds, a rich intertidal reef, a permanent *No Dog Zone*, GORCAPA's temporary *Wildlife Protection Area*, strong community support and tireless volunteers make this remarkable place work.

After four consecutive years of failed nests, Aireys Inlet has turned a corner. Five juveniles have fledged over the past two seasons, driven by intensive volunteer efforts, Wildlife Protection Zones, uniformed beach presence and targeted predator control. A newly arrived pair near the Fairhaven Surf Club, one banded as a sub-adult at Pt Roadknight just six months ago, attempted to breed, but their chicks survived only 48 hours on a sandblasted dune in howling winds. Promising signs, nonetheless.

The season's hardest moment came at Aireys, where a dog killed a 25-day-old chick inside the Wildlife Protection Zone, undoing weeks of parental and volunteer care in an instant. The Conservation Regulator and Victoria Police are working to identify those responsible.

Non-compliance remains our most persistent challenge. Volunteers recorded over 200 off-lead dog incursions into Pt Roadknight's permanent *No Dog Zone* during this season's 35-day fledging window. We are working with the dedicated staff at the Surf Coast Shire Council to strengthen protections and enforcement, particularly after hours at high-risk sites. The data, the science, and twenty years of recovery work is clear, where dogs are absent, Hooded Plovers thrive.

This season our volunteers gave over 1,500 hours to protect these birds and every single one mattered.



*Hoodie, taking a recently hatched chick's eggshell away from the nest. Photo: Bron Ives.*

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### BASS COAST SEASON UPDATE

Janine Thomas, Warwick Mears & Paula Street, Volunteers, Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast

A difficult season to monitor due to a lot of bad weather initially and then once it fined up, we had eggs everywhere creating havoc for diligent volunteers! From San Remo to Williamsons, we had 3 brand new pairs move in and from the 10 breeding pairs in total we had 6 fledglings. The highlight was the new pair at the Mouth of Powlett River West Bank. This is a very popular spot on the Bass Coast and has all sorts of recreational activities as well as a caravan park across the river. It has been 8 years since a chick has fledged on this site despite multiple attempts every season. This champion new pair not only managed to incubate a nest over the Christmas holidays and long weekend but also produced 2 fledglings.



*Powlett River Mouth Chick & parent. Photo: Jennifer Brown.*

The Wonthaggi Back Beaches finished the season

strong with 5 fledglings spread along Baxters and Williamsons Beaches. The Williamsons Beach Further East and neighbouring site continued to surprise with partner swaps. 75 yellow left its long-term partner XC orange and had a nesting attempt with KL white who lost its partner last season. XC orange spent a few weeks alone. 75 yellow returned to XC orange for the latter half of the season and had a nesting attempt. Meanwhile KL white spent many weeks solo before finding a new no band partner and having a nest. Unfortunately, none of these nests were successful but the pairings look promising for next season.



*Baxters Beach family. Photo: Janine Thomas.*

The Inverloch/Bunurong Coast proved to be frustrating once again. However, it was good to have the return of nesting Hoodies to Point Norman. Despite 2 pairs having nesting attempts and 1 making it to hatching stage, the chicks disappeared quickly. A similar situation occurred with the Screw Creek pair in that their 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt resulted in chicks but they didn't make it through the busy Australia Day weekend. Tidal inundation impacted the nests at both these sites. At the Oaks, the high tides pushed the birds up into the dunes to nest. The nest was abandoned for an unknown reason and it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in 3 years such an unusual event has happened at this site.

No nests were recorded at Twin Reefs. The Cape Paterson to Harmers Haven area has had 1 fledgling so far on the Wilsons Road 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Bays

West site. There are more fledglings to come at the Pea Creek Estuary sites which has been split into an east and west site due to the arrival of a new nesting pair. If all goes well there will be a further 3 making a total of 15 fledglings for the Bass Coast.

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### HOODIES WITHOUT BORDERS AND OUR ONE CHICK WONDER

**Alison Green, Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover East Gippsland**

Tucked away in the far eastern corner of Victoria amidst coastal wilderness, Mallacoota offers a string of eligible nesting beaches for our Hooded Plover population. With 2,000 kms of Victorian coastline to our west and a mere 20 kms east to the NSW border, it's not surprising our rugged coastline of beaches attract interstate Hooded Plover visitation.

Over February/March, our Friends of Mallacoota Hooded Plover volunteers reported seeing two Hoodie fledglings with black bands on their left legs, which indicate NSW origins. One banded Hoodie fledgling was later spotted hanging out at the Betka River mouth with a group of Hooded Plover adults. Its black band number was ascertained as SO, one of three fledglings banded at Nullica, south of Eden, in November 2025. That black band provided valuable feedback to Birdlife Australia regarding Hooded Plover movements along the coast, regardless of manmade borders.

Early nests failed at Quarry Beach and our intrepid Betka River mouth pair weathered nest failures from what appeared to be dog predation, then high tide intrusion, before moving to a secluded end of the beach away from the river mouth. A concerned member of the public informed our team of the presence of a 3-egg nest in this new location and the surf lifesavers, who were stationed there this summer, were helpful in spreading the word concerning their presence.



*Tagged NSW juvenile SO who visited Mallacoota. Photo: Caroline Jones.*



*Our one surviving summer '26 chick getting ready to fledge. Photos: Caroline Jones.*



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The site was fenced and signs erected requesting beachgoers to respect and avoid disturbing the nesting parents. Eventually 3 healthy chicks emerged, soon reduced to one surviving chick. No evidence was found as to why the two chicks disappeared, but our resilient “One Chick Wonder” went on to successfully fledge by mid-March. A summer victory after a host of early nest failures. Our Mallacoota 2026 summer story of “Hoodies Without Borders” and our “One Chick Wonder” show how these small birds and our small actions, can inspire big conservation impacts.

### BELLARINE PENINSULA SEASON UPDATE

#### Tash Verspeek, Volunteer Regional Coordinator, Friends of the Hooded Plover Bellarine Peninsula

Our region has 14 breeding pairs from the East at Point Lonsdale Lighthouse through to Breamlea estuary (Thompson Creek). The Friends of the Hooded Plover, Bellarine, assist with monitoring the population, their breeding/nesting activity, provide site guardianship when chicks have hatched at vulnerable sites with heavy beach usage and educate/engage the public.

**Pt Lonsdale back beach:** No breeding success this season. One chick hatched from MD (White) and unbanded in October, but chicks were gone after 24 hours with storm surges the likely cause of failure. Later nests were all predated on by foxes and magpies.

Mixed breeding pairs (A bit of a ‘Days of Our Lives’ saga) occurring on the Lonnie back beach. JX (White) two timing with HY (Orange) one minute and EL (Orange) the next!! All nests failed.

**Buckley Foreshore:** After what was looking like a ‘failed season’, with numerous nest failures due to storm surges and fox and magpie predation, the Hoodies showed us they were not giving up and neither did we!

PL (Orange) and Unbanded hatched chicks on 2<sup>nd</sup> February and 2 Chicks fledged on 9<sup>th</sup> March!!!! Yay! West of Turtle Rock.

HE (White) paired up with dear HY (Orange) (20 yrs old now?) and hatched 3 chicks on 11<sup>th</sup> February. One Chick survived and fledged on 18<sup>th</sup> March!! Yay! East of Turtle Rock.



Fox caught near nest. Photo: Anne Gason.

Massive support and assistance came from the volunteers, City of Greater Geelong (CoGG) Enviro team, Nature Reserves Team and Animal Management all coming together in a weekly meeting to update Hoodie status. This combined presence on the beach and at access points really made a difference, engaging dog walkers and improving compliance. Special thanks to Aldrin Woods (CoGG).

Matt Wills, Manager of the Nature Reserves Team and Alex Johnson also got on board to arrange some planned Fox Shoots with Chris, during the period of incubation and chicks hatching. This made a big difference reducing the risk of fox predation on nests and vulnerable chicks. Fourteen foxes were shot over 4 nights within a 2-3 week period.

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**Ocean Grove (Wedge Street) -Barwon Heads (13<sup>th</sup> Beach):** JU (Orange) and Unbanded had 4 nest attempts at the busy ‘Dog off leash beach’ between Wedge and Tuckfield Streets in Ocean Grove. Despite Barwon Coast Staff’s best efforts to close off the site and dedicated volunteers keeping a close watchful eye over the dear pair trying their hardest to raise chicks over the busiest part of the breeding season and in the most challenging spot of the coast, their attempts all failed. Despite the beach closure, there was still too much impact by off leash dogs, with 2 chicks being preyed upon and their parents sent sprawling for their lives from off leash dogs. It’s absolutely devastating to watch this happening before your eyes. But our Hoodies are truly resilient beyond our comprehension and never give up, trying again! This is what keeps us inspired to keep supporting them and being their ultimate guardians.

**Breamlea – Bancoora (Stingray Bay):** Fledgling success! One pair, BJ (White) and Unbanded, Breamlea, set up nest on top of a dune in Stingray Bay. Chicks hatched 8<sup>th</sup> February and 1 chick successfully fledged on 15<sup>th</sup> March!! Yay! Massive thanks to Brett and Baylea from Barwon Coast setting up a Temporary Exclusion Zone for the first time in Breamlea. It worked a treat and assisted dedicated volunteers in their engagements and education with the public.

**Swan Island – Sand Island:** Surprise Fledgling found with PT (Orange) and Unbanded. PT (Orange) has taken up residence with an unbanded adult at Swan Island. PT has been missing in action for the last season from the back beach in Point Lonsdale. His previous partner, EL (Orange) had been approached by JX (White) earlier in the season when PT’s whereabouts were unclear and he was not around to reinforce the relationship with EL. Sadly, no luck from nesting with EL.



*Hoodie nest at Sand Island, QC ferry terminal in background. Photo: Tash Verspeek.*



*Dog’s Breakfast. Photo: John Murray.*

We always strive to strengthen our partnerships with land managers, local councils and other environmental organisations and research institutions. These collaborations have provided us with additional resources via successful grant applications and funds provided such as a grant from Port Phillip Bay Environment Fund (DEECA) \$15,000, a Borough of Queenscliff Community Grant of \$1,000. enabling a successful “Dog’s Breakfast” event.

Challenges abound but with added support and funds we can expand Monitoring Programs, provide more resources and educate and engage more of the beach users.

We have 5 chicks from 4 different sites that fledged this season! We are just so elated for the Hoodies success this season. “It takes a Village” and our amazing team of Volunteers have done an amazing job in increasing fledging successes.

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### SOUTH GIPPSLAND SEASON UPDATE

**Wendy Hayes, Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover South Gippsland**

*We're already planning the banding party, little one.....only 3 more weeks till you can fly.....*

This two week old chick survives on a narrow beach at Pony Creek, Waratah Bay and came at the tail end of our breeding season in April, when most of our breeding pairs are already taking a break until next August.

The parents of this little chick, CB/unbanded, became hypervigilant during this season. They had incubated three nests, each with three eggs, till eventually two chicks hatched. This chick's sibling failed from unknown causes. Given the number of fox tracks on the beach, keen interest shown by pacific gulls foraging on the beach, high tides sweeping through the nest area only a day after the eggs hatched and observing the number of people using the beach over warm summer weekends and easter school holidays, it's amazing this chick is still alive and thriving!



*Chick at Pony Creek. Photo: Wendy Hayes.*

Sandy Point (SP) and Wilsons Promontory National Park (WPNP) have also had challenging breeding seasons, with plenty of activity observed but little hatching success until near the end of the season. Only one chick, which fledged before Xmas, had been observed at Sandy Point. Two chicks hatched more recently on the SP sandpit and were moved by their parents more than 1 km along the ocean beach to Horse Track, where last week they were banded soon after fledging.


Three of the WPNP Rangers monitored nests and chicks at Whisky Bay and Five Mile Beach, one chick at each site survived to fledge and both were banded recently.

Each time we go out to check the chick at Pony Creek it takes a long while to locate as these parents send their chick into hiding when approached from >250m distance. It is often more than an hour before the chick is given the signal to continue foraging. Fortunately, there's an abundance of food after high tides cast weed up on the beach above the rocks, so the chick is rapidly growing and already practicing stretching its tiny wings.

We're trying to support the parents who are doing an impressive job of fending off aerial threats, usually silver gulls and ravens, as well as responding to threats on the beach including visiting neighbouring Hoodies who are clearly not welcome. We've put up



*Two banded fledglings, Sandy Point. Photo: Wendy Hayes.*



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signs, have a banner ready to erect on the beach during busy periods including the current Easter holidays, and try to enthuse the local beach users with our love for the Hoodies, pointing out how to look out for them and give them space when passing by.

As we peer through binoculars the sight of this robust little chick as it comes out of hiding at each visit is cause for celebration.... another day closer to fledging.