EDITION 34 – SEASON 2025 /2026

INTRODUCTION

Dr Grainne Maguire, Program Leader, Coastal and Wetland Birds, BirdLife Australia

2026 has started with a whirlwind of activity! The program has reached 20 years!!! So many of you have been with us for the whole 20 years, and a number of you pre-date this even, having participated in the biennial count (which started in 1980!) or having started fencing nesting sites in a handful of areas. The best thing is that among all the long-term volunteers, are the new people who keep coming on board each season, and being inspired by these amazing birds and by the equally amazing people helping them. The team is pulling together some great highlights of the program over its two decades to share with you soon!

We have recently welcomed two new staff onto the team, and even the recruitment process itself opens your eyes to just how many talented people are out there and passionate about a career in protecting our coasts and wildlife. One of the new roles has specifically arisen due to the Harmful Algal Bloom in South Australia, as this is particularly worrying for a suite of shorebird and waterbird species. We haven't yet begun compiling the season's Hooded Plover breeding data, which takes time to go through each pair's nesting efforts and calculate the success rates, but we know that the incredibly poor breeding success in the most impacted part of South Australia must be in part to impacts of the bloom. This role will allow us to expand our monitoring and to collect additional information to be able to tease apart a 'bad season' that might potentially arise due to storm-related, unsuitable beach morphology from the impacts of the bloom.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue, the fantastic spotlights on Felicity, Leonie and Aldrin; the exciting new projects delivered in partnership with Indigenous groups including Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation; as well as the challenge of threats to our beach-nesters including foxes and the devastation they can have on tern colonies, the challenges of signs withstanding our dynamic coastal conditions, and the potential threat of an incursion of H5 Bird Flu. It's incredibly heartening to see the success of Operation SoHo across Victoria, aiming to improve compliance and strengthen all the work of the volunteers across the coast. We hear from Tassie and WA hoodie programs, and the new and exciting news of a National Hooded Plover Recovery Network/Team being established, whose members can work together to improve collaboration, information sharing and tackling some of the biggest challenges we have to recovery. I especially enjoyed reading Mark Lethlean's tale of Anna, Alexei and Vron, names given to flagged birds whose fascinating partnerships and movements provide us with insights but then further questions (!), which leads nicely into introducing our new student, Stephanie Wood, who will be bringing together decades of resighting data from various sources to explore key questions about the demographics of known-age (chicks/juveniles) birds! Things like how long do they live on average, age to first breeding and lifetime breeding effort and output. This is going to be so exciting! Lastly, our conference is just around the corner, and we hope to see many of you there, but if not, we will make available talks to watch online afterwards so that you can still benefit from the great presentation content!

STAFF MOVEMENTS

Dr Meghan Cullen, Beach-nesting Birds Project Manager, BirdLife Australia

We have a couple of staff changes since the last newsletter. Kerri Bartley has started her new role working alongside the Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation to conserve Hooded Plovers and Fairy Terns in the Coorong (read more about the project further on in the newsletter). This transition has left a gap in the Sharing our Shores team, which has been recently filled by John Gitsham. John is an avid birder, with a wealth of experience working in conservation and land management in South Australia and beyond. One of his many skills is also wildlife photography and John will be running the photography workshop at the BNB Conference in May, so make sure you pop in and say hello. John will be assisting Julia in the Sharing our Shores team until January 2027.

Introducing John Gitsham!

Introducing Jasmin Rooks!

Another new member of the team is Jasmin Rooks, who has recently taken up the role as South Australia Shorebird Monitoring Coordinator. Jasmin completed her Honours degree in Environmental Science at Deakin University, looking into how the current management of Hooded Plovers impacts their breeding success, using data collected through the beach-nesting bird program. She previously worked for Mycelia, a non-for-profit organisation as a researcher, working alongside Traditional Owners and state agencies in cross-cultural research and partnership. Jasmin will be coordinating the Migratory Shorebird Counts, the Hooded Plover Biennial Count and assisting with other shorebird and Fairy Tern monitoring for the next two years.

MEET FELICITY HOFF

Felicity Hoff, Volunteer, Yorke Peninsula, South Australia

On duty! Photo: Phil Hoff.

I am a more recent volunteer having only been a "Hoodie Monitor" for a few years, ably assisted (for the heavy work!) by my husband, Phil. Despite having been on the beaches I now look after, for almost 60 years, I didn't ever recall seeing the Hoodies or the Red-caps until my attention was drawn to them by Nanou Cabourdin, our wonderful regional coordinator for the Yorke Peninsula in South Australia. Nanou was putting up a fence and signage on the beach in which I reside and I was intrigued, having not seen this previously.

I initially contacted BirdLife Australia via the signage information and was later connected to Nanou who expertly guided me through the initial training, data entry and provided me with the equipment needed to get started. I have really enjoyed getting to know all our beach-nesting birds along the Levens, Galway Bay and Galway Cove beaches I look after. I have also expanded my volunteering to a roster where we monitor more remote beaches at the bottom of the Yorke Peninsula, which by the way, are spectacular!

My favourite Hoodie. Photo: Felicity Hoff

More recently I have also taken on a role editing and assembling of the Word About the Hood Newsletter. This will be my sixth attempt at helping with the Newsletter. Doing this work has given me connections with others a great insight into beach nesting birds in other areas of Australia and kept up my computer skills, post-retirement! I have learnt so much more about our wonderful birds and have fallen in love with them all. Our chatty Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers who love a chat on the wing, our Hoodies who I have noticed do have different styles of parenting and behaviours and of course the Red-caps who make rocky parts of the reefs on my beaches, their home. I still love watching our pelicans, cormorants, terns, gannets, silver and pacific gulls, ospreys etc as well. Birds are great!

Whilst we witness some sad moments, the joy of helping our birds fledge their chicks can never be underrated, especially by helping others using the beach, understand the value of these birds and how they too can help.

Our chatty Pied Oystercatchers. Photo: Felicity Hoff.

Our resident Terns. Photo: Felicity Hoff.

MEET LEONIE DAWS

Leonie Daws, Regional Coordinator Volunteer, East Gippsland, Victoria

I first joined BirdLife while living in Queensland in the 1990s. There I was privileged to take part in various survey activities including around the Mackay coastline with the Australasian Waders Studies Group. I continued to pursue my birding interests following a move to Mallacoota in 2005 which inevitably led to meeting local legend Bushy Bob Semmens.

Leonie Daws. Photo: Pam Kohn.

Among other things, Bob was involved in erecting temporary fencing around a Little Tern nesting site so I volunteered to help. Local interest really got started following an Introduction to Shorebirds Workshop in Mallacoota in 2014, presented by Grainne and the BirdLife team. This evolved into a group of us joining the Hooded Plover/Beach Nesting Birds Program.

Our involvement is at two levels: monitoring nesting sites, including erecting temporary fencing and signage; and participating in the Biennial Hooded Plover Count. We mostly focus on the regular nesting sites at local beaches – Bastion Point, Davis Creek, Betka Beach and more recently Quarry Beach. A pair also nests at Seal Creek but that requires a half-day trek, by car to Shipwreck Creek and then on foot the remaining three kilometres to Seal Creek, so our reporting from there tends to be irregular and opportunistic.

Over time my role evolved into coordinating the group, receiving notification of possible nests, activating a group to put up signs and temporary fencing, placing regular progress updates on local social media to keep the community informed, and liaising with the BirdLife team.

In Biennial Count years we survey sites from Wingan Inlet to the New South Wales border. As well as those who cover the local beaches, we're fortunate to have an intrepid bunch of volunteers willing to undertake the three-day hike through remote wilderness from Wingan Inlet to Shipwreck Creek.

Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of my involvement has been the growth of interest in, and support of, the Hoodies within the local community. Dog walkers, for example, now willingly establish alternative routines to avoid disturbance when the birds are nesting and I am frequently stopped in the street with requests for progress reports on the latest nest or chick.

Our Hero Hoodies! Photo: Leonie Daws.

The highlight of my time has been our hero Hoodies. This pair sat faithfully on a nest at Betka as the 2019 New Years Eve Mallacoota fire burnt down to the shoreline around them, persisting through the resulting chaos to successfully raise two chicks.

It has been a privilege to have the professional support of the BirdLife team who have run a number of workshops here and have twice taken time to band some of our local Hoodies which has added to our knowledge of the Hoodies and their relationships. I am also very grateful to the BirdLife

team for assisting me to take part in conferences and coordinator workshops. These have been invaluable in keeping abreast of the latest research, sharing ways and means of working effectively recruiting and coordinating volunteers, and making valued new friendships.

LAND MANAGER SPOTLIGHT IN GEELONG

Aldrin Woods, Environment Ranger, City of Greater Geelong, Victoria

Q1. What organisation do you work for and how does your organisation work with beach-nesting birds?

I work for the City of Greater Geelong, an organisation that is strongly committed to protecting endangered beach nesting birds, particularly the Hooded Plover, which is guided by the City's Hooded Plover Conservation Action Plan.

Each nesting season, the City takes an active role in conservation with dog restrictions in sensitive areas, fox and weed control, educational signage, media communications and erecting protective fencing around nesting sites to give these vulnerable birds the space they need to breed successfully. We work closely with BirdLife Australia and dedicated volunteer groups and the City has also created a dedicated Environmental Ranger role to patrol our coastline, educate the public and ensure regulations are followed.

It is a shared effort driven by a genuine commitment to seeing these birds survive on our beaches for future generations.

Q2. How big is the team that contributes to beach-nesting bird conservation?

Protecting beach nesting birds is very much a team effort. Within the City of Greater Geelong, multiple departments contribute, led by the Environmental Team and working with Animal Management and our Communications team, together to support conservation, education and compliance. Beyond the City, we rely heavily on the support of BirdLife Australia, passionate volunteers and state agencies. Without this combined effort, the level of protection these birds need simply wouldn't be possible.

Q3. How long have you been working with beach-nesting birds and what activities do you participate in as part of your role?

I have worked as a Ranger for 31 years, including the past 8 years with the City of Greater Geelong and working with beach nesting birds has become one of the most meaningful parts of my role. As an Environmental Ranger, I spend a lot of time on the coast educating the public, enforcing seasonal "No Dogs" or "Dogs on Lead" regulations, installing signage, maintaining fencing and working closely with groups such as BirdLife Australia, Friends of the Hooded Plover and DEECA on coordinated protection plans. My work also involves responding to wildlife incidents along the coastline, from injured seals and penguins to the occasional whale, but protecting Hooded Plovers during nesting season is something I take pride in.

Q4. What are some of the greatest challenges facing the birds in your region?

Increasing high tides and big swells are reshaping our beaches. Sites where the birds have bred successfully in the past are seeing nesting attempts washed away. The coastal weed species, Sea Wheat Grass, also plays a role in reducing the suitability of stretches of beach for nesting.

Another challenge these birds face is human disturbance. Their nests are incredibly well camouflaged, which means people often don't realise they are walking straight through a nesting area. Off leash dogs are also a major threat, as even a brief chase can cause the parents to abandon the nest. When the parents leave, the eggs or chicks are left exposed to heat, cold and predators and it doesn't take long for a nest to fail. People don't mean to cause harm, but even small disturbances can have a life or death impact on such a fragile species.

Aldrin with Friends of the Hooded Plover. Photo: City of Greater Geelong

Q5. What are some of the benefits of working together with BirdLife Australia and the beach-nesting birds program volunteers?

Working together with BirdLife Australia and the volunteers is vital. These birds don't survive without teamwork. BirdLife and the beach-nesting birds program volunteers provide expert knowledge and guidance for our activities. BirdLife is always there when we need to check in or ask advice, and the volunteers are a hugely dedicated group.

Good communication means we know exactly when nests are formed, when eggs are laid, when chicks hatch and we follow their progress every day until they fledge at around 35 days old. That information allows us to put fencing up at the right time, increase patrols when needed and make sure the public understands why certain areas need to be protected.

When everyone works together, you can really see the difference and every chick that fledges feels like a shared achievement.

Q6. What is one achievement for beach-nesting bird conservation that your organisation is most proud of?

One of the achievements the City of Greater Geelong is most proud of is the progress we have made in improving breeding success through persistence, teamwork, and community education. Over the years, through stronger partnerships, better fencing, increased patrols and greater public awareness, we have seen more chicks survive to fledging.

For a species as vulnerable as the Hooded Plover, every successful season feels like a win and it shows that the work being done by the City, BirdLife Australia and volunteers truly makes a difference.

Q7. What has been one of your personal highlights of working with beach-nesting birds?

The 2025–2026 Hooded Plover nesting season has been the most rewarding season I have experienced. After eight years of working in this role, we achieved our best result, with four chicks successfully fledging. One moment I will never forget happened while I was patrolling a nesting area. By pure chance, I noticed a small movement at the base of a dune and found a Hooded Plover chick tangled in sea grass. It was completely stuck and would not have survived much longer. I carefully untangled and freed the chick and watched it run back toward its distressed parents unharmed.

Aldrin with Friends of the Hooded Plover. Photo: City of Greater Geelong

About a week later, I saw that same chick take its first flight. That moment brought tears to my eyes. After all the early mornings, long patrols and challenges each season brings, seeing that chick survive and fledge reminded me exactly why this work matters.

Knowing that we are helping give an endangered species a fighting chance is one of the most rewarding parts of my career.

BIRDING WORKSHOP IN SOUTHWEST VICTORIA

Finn Saurine, Beach-nesting Birds Project Officer, BirdLife Australia, Victoria

In February BirdLife Australia BNB staff ran an incredible workshop in Portland in collaboration with the local Southwest Environment Alliance. This workshop focussed on the Glenelg Estuary and Discovery Bay Ramsar site and the incredible birds which call it home.

Point Danger Gannet Colony Field Trip. Photo: Katelin Saurine.

The day was funded through the Glenelg Hopkins CMA through a Natural Heritage Trust Grant and started with two field trips to the Point Danger Gannet colony where one of the local volunteers gave participants an incredible insight into the colony's history and the work done by the committee of management to protect the only Gannet colony on mainland Australia. This site has also been a birdwatching hotspot with recent sightings of a Brown Booby and Red-tailed Tropicbird! Afterwards, a second fieldtrip to Fawthrop Lagoon took place where participants conducted a Wetland bird count, rewarding over 35 species in an hour, including Buff-banded Rail and Spotted Crake but unfortunately the Brolga spotted the night before in the lagoon by Mel Sheedy and Finn Saurine had flown off to feed elsewhere.

We then gathered for lunch and afternoon presentations from Finn Saurine on the Glenelg Estuary and Discovery Bay Ramsar site and the different bird species which require protection such as Sanderling, Australasian Bittern and historically Orange-bellied Parrots! This led to insightful discussion from participants most of whom were very experienced environmentalists, birders or botanists and it was incredible to listen to knowledge of the area and share stories of various exciting species seen in the area. Mel Sheedy then gave a presentation on the history of beach-nesting bird monitoring in the Great South West which this season so far have had their greatest fledgeling count in our records with some chicks still running around! Participants included some our local Hoodie volunteers, and it was fantastic to network with some other community members and share how they can get involved in protecting these enigmatic and resilient birds.

Fawthrop Lagoon wetland bird count. Photo: Katelin Saurine.

An incredible turn out for the workshop Photo: Katelin Saurine.

This project is funded by the Australian Government Natural Heritage Trust and delivered by Glenelg Hopkins CMA, a member of the Commonwealth Regional Delivery Partners panel and BirdLife Australia.

NATURE CADETS

Mel Sheedy, Beach-nesting Birds Project Officer, BirdLife Australia, Victoria

Tiny, camouflaged eggs lie hidden among the sand and shells of the northern Bellarine foreshore, so well disguised that most beach goers would walk straight past without ever knowing! In March 2026 and as part of Bellarine Bayside's Exploring and Protecting Our Coastal Environment Coastcare Project, BirdLife Australia hosted a Nature Cadets session that introduced these vulnerable shorebirds to students, as well as the diverse birdlife that can be found along the foreshore.

The session wasn't just about spotting birds. Continuing coastal erosion and other growing pressures are severely impacting the nesting survival of our precious Red-caps in this area. Students explored what it means to be a 'wildlife warrior', learning simple but powerful ways they can help protect these birds when visiting the beach.

Our session involved a walk on the beach with our binoculars and spotting scope, putting our new ID skills to test. Students discovered a (fake) Red-capped Plover nest and saw first hand how truly camouflaged eggs can be! Together, we came up with ideas on how people walking along the beach can best keep these shorebirds and their nest and chicks safe, especially from dogs. We were also lucky enough to observe other bird life such as pelicans, crested terns and pacific gulls up close!

Nature Cadets looking at Crested Terns. Photo: Holly Lubcke.

Nature Cadets looking at a fake nest. Photo: Holly Lubcke.

Nature Cadets is an initiative delivered by the Bellarine Bayside Foreshore Committee of Management in Victoria, and delivers fun, place-based and hands-on activities on the coast, allowing kids to explore and connect with the coastal environment of the northern Bellarine Peninsula. Events occur throughout the year with activities based around local cultural and environmental values and sustainability. Participating in nature-based education activities improves children's affinity and empathy for the natural environment, resulting in kids who are more likely to care for the natural world when they are older. Their next session is on the 21st of April, exploring the world of marine invertebrates and investigating seagrass, kelp and other sea wrack washed up. Future Nature Cadets for the year will be held monthly on Tuesdays and Thursdays, check out their site for more details!

Behaviour change and awareness raising

SEA COUNTRY WORKSHOP IN SOUTHWEST VICTORIA

Micko Bell, Sea Country IPA Development Coordinator, Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Victoria

On Monday 15th December Gunditj Mirring Tradional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC) staff along with Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC) and Glenelg Hopkins CMA attended a Hooded Plover workshop at Narrawong beach. The workshop was run by Finn from BirdLife Australia and taught us about how the Hooded Plovers prefer to live on broad, flat, open sandy beaches with plenty of seaweed and backed by low sand dunes. They lay their eggs in shallow scrapes in the sand usually above the high-tide mark on ocean beaches or among dunes. These little plovers run away from their nest and pretend they have a broken wing so their perpetrators (dogs, foxes, ravens) will follow them and not their eggs or babies.

Searching for Hooded Plover through the scope. Photo: Jacinta Hendriks.

The Hooded Plover is considered endangered, and they are present on beaches on Gunditjmara Country including Narrawong, Snapper Point, Discovery Bay, Cape Bridgewater and some beaches around Portland.

Finn showing where a failed Hooded Plover nest was laid. Photo: Jacinta Hendriks.

If you are out enjoying Nyamat Mirring over the summer, please keep an eye out for the Hooded Plovers and their nest (picture below). Some of their nests are fenced of which is done by some of Birdlife Australia volunteers. Also, they are a lot nicer than the other plovers (Masked Lapwing) which can swoop us.

BirdLife Australia is always looking for volunteers to help the Hooded Plover, they provide training. Volunteers usually look after a pair of plovers this included monitoring with fortnightly being good and weekly being great also, you will set up fences as a protection for the plovers to nest. This also includes noting your observations and photos and upload onto their database. It would be a great family activity.

Hooded Plover nest on Gunditjmara Country. Photo: Finn Saurine.

HOODIE WORKSHOP IN PORT MACDONNELL AND VEHICLES ON THE BEACH!

Finn Saurine, Beach-nesting Birds Project Officer, BirdLife Australia, Victoria

Hoodie nest well disguised in the rocks. Photo: Finn Saurine.

In January I was lucky enough to travel to Port MacDonnell to deliver a beach-nesting birds workshop in collaboration with Friends of Shorebirds South East SA (FoSSE SA) who have been monitoring shorebirds in the region for over 20 years!

Upon arriving I headed for Woolwash Beach where I intended to take workshop participants the next day for a field trip. I was greeted by a wide-open beach on low tide with very limited sea wrack and cars everywhere! This was a new sight for me, as my experience looking for Hoodies so far had been limited to Victorian beaches with brief ventures into southern NSW, over the six years I have been involved in the Beach-nesting Birds project as a volunteer and now working in the team itself. It took some adjusting to see the vehicle tracks everywhere and cars cruising past on the hard wet sand as I walked towards where the local Hoodie pair were reported to be nesting. I eventually located the nest which was high up at the foredune base behind a rock pile, no guesses why with the vehicle pressure! The birds were very alert, and I left them to incubate their eggs before the workshop the next day.

The workshop the next day was attended by participants from different backgrounds and birding experience and included presentations on the beach-nesting birds found in the area and their secretive behaviours, giving an insight in what to look for when out on the beach monitoring them.

Vehicle tracks on the beach. Photo: Finn Saurine.

Jeff presenting FoSSE Projects. Photo: Finn Saurine.

Jeff Campbell from FoSSE SA presented on some of the fantastic work achieved from Sanderling tracking projects to shorebird monitoring including Grey Plover and the extensive banding they have delivered in the region, and incredible

contribution to shorebird science. FoSSE SA offer incredible opportunities to get involved in both shorebird monitoring and banding opportunities and are always on the lookout for some more participants so please get in touch!

This project is supported by the Government's South Australian Environmental Citizen Science Strategy with the support of the Department of Environment and Water.

PROTECTING THE HOOD: COMMUNITY ACTION SAFEGUARDS TASMANIA'S SHOREBIRDS

Nikita Sarangdhar, Biodiversity Coordinator, NRM North, Tasmania

Over the past year, conservation efforts to protect Tasmania's iconic Hooded Plover have gathered fresh momentum along the state's north-east coast and on Flinders Island. Building on our earlier Hooded Plover conservation efforts, NRM North's latest project, 'Protecting the Hood', combines science-led management, community engagement and on-ground action.

A major focus has been safeguarding critical breeding habitat. Sea spurge, an invasive and habitat altering weed, was treated across 16 hectares of foredune along the north-east coastline, helping to restore key nesting areas. Feral cat control was also trialled across 23 hectares of priority coastal habitat at the commencement of the breeding season to reduce nest predation and improve breeding success.

Community involvement has been vital to efforts. A dedicated weed removal weekend, led by the Friends of Larapuna Coast in partnership with Break O'Day Council, mobilised volunteers to tackle smaller sea spurge infestations unsuitable for spraying along 50km of beaches in the Bay of Fires region.

A high level of community engagement and interest in shorebird conservation was evident at local markets. Photo: Jesse Lewis.

Around 50 volunteers also supported delivery of one of the project's most significant undertakings, a large-scale fauna survey spanning approximately 180 kilometres of beaches across Flinders Island and north-east Tasmania, gathering critical shorebird population data, and supporting data collected during BirdLife Australia's Biennial Count. A total of 314 Hooded Plovers were recorded, equating to 10 per cent of the species' estimated global population. This result highlights the global importance of Tasmania's coastal habitats for shorebird conservation, and the urgent need for their continued protection.

A total of 314 Hooded Plovers were recorded during the shorebird count. Photo: Jesse Lewis.

Meanwhile, key partners Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS), engaged with residents and visitors alike, promoting responsible beach use and raising awareness of the pressures facing species such as the Hooded Plover. PWS rangers also partnered with the North East Bioregional Network to further protect nesting birds during the breeding season, installing temporary fencing and signage at key sites, to reduce accidental disturbance and give chicks a better chance of survival.

In coming months, beach user engagement will continue, with practical measures such as vehicle access barriers and interpretive signage to also be installed by the PWS team.

Together, these outcomes demonstrate what can be achieved when conservation organisations, government agencies and local communities work in unison. Through coordinated action on the ground and sustained public engagement, 'Protecting the Hood' shows how local efforts can deliver conservation outcomes of national and global importance.

This project is funded by the Australian Government's Saving Native Species Program and delivered by NRM North.

WA SEASON UPDATE AND PROJECT UPDATE

Tegan Knowles, Beach-nesting Bird Project Officer, BirdLife Australia, Western Australia

While a funding gap in WA from August to March presented challenges, our dedicated stakeholders rose to the occasion, working tirelessly throughout the season to monitor and manage priority breeding sites.

It was a strong start in the Margaret River region, with several Hooded Plover fledglings already recorded by October. After a difficult previous season where high tide events, storms, and large swells caused early-season widespread nest inundation. This year's early conditions were a welcome change. Increased beach activity later in the season did bring some challenges, but well-placed signage and fencing ensured that nesting attempts had every chance of success.

Three Hooded Plover fledglings and their proud parents foraging together along the coast. Photo: Tegan Knowles.

Further north, the Busselton and Bunbury networks have gone from strength to strength, with a growing community of volunteers and land managers protecting Red-capped Plover nests along busy foreshores. They were also very helpful in informing the scheduling of wrack-pushing works, so as not to disturb nesting birds.

New Red-capped Plover signage at Port Geographe, where the combined efforts of BirdLife Australia volunteers and land managers helped to inform the scheduling of wrack-pushing works and minimise disturbance to breeding birds. Photo credit: Tegan Knowles.

As is typical for the more southerly locations of Denmark and Walpole, the season got off to a slower start in these regions. Encouragingly, however, an expanded network is meaningfully strengthening monitoring coverage of nesting attempts across these areas.

A heartfelt thank you to the volunteers and land managers who kept a watchful eye throughout the season and responded so swiftly and tirelessly to ensure breeding site management was in place when it mattered most.

Looking ahead, there is much to be excited about. A new State NRM funded project launched in WA in April, bringing with it a wonderful range of initiatives, from stakeholder meetings and upskilling workshops to awareness-raising events and expanded biennial Count coordination. The project will also deliver a Coastal Restoration Toolkit, a practical and much anticipated resource designed to guide those working along our coastline in restoring beaches with careful consideration for our nesting shorebirds.

Threats and management

A Moonlight Dash to the Bird Island Buffet

Warrick Barnes, Coastal Project Coordinator, Coast and Seas, Green Adelaide, South Australia

At times I feel I'm the spiritual amalgamation of Boggis, Bunce, and Bean having a collective meltdown, because Mr Fox is out there orchestrating the most unhinged coastal banquet ever conceived. He isn't just slipping past my traps, he's *gliding* through them like some fox-shaped ghost of mischief, assembling a tasting menu of eggs, Pelicans, Silver Gulls, and Cormorants, with Fairy Terns and Hooded Plovers ominously bookmarked for dessert as the dramatic final act. Meanwhile I have developed a nervous quiver, spiralling into existential coastal despair, and questioning the very fabric of reality as this fox stages a full ecological opera while refusing to even acknowledge my presence. The truly infuriating part is that he manages to pull off this entire avian degustation in a single night.

Trail Camera photos from Torrens Island, showing foxes with captured prey.

And yet, despite all that chaos, Green Adelaide has been working furiously behind the scenes to flip the script on this real-world fox-themed saga. Torrens Island and Bird Island are home to some of our region's most important seabird colonies, especially Fairy Terns, so shutting down Mr Fox's after-hours buffet has become a priority mission for our on-ground teams.

Bird Island Parks Rangers and Green Adelaide Staff with Felixer unit. Photo: Warrick Barnes.

This year we've rolled out an arsenal of tech and field expertise to keep fox numbers low. Canid Pest Ejectors (CPEs) have been one of our main tools, though they've come with enough plot twists to rival Game of Thrones. Rats have been chewing the lure heads like tiny saboteurs before foxes even stumble onto the scene, and on Bird Island the foxes have been too busy gorging on nature's buffet to show interest in our carefully prepared baits. A few overachievers have even mastered the sideways-pull technique lifting the lure head just incorrectly enough to avoid triggering the device to get the tasty morsel of dried meat.

Then there's the age-old behaviour we've had to contend with: foxes sneaking across from Torrens Island to Bird Island during very low tides with youthful exuberance and carefree confidence, like teenagers sneaking out at 2 a.m. It's not new, but it certainly complicates things.

Once they make the crossing, the sheer abundance of natural food means our CPEs suddenly drop several places on the culinary ranking. That's one reason our team has doubled down on Torrens Island trying to break this learned migration pattern by reducing fox numbers before they make their moonlit dash to the Bird Island buffet. Interrupting that movement

is critical for protecting Fairy Tern colonies and our other vulnerable beach nesting seabirds.

To back up the CPEs, we've strategically deployed Felixer units in key areas, high-tech sentinels that use sensors to identify cats and foxes and only fire at the right animal. Since being placed, they've quietly and effectively removed several foxes, lifting pressure from important breeding sites and giving our seabirds a fighting chance.

Fox Chasing Tern. Photo: Ian Forsyth.

Fox prints on Bird Island near 1080 bait stations. Photo: Greg Johnston.

Detection work has become its own chapter in the story. Conservation sniffer dogs, alongside our human search teams, have been patrolling dunes and scrub to track dens, scats, and fox movement routes. We concentrate on the place's foxes love most, particularly the sensitive nesting zones of Hooded Plovers and Fairy Terns because if Mr Fox plans a dramatic encore, we plan to intercept it.

By combining smart tools, field skill, and stubborn adaptability, Green Adelaide is fighting back against this coastal trickster with a level of determination that would make Boggis, Bunce, and Bean proud. This work is proudly supported by the Australian Government's Bird Flu Response funding, and we thank the community for continuing to stand with us as we protect our coastal environment.

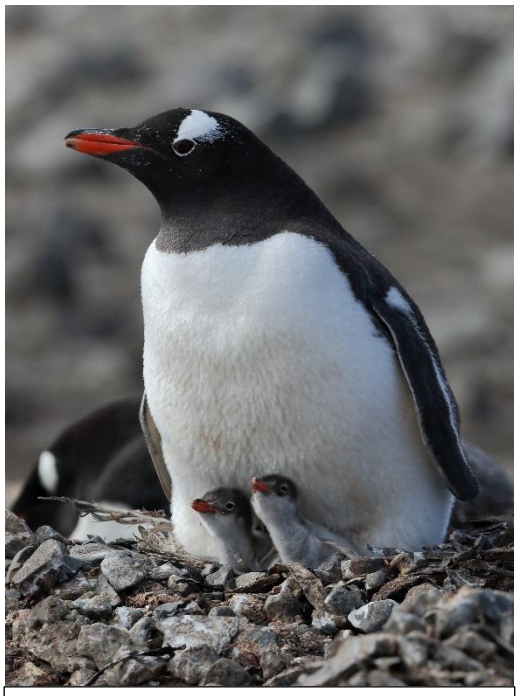
So, whilst you may not be able to out-fox a fox, we're definitely giving it a red-hot go, and are forever optimistic!

Threats and management

H5 BIRD FLU UPDATE

Tanya Loos, Avian Influenza Response Coordinator, BirdLife Australia

H5 bird flu has been detected in all continents outside of Australia, including on the Antarctic Peninsula. In Feb 2026 preliminary testing confirmed the presence of H5 bird flu in samples collected from wildlife on Heard Island, a sub-Antarctic Australian external territory, including in a Gentoo Penguin. Australia's H5 bird flu status remains unchanged but the detection reminds us the virus is still on the move, and preparedness efforts and ongoing vigilance must be maintained.



Gentoo Penguin with 2 chicks, Elephant Point. Photo: Andrew Silcocks.

We used to think H5 bird flu risk was heightened during spring, relating to migratory shorebird movements along the East Asian Australasian Flyway, but with the virus hopping around the sub-Antarctic islands this has changed. Northern and Southern Giant Petrel move into our waters autumn to winter and overlap with current outbreak areas in the sub-Antarctic. In our waters they interact with more localised birds, increasing risk of virus transmission.

We are asking all of our volunteers to assist in the surveillance effort by keeping an eye out for sick or dead birds, especially clusters of multiple dead birds. If any seabirds, waterbirds, shorebirds or birds of prey are seen showing the following symptoms, do not approach or try to handle the bird, but do report it to the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888:**

- incoordination, tremors, swimming in circles
- twisted necks or other abnormal posture
- inability to stand or fly

After calling the EAD Hotline, let us know immediately via email to avianinfluenza@birdlife.org.au so we can ensure no other volunteers head out on site until any testing results come back negative. If you have any questions or concerns regarding H5 bird flu, Tanya Loos, BirdLife Australia's Avian Influenza Response Coordinator, can be reached on avianinfluenza@birdlife.org.au.

Additional details on the disease, what to look for and details on the Avoid, Record and Report steps can be found at https://birdlife.org.au/avian-influenza/

Have you seen Birdata's new feature the Bird Impact Tracker? This enables users to log sightings of sick, injured, or dead birds to help support conservation efforts. The BIT feature has been funded by the Australian Government to help preparedness efforts for H5 bird flu, however the feature is a broad tool to monitor a variety of threats including disease, car strikes, predator attacks, window strikes, and entanglement. For more info check out the user guide here: https://birdata.birdlife.org.au/how-to-guides

OPERATION SOHO, THE FINAL YEAR? WE DON'T THINK SO!

Han Auld, Forest and Wildlife Officer with the Conservation Regulator, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Victoria

Reflecting on another season of Operation SoHo is always encouraging. Since 2019/20, the program has grown significantly, with lessons learned, some applied immediately and others carried forward into future seasons. I'm Han Auld, Forest and Wildlife Officer with the Conservation Regulator, writing to you from Anglesea.

Threats and management

This season was a busy one, marked by interstate travel, continued on the ground effort, and the completion of the Saving Native Species Grant. In short, it was as packed as Lorne beach on a hot summer's day!

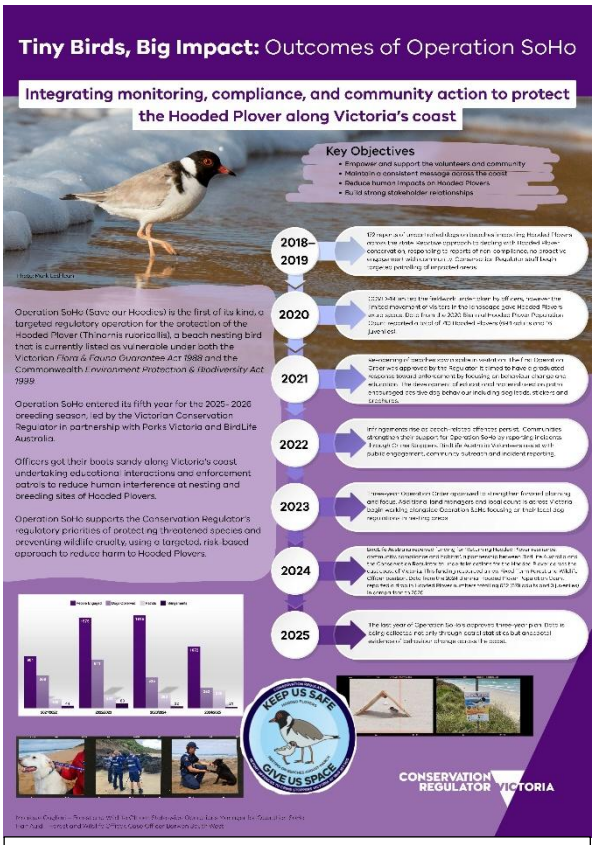
In November, Monique Cugliari and I packed our carry on, rolled up a poster (right), and headed west to the Australasian Ornithological Conference in Perth. Three days immersed in presenting, learning, listening and of course, talking birds was both motivating and inspiring. The AOC was full of passionate birdos, and we're grateful to BirdLife for always making space at the table.

As of 25 March 2026, 354 patrols have been completed across Victoria. An enormous effort by Authorised Officers and supporters alike. Whether volunteering, managing intelligence or undertaking compliance work, every role contributes to protecting our birds. Volunteers, in particular, continue to be invaluable as the eyes and ears on the beach, and we couldn't do this without them.

The Saving Native Species project concluded this month, delivering a significant increase in enforcement patrols along Victoria's east coast. Results showed that increased presence directly improved community understanding and compliance, particularly around dogs on beaches.

Finally, a fond farewell to Monique Cugliari, SoHo's instigator, creator, and Queen, who has fledged to an Assistant Warden role at the Broome Bird Observatory. Her dedication laid a strong foundation for threatened species enforcement, and while she'll be missed, her move is well deserved. The red dirt has settled, sunscreen is permanent, and if you visit BBO, please pass on a hug from the Hoodies, they're asking for her.

Thank you all for your continued efforts. We'll see you next season.



Operation SoHo Poster. Supplied by Han Auld.

WATCH OUT! THERE ARE OTHER NESTS ABOUT

Jean Turner, Friends of the Hooded Plover Kangaroo Island, SA

Pied Oystercatchers and Red-capped Plovers breeding on South Australian beaches will have a raised profile next season, thanks to a generous Community Grant from BirdLife Australia.

Nationally, Pied Oystercatcher and Red-capped Plover populations are considered 'secure', but in South Australia (SA) Pied Oystercatchers are listed as Rare under the SA National Parks and Wildlife Act (1972) and Red-capped Plovers are disappearing from some beaches. These beach-nesting birds are impacted by the same range of threats as Hooded Plovers, including human disturbance and off-leash dogs. Unfortunately, their nests and chick foraging areas often go unnoticed and without protection, due to a lack of public awareness signs. But that's about to change!

Friends of the Hooded Plover Kangaroo Island received a BirdLife Australia Community Grant of $4039 to produce breeding season signs for Pied Oystercatchers, Red-capped Plovers and multiple species at locations affected by high levels of human disturbance. The new core-flute "Nesting Area" and "Chick Feeding Zone" signs, printed from the

These hardy little Red-caps chose to nest on the gravel path next to the road! Photo: Nanou Carbourdin.

Threats and management

Beach-nesting Birds program's existing designs, have been customised for four rural Landscape Board regions in SA: Eyre Peninsula, Yorke Peninsula, South East SA and Kangaroo Island. With consistent images and messaging along the SA coast, the new signs will increase recognition of these birds and help improve their breeding success.

Nepean Bay POC incubating its nest. Photo: Jean Turner.

On Kangaroo Island (KI), locals at Nepean Bay settlement put a call out on social media for help when a Pied Oystercatcher (POC) nest appeared unexpectedly in the parklands. The new signs were on the way but hadn't yet arrived. We responded with a few generic signs and cobbled together enough stakes to rope-off the nest. That's when KI Wildlife Network stepped in. They kindly offered support to protect our vulnerable birds, generously funding 30 new plastic stakes for signs and nest protection. These lightweight stakes are eye wateringly expensive, but fantastic for the safety of volunteers carrying gear to nesting sites.

FoHP KI Volunteer David Potter and the new signage. Photo: Jean Turner.

Our 'rough enough, good enough' nest fence, combined with tremendous local community support, saw the incubating Pied Oystercatchers through to egg hatching. When the pair moved their tiny new chick down to the beach, the new signs and stakes magically turned up, perfect for "Chick Foraging Zone" signs to go out.

A huge "Thanks!" to BirdLife Australia's Community Grants program and to Kangaroo Island Wildlife Network for supporting community awareness and protection of our 'other' beach-nesting birds along the South Australian coast.

Can't wait to put the new signs out next breeding season!

Science and research

EASTERN HOODED PLOVER RECOVERY NETWORK

Meghan Cullen, Beach Nesting Birds Project Manager, BirdLife Australia, Victoria

There have been such significant advancements in Hooded Plover conservation since the start of the project in 2006. Twenty years on, in February 2026, we had the first official eastern Hooded Plover Recovery Network meeting. The Network consists of members from NSW, VIC, SA and TAS, with a range of skills and organisations represented. While it is still early days for the Network, the plan is not to reinvent the wheel, but to build greater connections and collaboration, in order to tackle some of the current barriers to Hooded Plover conservation across the species range. The formation of the Network was made possible through grant funding received from the Australian Government Saving Native Species Program which assisted BirdLife Australia in the formation and coordination of a series of Recovery Teams for the threatened birds. We thank all members for the time and Rachael Kannussaar for supporting the establishment through the organising team and Renee Mead for coordinating the establishment of the group and the initial meeting.

Eastern Hooded Plover Recovery Network

LITTLE TERN SEASON 2025-26: FIRST CONFIRMED NESTING AT ROSS RIVER FOR SEVERAL YEARS

Simon Kennedy, Wetland and Coastal Birds Co-ordinator, Queensland

First confirmed Little Tern nest at Ross River in years. North Queensland's Little Terns appear to nest among woody debris more readily than populations further south. Photo: Simon Kennedy.

The Eastern Australian breeding subspecies of the Little Tern was listed as nationally Vulnerable in early 2025, and Birdlife has been overseeing monitoring of the small and scattered nesting sites in North Queensland since 2022.

Ross River sandbar was once home to large nesting colony, but after it was wiped out in a storm surge several years ago it was thought to be either lost or hanging in there depending on who I asked. In early December a short expedition on a Parks and Wildlife service boat was organised and we found one nest, the first confirmed nesting since the storm surge. This nest was at the eastern end of the sandbar, out of sight of vantage points from Ron Mclean Drive and only reachable by boat. John Lowry also found several nests at Bushland Beach, a site where they have not nested for at least 17 years, showing that while Little Terns return to many of their nesting sites, they will opportunistically nest in suitable habitats.

The Ingham area from Lucinda to Palm Creek (just south of Forrest Beach) was the most successful area in North Queensland, with at least 17 fledglings. The photo from Palm Beach was taken in early December and shows what to look out for once the young birds are old enough to fly. These terns with their scalloped feather patterns on the upper back and short orange-brown bills are around 20 days old. At this point they have left the nesting area and joined their parents and often many other adult Little Terns, some of which we strongly suspect are visitors from eastern Asia of a different subspecies.

Three Little Tern fledglings among breeding adults (yellow bills) and non-breeding adults (black bills) at Palm Creek, Forrest Beach, December 2025. Photo: Simon Kennedy.

BirdLife is currently discussing another Little Tern monitoring season with funding agencies to return to the sites where nesting occurred this season, gauge breeding success and use fencing and signage if necessary.

CAN SIGNS IN THE INTERTIDAL ZONE WITHSTAND HARSH CONDITIONS? THE SUMMARY OF A TRIAL OF TWO TYPES OF POSTS.

Kasun Ekanayake, Beach-nesting Birds Project Coordinator, Victoria

As you know, our little Hoodie chicks like to venture out with their parents to the water's edge and to those rock platforms that get exposed at low tide to find food. This means the temporary chick signs we traditionally install above the high tide mark may not be as effective especially on wide beaches where chicks can spend a lot of time further away from where the signs are. Sometimes this can be problematic where beach users tend to linger at the water's edge in front of the fenced areas assuming that chicks are higher up on the beach where the signs are when in actual fact, the chicks are down at the water's edge looking for food being disturbed by beach users who are trying to do the right thing by staying down at the water's edge away from fenced areas. With this in mind, we decided to conduct a trial to see if we could find a type of robust post to install chick signs on, that we could install further down on the beach in the intertidal zone to alert beach users to the presence of chicks in the vicinity. These posts would need to withstand tidal energy as they get inundated by the rising and falling tides and be tall enough to not be completely inundated by the high tide.

The trial experimented with two types of posts, one made completely out of timber and the other of galvanised steel. They were 2.8 m in height and were buried to a depth of 0.8 m in the sand. The timber posts were fitted with a base in the form of a small plank of wood, for extra support (Fig. 1). Timber posts were installed at seven sites on the Bass Coast and at four sites on the Mornington Peninsula, whereas galvanised steel posts were installed at four sites on the Bass Coast in December 2025 (Fig. 2). Two posts with A2-sized signs were installed at each site 10 m from the base of the dune. The posts remained in place for five weeks to resemble the chick rearing period, and their status was monitored every week.

Figure 1: Timber posts (fitted with base) with signs installed at Hooded Plover breeding sites. Photos: Kasun Ekanayake.

Figure 2: Galvanised steel posts with signs installed at Hooded Plover breeding sites. Photos: Kasun Ekanayake.

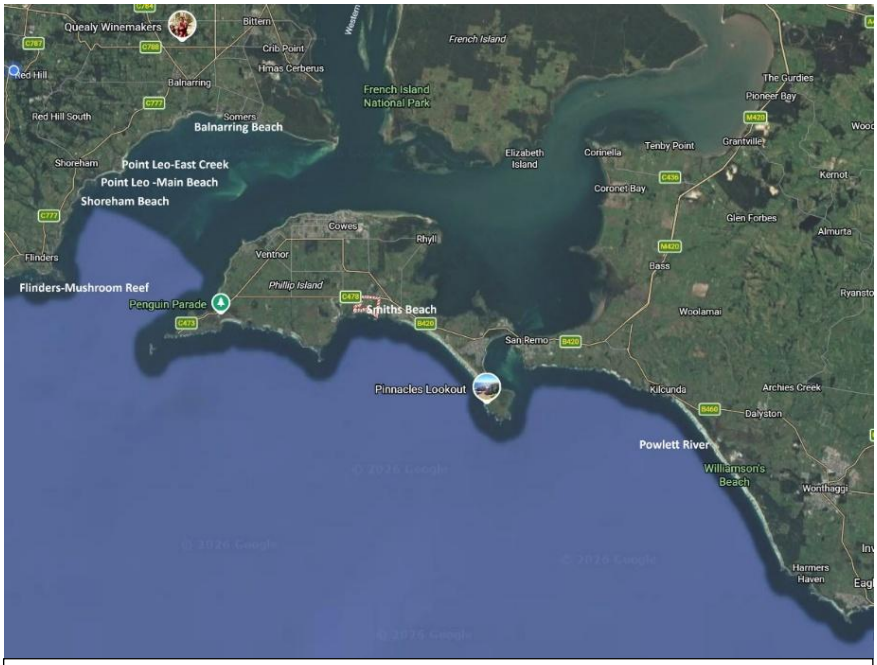
On the Bass Coast, 8 out of 14 timber posts lasted the five-week period while six posts were affected by the tide and were found washed up on the upper beach. All eight galvanised steel posts lasted the five-week period. On the Mornington Peninsula, six out of eight timber posts lasted the five-week period while two were affected by the tide and were found washed up on the upper beach. Overall, the galvanised steel posts performed better in withstanding tidal energy in high-energy ocean beaches. The trial suggested there were both pros and cons in using these intertidal posts. Both timber and galvanised steel posts were heavy to carry, but timber posts were slightly lighter. Once installed, they require maintenance at least on a weekly basis, to check whether they have been impacted by the tide and then to realign or straighten the posts if necessary. At sites where breeding site management (installation of fences and signs) is carried out by volunteers, the use of these posts may not be feasible due to the effort required, whereas where land managers are involved, they will be able to use resources such as all-terrain vehicles to transport these posts facilitating their use at sites with chicks. These posts might also perform better at relatively low-energy ocean beaches, situated in bays/gulfs which were not included as sites in this trial.

HOODIE RELATIONSHIPS - A STORY OF WANDERINGS AND EMOTIONAL ENTANGLEMENTS

Mark Lethlean, President, Friends of the Hooded Plover Mornington Peninsula, Victoria

I've thought about writing this story for quite a bit. It brings together all our monitoring and collation of data into quite an intricate tale. My challenge was how to take a group of Hoodies, with their flag ID's, and to tell their individual and collective stories without leaving the reader glazed and confused.

I have never been a fan of naming chicks. I guess, because personalizing the chicks in an industry where failure rates are high, heightens the tragedy of failure. But, for this story, I am going to try anthropomorphizing my main characters to try to hold your interest. If you are familiar with the plot from Leo Tolstoy's 'Anna Karenina', then you may recognize the names, their stories somewhat align. Young wife (Anna) leaves her older husband (Alexei) for a scandalous and sordid affair with a younger army officer (Count Vronsky). Pretty standard love triangle. Let's see how we go.



Map supplied by Mark Lethlean.

This is the story of 3 Hoodies. One from Phillip Island, one from the Bass Coast and one from 'origins unknown'. Plus, a few fly-by-nighters.

Alexei (Orange UJ) was banded at Hamers Haven on the Bass Coast by Steve Johnson as a fledgling in April 2013. We know he's a male from feather DNA. So Alexei is old.

Vron (Yellow 44) was banded at Smiths Beach on Phillip Island in December 2017 and from blood DNA is also a male. Vron is significantly younger than Alexei.

Anna (White TT) was banded as an adult at Flinders by Kasun Ekanyake. Her origins and age is unknown.

Alexei - I first met Alexei in January 2015 at Mushroom Reef in Flinders when he was just a young fella, less than 2 years old and was nesting for the first time with an unbanded partner, possibly Anna but we just don't know.

Between 2015 to 2021, Alexei and his partner had 13 nests that all failed before hatching. Finally, in February 2021, they hatched 2 chicks and one of them went on to fledge. A first for Flinders. The following season they had another 4 nests that all failed.

Alexei. Photo: Mark Lethlean.

Anna - In March of 2022, Alexei's unbanded partner became severely ensnared in fishing line. In an emergency dash, Kasun was able to catch her and rush her to a local vet where the line was delicately removed and her wounds treated. Due to her injuries, she was nicknamed 'two-toes' and was appropriately flagged White TT. We will call her Anna.

Anna (White TT). Photo: Mark Lethlean.

As we monitored Anna over the following weeks, two toes became one toe but she seemed to be coping pretty well.

Alexei and Anna were a happy Flinders couple for 7 odd years when they decided to move to East Creek Beach at Point Leo about 10km away, a busy beach with surfers, dogs and campers. They may have been pushed out, or they may have simply wanted a change after the years of failure and following Anna's major trauma.

Here they enjoyed a modicum of success with their first 2 of 3 nests hatching chicks. A first for Point Leo. However, tragedy struck with their first chicks being taken by a rogue Silver Gull. Their desperate efforts to protect them failed.

Over 3 seasons from 2022 to 2025 they had 9 nests hatching 6 chicks which all failed.

Rogue silver gull taking Anna and Alexei's first chicks at Point Leo. Photo: Mark Lethlean.

(Count) Vron - Introducing Vron, a younger bloke from 'The Island'. I'm not sure if that naturally means he's cool, but he is certainly a different dude. So, I hope you're still with me because Vron certainly adds another layer of complexity to the story. I first met Vron at St Andrews Beach on the Mornington Peninsula in August 2018 when he was less than a year old. He hung around in that region for a couple of years although he would disappear for long periods. He was a wanderer.

Then in the Spring of 2020 he suddenly showed up on the semi-urban Balnarring Beach with an older lady from 'The Island' (Yellow 33) and they started nesting. A first for Balnarring. They had 3 nests that season and amazingly the last of those produced 3 chicks which all fledged. Another first.

Count Vron. Photo: Mark Lethlean.

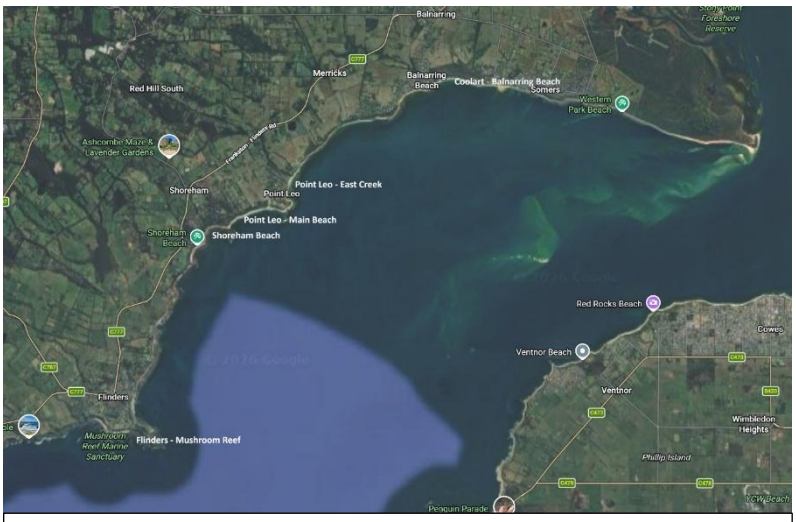
One of Count Vron's first 3 chicks. Photo: Mark Lethlean.

We were very excited, expecting a dynasty of chicks in future years but Vron became lame and that seemed to be all the excuse that Y33 needed to move on. Dynasty over!

So, Vron wandered the Westernport Beaches for years, always on his lonesome. Occasionally he would join Alexei and Anna at East Beach but often he would be seen alone on the Main Beach one kilometre away.

Finally in the 2024-25 season he found himself an unbanded mate. They had 3 nests on Main Beach which all failed. It wasn't long before she left him, as well.

2025-2026 Season - For clarity, here's a map of the beaches. Early in the season things were as expected. Alexei and Anna were on territory at East Creek and Vron had paired with yet another Phillip Island lady, Yellow 3D, on Main Beach. She was very young. However, once again, after a couple of months she had moved on and left Vron to his own company.



Map supplied by Mark Lethlean.

The Scandal - So, we were shocked, when in October, Vron had paired with the Anna and had a nest on the Main Beach. It was sad to see the old male, Alexei preening himself about 200m away, dumped, as in Tolstoy's masterpiece, for a younger man.

That nest failed and they had another in early November that also failed. But still old Alexei hung around in the shadows.

Then, what do you know? In early December, Alexei and Anna got back together on their old territory at East Creek and Vron disappeared. Vivien Morris from Phillip Island Nature Parks emailed us to say that Vron had been seen in a couple of areas on 'The Island' with different partners and was causing havoc with birds on established territories. A jilted lover!

Vron with very much younger lady. Photo: Mark Lethlean.

We had always thought that Vron may have some sort of avian personality disorder, he never seems to be able to keep a partner for very long. He's a real wanderer. But maybe we were completely wrong. Maybe Vron's absolute love was Anna, because late in December he returned to Point Leo and he and Anna escaped to Shoreham to set up a new territory. A first for Shoreham. Sadly, that was the last we saw of Alexei, at 13 years of age he had finely succumbed to the relentless pressure. Vron and Anna had 2 nests at Shoreham and then late in February a final nest at Main Beach. One month after all our other birds had stopped breeding. So, for this breeding season, Anna had 6 nests, on 3 different territories with 2 different partners.

Thoughts - When teaching new volunteers about the behaviours and life cycle of the Hooded Plover we follow a chain of information derived from years of scientific data. Twenty-eight days of incubation, thirty-five days from hatch to fledging, partner and territory faithful. You know the spiel. But you also know that these guys don't read biology books and they are all individuals, just like us. It is those nuances of their behaviour which maintain our curiosity and keep us returning to the beaches to observe and record.

RENEWABLES ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH INITIATIVE

Meghan Cullen, Beach Nesting Birds Project Manager, BirdLife Australia, Victoria

The Renewables Environmental Research Initiative is a Commonwealth-funded suite of projects coordinated by DEECA to support renewable energy proponents and environmental decision makers. The BNB team were involved in a project focused on the development of a decision support tool for assessing the impacts of predicated bird and bat collision fatalities at onshore wind farms, which aims to help the regulated community better anticipate avoidance and mitigation measures that may be required through the assessment process. As part of the tool development Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) needed species expert input to develop Population Viability Analysis (PVA) for 30 priority species, which included a range of shorebirds including the Hooded Plover. Grainne and Meg, working with Mike Weston from Deakin University, used our available data, and in the short time frame provided, were able to provide estimates for the array of variables required to run a PVA for Hooded Plovers. At the time of writing this article, the decision support tools are almost ready for testing and feedback. In was fascinating to spend some time examining a subset of the banded bird data and we can't wait to examine the banding data further to understand more about Hooded Plover breeding, survival and movements.

HOODED PLOVER BANDING ON THE COORONG OCEAN BEACH, YARLUWAR RUWE

Cameron Clarke and Jaru West, Yarluwar Ruwe Rangers, South Australia

The Yarluwar Ruwe Rangers were recently invited to be a part of the migratory shorebird Summer count survey team along the Coorong ocean beach with BirdLife Australia staff and NPWS Cultural Rangers. We provided a driver and vehicle to support the survey and travelled ~110kms along the Coorong ocean beach from Tea Tree Crossing up to the Murray Mouth.

It was our first time driving along the Coorong beach, after having completed specialized 4wd training to learn "safe beach driving" techniques around the Murray Mouth in the ATV Buggies, and the methods needed to safely monitor the birds in preparation for the survey. It was quite fun to drive along the beach, with the tumultuous sand directing the steering in a sporadic nature whilst on high alert looking out for shorebirds.

Science and research

While surveying for shorebirds we were also lucky enough to help with capturing an adult Hooded Plover, who was a parent to 3 young chicks, with the BirdLife Australia banding team on the northern end of the Coorong ocean beach. We learnt how to properly handle and manage the Hoodies that didn't cause them too much stress. Thanks to Kerri's suggestion we tagged one of the Hoodies with a Green leg flag that had 'YR' on it! Representing the Yarluwar Ruwe Rangers! Cameron was lucky enough to hold the little fella! Selecting the leg flag letters Green 'YR' representing Yarluwar Ruwe was exciting! Yarluwar means large body of water and Ruwe means Country! So we're working on Water Country.

It has been absolutely wonderful working on the Shorebird and Wetland Habitat project with BirdLife Australia, it's a great combination of working on country and learning from ornithologists! Connecting language and culture with birdlife has been so insightful. It's prompted us to dig deeper into our own Culture, trading knowledge with academics.

Dan Lees (BirdLife Australia), Cameron Clarke (Yarluwar Ruwe Ranger) with newly banded Green 'YR' on the Coorong ocean beach, 9th February, 2026. Photo Kerri Bartley.

The Hooded Plover banding team from left to right Dan Lees, Julia Roetman, Jaru West, Kerri Bartley, Cameron Clarke (with YR), Ashley Reid, Daryl Rigney and Grainne Maguire, Coorong ocean beach 9th February 2026. Photo Adrian Phillips.

We are very excited about working with BirdLife to help restore the Hoodie habitat along the Coorong beach! There's plenty of plans for sessions to take place, including weed mapping, strategic weed control and spinifex planting in winter to promote gentle sloping dunes which the Hoodies need to safely breed.

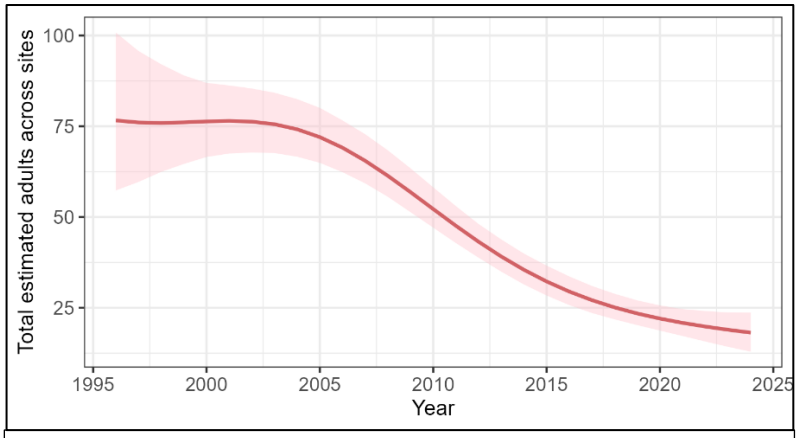
It has been an absolute privilege to collaborate with BirdLife Australia and to have the opportunity to help conserve our wildlife along the Coorong and at the Murray mouth site. It is truly a special place and vital for our endangered creatures which inhabit these lands and water!

A 30-YEAR WARNING SIGN FOR HOODED PLOVERS AT YALGORUP, WA

Sonia Sanchez, Fairy Tern Project Coordinator, Victoria

For more than three decades, volunteers have been counting Hooded Plovers across the salt lakes of Yalgorup National Park, 90 km south of Perth, quietly building one of the longest datasets we have for this species in Western Australia. When we analysed this dataset, the result was confronting: adult Hooded Plover numbers at Yalgorup have fallen by around 75% since the mid 1990s.

In the mid-1990s, an estimated 75-80 adult Hooded Plovers were using the Yalgorup lake system, including local breeding pairs and summer visitors that breed in inland lakes. By 2024, that number had dropped to fewer than 20. Declines were recorded across most of the regularly monitored parts of the park, with the steepest losses at former strongholds such as Lake Preston North. This matters because Yalgorup has long been considered a key refuge for the Western Hooded Plover, a subspecies found only in south-west Western Australia and still lacking the same level of protection and research attention as its eastern counterpart.



Estimated adult Hooded Plover Numbers over Time. Supplied by Sonia Samchez.

When and where birds gather:

Hooded Plovers were most abundant at Yalgorup in summer, when wide lake shorelines provide breeding, feeding and roosting habitat. This is also when the largest flocks formed, made up largely of birds that breed at inland salt lakes. In the early 2000s, flocks of 40–80 birds were not unusual. Today, flocks rarely exceed 20–30 birds, and large flocks have not been recorded for nearly a decade. Banding records showed that many of these flocking birds are highly mobile, moving between lakes and, in some cases, travelling more than 150 km to inland breeding sites before returning to Yalgorup.

Breeding still happens, but it doesn't explain the decline:

Breeding was recorded in almost every month of the year and across most lakes. Some chicks did fledge successfully, and overall breeding success was comparable to, or higher than, some reported figures from eastern Australia. This suggests that poor breeding success at Yalgorup alone is unlikely to explain the scale of the decline.

So what's driving the losses?

The most likely causes appear to lie beyond Yalgorup itself. Many Western Hooded Plovers breed at inland salt lakes, habitats that are becoming increasingly degraded due to rising salinity, declining rainfall, altered water regimes, grazing cattle and predation pressure. If fewer young birds are surviving or returning from these inland systems, fewer adults will join summer flocks at Yalgorup, exactly the pattern we observed.

Local pressures still matter too. Nest flooding, fox and gull predation, and occasional vehicle disturbance were all recorded, but uncertainty around nest fates and causes of failure was high. More targeted breeding monitoring is needed to better understand how local breeding contributes to Yalgorup's population size and recruitment.

Why this matters for conservation:

The sharp decline at Yalgorup raises serious concerns for the Western Hooded Plover across its range. These lakes provide scarce and highly suitable habitat in the Swan Coastal Plain region, suggesting the decline is unlikely to be due to dispersal to other areas. These findings provide strong evidence that the subspecies may now meet criteria for national threatened species listing, and they highlight the vital role that long-term volunteer monitoring plays in revealing significant declines.

The message is clear, protecting Hooded Plovers in Western Australia will require attention not only to beaches, but also to fragile inland and coastal lake systems, and continued support for the people who monitor them year after year.

Western Hooded Plover Flock, comprising 8 adults and two immature birds, Lake Pollard. Photo: Bill Russell.

This study was published in Corella in February 2026 and was authored by Bill Russell, Sonia Sanchez and Marcus Singor. Bill and Marcus are part of the volunteer team who have been monitoring Yalgorup Lakes for decades. If you would like a copy of the paper, please contact Sonia at sonia.sanchez@birdlife.org.au.

PROTECTING CRITICAL HABITAT OF BEACH-NESTING SHOREBIRDS AND SEABIRDS IN THE COORONG

Kerri Bartley, Coorong Beach-nesting Birds Coordinator, BirdLife Australia, South Australia

BirdLife Australia were successful with an application to deliver a new and exciting project called 'Protecting critical habitat for shorebirds and seabirds in the Coorong' in October 2025. The project is funded through the DEW Shorebird and Wetland Habitat Project in the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth (CLLMM) region. Works commenced in October last year and we are thrilled to be co-delivering this project with Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation and the Yarluwar Rangers.

The aim of the project is to deliver on ground solutions to support breeding success at nesting sites at the Murray Mouth and along 30km of Coorong ocean beach for the Endangered Fairy Tern and Vulnerable Hooded Plover. This area has many challenges for beach-nesters including heavy 4wd use throughout the year and especially during the breeding season.

Grainne installing new Hooded Plover protection signs near 3 Hooded Plover chicks. Photo: Kerri Bartley.

Several workshops have been delivered to raise awareness within the community and to provide training for the Yarluwar Rangers involving breeding monitoring, site protection, predator print identification and tracking, egg floating, remote camera use and Hooded Plover banding.

Installation of a remote 4G camera on a Fox cage trap near the Murray Mouth Fairy Tern colony. Photo: Chris Martin.

the foredune areas and upper beach where the birds need to breed. We are replacing these weeds with 300 *Spinifex hirustus* cuttings to encourage dune stabilisation and gently sloping morphology, which we know the birds need for the chicks to escape threats like high tides, storm surges and 4wd traffic.

Unfortunately, this past season saw a fox predate on more than 152 Fairy Tern nests at the Murray Mouth site. This was devastating for everyone to watch unfold over 45 pain staking days until the fox was finally controlled by NPWS mobilising a shooter, but by this time nearly all the nests were already lost to the fox. A few nests managed to make it through to hatching which resulted in 7 Fairy Tern and 5 Little Tern chicks fledging at the site for the season.

We also had success with Hooded Plover breeding along the Coorong ocean beach with 2 pairs producing 2 fledglings (1 each) from both breeding sites. Installation of some newly developed signage along the base of the dune, requesting beach users to drive slowly and avoid the upper beach, likely contributed towards this success. Seeing small Hooded Plover chicks from a 4wd drive on an open beach is nearly impossible! We are preparing to commence breeding habitat remediation works leading into winter including controlling sea wheat grass and sea spurge which has taken over

Yarluwar Ruwe Rangers practicing egg floating and remote camera installation on fake nests. Photo: Kerri Bartley.

Yarluwar Ruwe Rangers with Kerri installing NEW 'Do Not Drive' banners to protect Fairy Tern chicks at the Murray Mouth 6th February 2026. Photo: Darren Weinert.

POPULATION DYNAMICS OF THE HOODED PLOVER

Stephanie Wood, International Honours Student, Deakin University, Victoria

I am currently undertaking an Environmental Science Honours research project with Deakin University, honing in on the population dynamics of the Hooded Plover in Victoria and South Australia. My work sits within a broader collaboration with BirdLife Australia and builds on an extensive, long-term dataset collected through decades of monitoring, banding, and resighting efforts.

When it comes to helping threatened species, like our Hoodies, simply counting birds does not tell the full story of a population. A population may appear stable while underlying processes, such as survival or breeding success, are declining. My research aims to move beyond these surface-level counts and instead investigate the demographic mechanisms that actually drive population change. To do this, I focus specifically on individuals of a known age, birds that have been marked as chicks and subsequently resighted throughout their lives. This type of data is rare and incredibly valuable because it allows me to track life histories in detail, from early survival through to breeding and movement across the landscape. By working with these known-age individuals, I can directly examine how demographic rates change as birds age, rather than relying on assumptions.

Meet our newest Hoodie Honours student, Stephanie Wood!

Using capture–recapture modelling approaches, I analyse encounter histories to estimate key parameters, including survival probability, breeding output, and movement patterns. Importantly, these models also account for imperfect detection, meaning that a bird not being observed does not automatically imply mortality. This allows for a more accurate and realistic understanding of population processes. A major focus of my project is identifying how demographic rates vary across different life stages. For example, I am interested in whether younger birds experience lower survival when individuals begin breeding and how movement behaviour varies with age and breeding history. These age-related patterns are critical for understanding population viability but are often overlooked due to data limitations.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how Hooded Plover populations function. By identifying which life stages are most vulnerable, the findings can help inform more targeted and effective conservation strategies. More broadly, the project highlights the importance of long-term monitoring and the value of marking individuals, demonstrating how detailed ecological data can reveal patterns that would otherwise remain hidden!

HOODED PLOVERS BREED IN SALT LAKE

Zephyr Jones (15 years old), Elliston, Eyre Peninsula, South Australia

Last September, a pair of Hooded Plovers bred on our local beach. Sadly, the chick didn't survive past nine days old. After that, I didn't see or hear of the parent Hoodies until the morning of the fourth of December when we received a text from a friend who had seen something extraordinary whilst driving to work. The message read: "Hey it sounds ridiculous, but if you're in town today, you & Zeph should spend a bit of time with your bird watching gear exploring the long grass between the oval & the highway opposite the hardware store. I know they shouldn't be there, but I just had to brake for 2 adult Hooded Plovers & a chick while they ran across the road. Having jumped straight on the app to compare them with Red-kneed Dotterels, I'm still 99.9% certain they are Hoodies."

Hoodie pair with their chick on the salt lake, close to cars, buildings and having to cross a road to get to the beach. Photo: Zephyr Jones.

My family lives 10km inland from Elliston and after receiving this exciting message my mum and I went to investigate. The day was hot and there were no Hoodies to be seen around the oval so we went to check the nearby swamp/wetland (which has permanent water) and is in the centre of Elliston. Sure enough, the Hoodies were there. An incredible sight, a pair of Hoodies with a 10 day old chick resting at the edge of a wetland which is surrounded by roads and buildings!

A week earlier I'd seen a single Hooded Plover arrive in the Elliston wetland at dusk. I thought it was strange because it's summer and they should be at the beach and also, I'd never seen a Hoodie there before. Looking back now, I think that was probably one parent coming to see if it was going to be a suitable place for its chick to move to.

What the Hoodies didn't realise (or did but had no choice) was that there was a pair of very protective and territorial Pied Stilts with 4 young chicks occupying the wetland. The Pied Stilts called, swooped and chased the Hoodies around the wetland whilst the Hoodies performed distraction displays, calling and attacking the Stilts. The Hoodie chick (we named it Lakey) needed to rest and feed but instead spent a lot of time and energy running and hiding from the Stilts.

Pied Stilt and Hoodies, both protecting their young. Photo: Zephyr Jones.

They fought for about 2 hours but eventually the Hoodies made peace with the Stilts and won a small open patch surrounded by samphire and that was where they stayed. I think the Stilts were actually an advantage for the Hoodies because the Stilts were much more aggressive towards threats such as ravens, gulls and people. The Stilts divebombed and chased away anything that came near their chicks.

My mum and I stayed at the wetland for the whole day, watching from a safe distance with binoculars and a scope and we were extremely careful not to disturb them. We were unsure if the Hoodies were thinking of travelling on further to the beach. We wanted to be there in case they did as they would have to cross another road. For some time it looked as if the Hoodies might continue on their journey but soon they settled.

The Hoodies eventually found their own space on the salt lake. Photo: Zephyr Jones.

That day Mum and I spoke to Renée Mead and got approval from the Elliston Council to put up signs straight away on the entry points to the wetland. All the signs had to be altered slightly because we weren't on a beach and couldn't just say please walk by the water's edge because it was best to walk on the paths!

Two days later the year 7-10 school science class joined us in the wetland to learn about the Hoodies, and the students got to watch Lakey from a safe distance with my scope. We checked on the Hoodies every day we could, and one evening one parent was missing. We suspected that it could be feeding on the nearest beach so we went and checked and sure enough it was there. We don't usually see Hooded Plovers on this beach so it was very likely it was that parent. The next time we checked the wetland both parents were there.

From our knowledge of the area we came to the conclusion that this Hoodie pair that had failed to raise their first chick on the beach in September went on to nest in the salt lake about 1km inland on the edge of Elliston. By the time their chick was around 10 days old, the salt lake dried up. They walked Lakey, their precious chick, to the closest water which happened to be the small wetland in the centre of the town with permanent water.

Unfortunately, Lakey didn't survive longer than 5 days in Elliston Wetland and we suspect it was taken by a fox as we saw prints in the mud. That afternoon we watched the parents leave the wetland and as far as we know they haven't bred again this season.

I think this Hoodie pair is a good example of Hooded Plovers that might be adapting to climate change and increased people on beaches by making the decision to move to coastal salt lakes and try to breed there. Last spring was unusually wet and stormy, with out of season storm surges and high tides. This also led to a prolonged surf season with increased disturbance from dogs and people. Several pairs of Red-capped Plovers also lost their nests to storm surges.

In February I participated in the national shorebird counts, and surveyed a nearby coastal salt lake. We saw 18 Hooded Plovers (15 adults, 3 juveniles) flocking on the lake. I think this shows it is really important to survey our coastal salt lakes in summer as well as winter. That way we can learn more about these amazing little birds, where they flock and breed and better protect the places which they need to survive.

Check your local salt lakes this year, because you never know what you might find!

Hoodies, Pied Stilts and 4 Pied Stilt chicks. Photo: Zephyr Jones.

CONFERENCE REGISTRATIONS AND HUB VIDEOS

Tegan Knowles, Beach-nesting Bird Project Officer, Western Australia

The biennial Beach-nesting Birds Conference will be held in Goolwa, South Australia from 22–24 May. Conference registrations close on 30 April, and with an exciting lineup of presenters, workshops, and field trips now confirmed, it's shaping up to be a fantastic few days of learning, knowledge sharing, and connection. Stay tuned — we'll soon be sharing further details on the program schedule, along with your allocated workshops and field trips. We're really looking forward to catching up with everyone who can join us in Goolwa!

If you're unable to attend this year's conference or if you missed out previously, you can still tap into the incredible insights shared by our community. Recordings from the last conference in Anglesea, Victoria, are available on the Beach-nesting Birds Hub, offering inspiration and learning from researchers, cultural conservationists, volunteers and land managers.

Head to the Document Library within *My Courses* on the Hub to explore this suite of presentations. Whether you've been part of the BNB journey from the very beginning or you're just starting out, there's something there to inform, inspire and strengthen your involvement.

The 2024 Beach-nesting Bird Conference group photo, a flock of passionate people working together to give beach-nesting birds a brighter future. Photo: Photo: Katelin Saurine.

REGIONAL ROUND UP

Click on the links below to read more from each of the regions about their Beach-nesting Bird Project activities and updates from the 2025/26 breeding season:

Victorian Update South Australian Update

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Beach-nesting Birds program is funded by a diverse range of funding sources and each year we apply for new grants and opportunities to develop new resources, carry out targeted research or to provide support to volunteers and key regions. Donors, grants and philanthropists make the program possible, and we often leverage small funding to go for bigger grants to achieve special projects.

Thank you to all article writers, and an incredible shout out to our volunteer co-editor Felicity Hoff who assisted once again with the production of this newsletter. Without all of these contributions this publication would not be possible.