

Procedure for injured, entangled, oiled or sick Hooded Plovers for Victoria and South Australia

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Injured, entangled, oiled or sick Hooded Plovers in Victoria and South Australia

BirdLife Australia's Beach-nesting Birds Team act as a central point of contact for initiating emergency response protocols for Hooded Plovers in Victoria and South Australia. The team maintains a centralised database of where Hooded Plovers occur along the Victorian and South Australian coastlines, their breeding sites and for some locations, will be able to identify the stage of nesting that the birds are at based on citizen science monitoring data in the online portal. The team also know who manages and monitors the birds in most locations, and for some locations, the closest veterinarian and/or avian wildlife carers.

In addition, the Beach-nesting Birds Team at BirdLife Australia hold permits (in Victoria and South Australia) for capture of Hooded Plovers using specialist techniques (noose carpets, hand net, hand capture, mist nets), and have a list of individuals who have undergone training in rescue of entangled, oiled or injured Hooded Plovers.

BirdLife Australia have developed a strict set of protocols for deciding the steps to take in the scenario of an injured, entangled, oiled or sick Hooded Plover adult or chick. These protocols have had ethics approval and are our approved process in both states for deciding on intervention. It is important to know that these do not necessarily involve immediate, if at all, intervention. The protocols are in place to ensure all the key approvals are in place, that we have veterinarian care lined up for the bird if required and a well-devised plan for each step of any intervention.

BirdLife Australia's Beach-nesting Birds team should be made aware of any injured/entangled/oiled/sick Hooded Plovers, so we can maintain centralised records of these occurrences and ensure no pattern is forming in the population (e.g. potential viral outbreak). Identifying sources of injury and illness in the species can provide major insight into sources of adult and chick mortality, enabling us to better prioritise threat mitigation actions to improve recovery of the species.

We also need to be contacted when a bird has been taken in by the public or are with a carer, so that we can assist with an appropriate plan for care and release.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM:

Primary Contacts:

Grainne Maguire (0400 910 761)
Renee Mead (0422 798 388)
Kasun Ekanayake (0433 964 484)
Meg Cullen (0437 787 985)
Dan Lees (0400 090 767)

Secondary Contacts:

Mike Weston, Deakin University (0417 344 985)
Steve Johnson, Bass Coast, qualified in capture and rescue (0429 188 330)
Jon Fallaw at Phillip Island Nature Parks (0439 825 872)
Rachael Kannussaar, Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board (0427 975 903)

If there is no answer, leave a message and send a text.

The next best person to call is your Regional Coordinator who can assist in trying to reach key personnel.

Procedures for all participants in the Beach-nesting Birds program

Step 1. Upon discovery of the bird

The best advice we can give to anyone who observes a Hooded Plover that appears sick, entangled, oiled or is behaving abnormally, is to record as much information as possible on the spot. The information you need to take note of and have ready to share with the team includes:

- Where are you? Exact location will be important.
- Is the bird alone or with a partner or a flock?
- Is there evidence of breeding?
- Is the bird banded or flagged?
- What is the problem? Which part of the body is it affecting?
 - If entangled, can you see the material, is it natural (e.g. seaweed, seagrass) or is it a man-made material?
 - If oiled, what parts of the body are oiled and how much oiling is there?
 - If injured, is there any sign of blood, swelling, bruising or blackening (of the legs or feet)?
 - Is it limping or dragging the foot/leg or wing?
 - If it is appearing unwell, are the vent (cloaca) feathers stained?
- Can it move ok? This may even require gently herding it to get an idea of how restricted its movement is. If it is holding a leg up, herding may be able to get it to put the leg down so it can be reviewed but note the bird may not be able to put its leg down to pain or injury or entanglement.
- Is it feeding or interacting with its environment or other birds? Is it showing signs that it is able to function 'normally'?
- Will the bird be vulnerable to a predator if you leave the site to seek assistance or advice? e.g. is it unable to move and able to be approached to pick it up?
- If you have a camera, please take photographs of the bird showing different sides of the bird.
- If you have a telescope, please get a closer look and try to observe the exact source of the problem e.g. if it is the leg, which part of the leg? If banded, is it near the band or flag?

Step 2. Phone our Emergency Response Team (Page 1)

Contact the team as soon as you can. If you cannot reach one team member, try another contact until you reach someone. Make sure you leave a text message if you cannot get through. Try your regional coordinator also so they can assist with reaching the emergency response team.

Step 3. Emergency Response decision making framework is followed

If the bird is severely injured or not moving:

Even though immediate vet care is the first priority here, it is important to contact BirdLife early on in this scenario to ask for advice. We may have dealt with a vet in that area who we can direct you to, and we may have had experience with the symptoms the

bird is exhibiting from other rescues. We will also need to be aware so we can start to prepare for potential care and release strategy of the bird.

If immediate care is required and the bird is able to be approached to pick up, the following will need to be in place:

- Do I have a box or cloth bag that I can put the bird in to transport to the vet?
- Do I know of a vet (better if they are experienced with birds) and is it within opening hours? (Where am I heading and will they be open?)
- Where will I place the bird in the car? You need to think about its temperature and ensuring it has air and is not placed in a position where the sun will overheat it, or in a position where it will get too cold. Please ensure the car is as quiet as possible (no radio, ideally silence or minimal talking). Avoid having any pets in the car.
- Do not keep checking the bird, better to leave it in a box or cloth bag, where it can be stress free.
- Do not squeeze the bird when picking up, be as gentle as possible.

The emergency response team will talk the person through immediate actions and assist with organising care. Land managers will be notified as soon as possible, and if out of hours, messages left with follow up occurring once they return to work.

If the bird is still able to move and evade a predator:

The Emergency Response Team will initiate a plan.

One of the very first steps is to gather enough of a description of the issue/injury and/or photos/videos that show this issue/injury, for consultation with a vet over the phone or email. The vet provides their initial assessment advice and conveys advice on whether an intervention needs to occur and how timely this needs to be.

Some examples of when intervention was needed based on answers to the following:

- Is the foot or leg beginning to show signs of necrosis (i.e. death of tissue from too little blood flow to the tissue; often indicated by purple colouration)? Is there an object or entanglement causing constriction of blood flow? If so, timely intervention is important. There are numerous examples of where we've been able to rescue a bird that has necrotic toes and while it has lost the toe/s, we've been able to stop any further damage or loss of the foot and bird.
- Is the oiling likely to be ingested or does the bird have eggs or chicks that oil will transfer to through incubation/brooding?
- Is the injury related to the band or flag? It is our obligation under banding conditions to rectify this.
- Is the bird tipping over or is its movement severely restricted, hence its predator evasion capacity limited/absent?
- Is the chick struggling to thrive relative to its age, has its condition physically deteriorated and is it unable to keep up with the family group?

Some examples of when intervention has not occurred:

- The injury has been superficial and vet consultation (based on photo/video assessment and description of the birds' movement, colouration and behaviour) revealed it was likely to self-heal (note continued monitoring is always undertaken to confirm healing is occurring/has occurred)

- The bird was entangled in a natural fibre which was assessed as loose and likely to fall off and it was not posing a threat to the birds' health (continued monitoring is undertaken to confirm the fibre has come off and the birds' health has not deteriorated)
- During an oil spill, when oiling was very minor and the bird was not breeding, the bird was monitored closely without intervention.
- The chick/s are small for their age but they appear to behave normally and take approximately an extra week to fledge.

These are just a few examples of potential scenarios, however there are always new scenarios which arise and we assess these primarily on the birds welfare, condition and ability to behave/thrive/survive in the wild. All assessments are done in consultation with one or more vets.

Step 4. Undertaking an intervention

If the Emergency Response Team in consultation with vets determines that an intervention is required, the following steps are followed:

1. The Emergency Response Team identify the key personnel to be involved in the intervention including a coordinator, catch team (plus volunteers or land managers to assist with crowd management), a vet, a clinic if required, and a wildlife carer if required.
2. Land managers are notified. Note if this occurs out of hours, messages will be left and follow up made once land managers are back at work (which may be after the intervention has occurred).
3. Traps for capture are sourced. A catch team arranges meeting time and location, plus has additional availability times determined in case the first attempt fails. The catch team ideally consists of one qualified trap operator and another qualified capture member, plus one or more volunteers or land managers to assist with managing people that may approach the catch area from nearby access points (if required).
4. If discussions with the vet, based on photos/video and descriptions of the birds' injury/entanglement, condition and behaviour, indicate that it may be able to be treated in situ, we will have pre-arranged for this to occur. This is the most ideal scenario as we aim to minimize disturbance and stress to the bird by taking it off beach. This may also be compounded by the presence of nest or chicks. We would arrange to have a vet attend the capture or be on call to arrive within 15 minutes after capture, on the beach. The vet would assess and treat on site where possible. We would release without the need to take off site in this scenario.
5. If a vet cannot attend on site or if the injury/condition of the bird is likely to need an examination in a clinic and possibly X-rays, we would have pre-arranged with a vet or animal hospital to take the bird off site to this facility and have determined the opening times and arrangement for drop off in advance. Given the unpredictable timing of capture, we would be aware of a back up arrangement for out of hours scenarios.
4. Capture is carried out by the designated catch team using a noose carpet if the bird can walk, or a hand net if the bird is approachable (including at night, approaching under spotlight, although conditions for this must be suitable). It may be additional capture methods are needed if the bird cannot walk, such as a mist net. Note only a few

personnel have approval to operate a mist net in the capture team, and we may need to source an authorised mist net operator to attend also.

[Note: once the bird becomes unable to walk and only wishes to take flight from an approaching person, it can no longer be easily captured using these methods. It then narrows the methods for capture greatly, and increases the chances we will not successfully capture the bird. Thus the need for timely intervention.]

6. The bird is assessed and treated by a vet. Photos of the injury or entanglement are taken before and after treatment. Any material taken off the bird (e.g. entanglement material) is kept in a zip lock bag and given to the team to arrange forensic analysis.

7. If it needs to be kept overnight or for a period of time to rehabilitate, given to a wildlife carer with experience caring for birds who has the relevant permits in place.

8. A plan is made for release that involves someone with local knowledge of the bird's territory and partner or breeding status, present. Release is done by an experienced member of the team, undertaking predator checks, placing the bird just above the ground and into the wind, covering the eyes of the bird and gently releasing hands so the bird can run or fly away.

Step 5. Monitoring of the bird

Regardless of whether intervention will occur after the initial discussion between members of the Emergency Response Team and vets, the bird will be monitored. This will involve regularly visiting the bird repeatedly, which may be multiple times over 24 hours, or daily or over the course of weeks, depending on the particular issue.

Upon each visit, photos and an assessment of the bird's health and movements are made. The Emergency Response Team is then spoken to, the vet is kept informed of the birds' condition and developments, and the decision about intervention is reviewed continuously over the course of monitoring. This continues until either the bird recovers or an intervention is undertaken.

