



EDITION 25 - WINTER 2021

QUEENSLAND

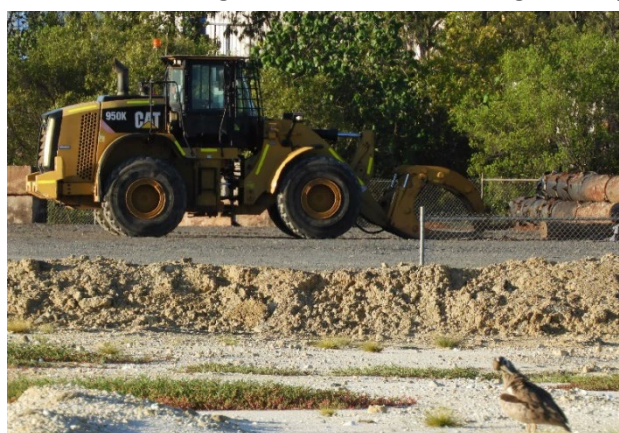
BEACH STONE-CURLEWS ON THE WET TROPICS COAST

Amanda Freeman, Ecologist, Nature North



Late last year and early this year BirdLife's Threatened Coastal Birds project (funded through a Community Sustainability Action grant via the Queensland Government's Department of Environment and Science) in north Queensland focussed on searching for nests and monitoring Beach Stone-curlew breeding attempts. This involved Project team members and other volunteers strategically searching for Beach Stone-curlews in known breeding locations and watching for any behavioural cues that might suggest nesting.

At a couple of sites in the Cairns area, nests were recorded from September to December 2020. Unfortunately, of the nests we knew about, none were successful. In one case numerous goanna tracks hinted that the egg could have been predated and in another, a new chick, hatched at the end of December, was no longer there when the nest site was checked after a heavy rain event in early January. We were surprised, however, by regular sightings of a well-grown immature Beach Stone-curlew with two adults at the port's dredge material placement area in an industrial part of Cairns. In early 2019 a family group was recorded in this area, which had been a regular Beach Stone-curlew breeding site, amidst concerns for birdlife when dredge spoil dumping began. It was heartening to see that this pair bred successfully again this season. Where they nested, we don't know. Given the propensity of these birds to stick with their traditional nest sites, we presume it was close by despite disturbance.



An immature Beach Stone-curlew loafs on dredge spoil at a port facility in Cairns. Despite the industrial area, its parents presumably nested nearby. Photo: Amanda Freeman.

Over the cooler months our attention has shifted to 'plugging the gaps' in our coverage of the Wet Tropics coast. In the late 1990s, as reported in Emu (Vol 103, No 4), Beach Stone-curlews were recorded in 48 locations between the Daintree River in the north and the Tully River in the south. So far during the 16 months our current Coastal Birds project has been running, they have only been recorded in 32 of these locations. Therefore, we're busy getting boots on the ground to check for Beach Stone-curlews in places that aren't thoroughly surveyed and where we've had no recent sightings.

Autumn is also a good time of year to get a handle on successful breeding that has illuded us. Groups comprised of three Beach Stone-curlews are a good indicator of this as they are probably a pair with last season's offspring. As well as the 'dredge spoil' youngster, we've had two other surprise appearances of immature birds in our study area confirming what we already knew – that Beach Stone-curlews can be secretive – and giving us hope that they're breeding more successfully than we have feared.



NEW SOUTH WALES



NSW FAR SOUTH COAST HIGHLIGHTS

Leo Berzins, NSW South Coast Shorebird Recovery Program and BirdLife Australia Beach-nesting Birds Project volunteer

It was a good season for beach-nesting birds in our region. On the stretch of coast that I monitor (Bermagui to Wonboyn) we had 16 Hooded Plovers fledging. Also, at least a dozen Australian Pied Oystercatchers fledged. The Little Tern colony at Mogareeka only had about 40 breeding pairs this summer but they managed to fledge over 50 chicks.



Left: Pied Oystercatcher chick at Mogareeka. Right: Little Tern fledgling at Mogareeka. Photos: Leo

A mild summer with no major storms or extreme heat events probably contributed to the success and certainly made monitoring a lot more pleasant for volunteers. A great relief after the devastating bushfires of the previous summer.

The parents of the year award went to the Hooded Plover pair at Bunga Beach South, in Mimosa Rocks National Park. This pair successfully fledged five chicks. A great effort considering the regular presence of foxes at this beach, largely due to the proximity of farmland. This is one of only two sites where we deploy nest cages to protect hoodie nests from fox predation but of course, these are no help after the chicks hatch. Good parenting and no doubt a measure of good luck is still required for fledging success.

A most surprising event was the visit from a flagged hoodie which had been living in Victoria. W0 is a female, banded as a fledgling in October 2015 at Nullica Bay, near Eden. She has been a breeding resident in East Gippsland for several years and is monitored by volunteers Len and Jacqui in Marlo, Vic. In late October she was seen foraging with one of the resident pairs at Disaster Bay and a week later she was at nearby Saltwater Creek with a hoodie who had lost his partner over winter. The pair nested the following week and again two weeks later, after the first nest failed. Sadly, they lost their second nest as well and W0 was not seen again in NSW. She had returned to Victoria where Len and Jacqui reported her nesting again at Conran Creek. The straight-line distance between the NSW and Vic nests is over 130km. An amazing trip



for a hoodie during breeding season. (Grainne jokingly suggested that W0 returned to NSW to boost our numbers in the 2020 biennial hoodie count.) Note that all NSW hoodie flags are black with an alphanumeric code in white. Please let us know if you ever see a hoodie with such a flag outside NSW.

Sadly, we are losing our wonderful, dedicated shorebird coordinators Jodie and Sophie. The NSW Shorebird Recovery Program will continue with coordination from two National Parks Rangers, one in Nowra and one in Narooma.



Hooded Plover with NSW black flag. Photo: Leo Berzins

TASMANIA

WHAT A SMALL WORLD

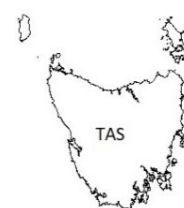
Jo King, Volunteer with NRM North

For our “escape the Tasmanian winter” sojourn 2016, we decided on the Mitchell Highway through central Queensland up into the Gulf country to explore as yet uncovered ground with the possibility of some exciting bird watching.

Central Queensland that year experienced good rainfall with water pooling in vast areas of bush and Brolgas were a common sight. In early July we arrived at Charleville Bush Caravan park and set up for a few days to take in the many sights of the area. That evening I was invited to sing and play guitar around the happy hour campfire to a wonderful audience of fellow travellers. During the evening my partner Ted struck up conversations with two friendly couples from Wonthaggi, Victoria. Over the next few days and evenings around the campfire we became fast and firm friends. Imagine our delight to find such an enthusiastic and knowledgeable birdo as Steve Johnson. We were fascinated to hear of Steve’s involvement in Hooded plover monitoring and all it entailed. We had for some years with our local bird watching group been involved with annual shorebird counts and fencing for Fairy terns on the local beach.

Over the next few months as we all moved northward, we met up again at Lara Wetlands, Winton and Cloncurry spending many hours swapping birding stories, walking and bird watching, and enjoying fine food and wine. Steve, Di and friends extended an invitation to stay with them in Wonthaggi before sailing back to Tasmania giving us an opportunity to visit Steve’s Hoodies and a number of his favourite bird watching areas. With plans made to catch up the following year we returned home to Tassie.

In summer of 2018, I was invited to join a Hooded Plover monitoring programme headed up by NRM North, and we chose Shelly Beach as I had observed a pair of Hoodies in that location over a few years. After completing the training with





BirdLife Australia, I began my data collecting in December of that year. I was delighted to tell Steve of our programme and was so grateful for his insights and wealth of knowledge on Hoodies. I had many questions for him and he offered much needed advice on observing and data collection. On their 2019 Tasmanian holiday, we visited the site at Shelly and a number of our favourite bird watching spots leading to many long and interesting discussions on the lives of Hooded plovers.

I now look forward to the next get together with Steve and reliving the excitement of joining the BirdLife Australia banding team on Shelly Beach to capture, band and release my Hoodies. Over the last three years these tenacious little birds have survived all that mother nature sends, dogs off lead, people on bikes, runners, sunbathers let alone threats from other birds and cats. They have lost eggs but tried again and successfully raised chicks. What a privilege it is to observe them, collect data and be a small part in their long-term survival.



Jo watching release of E1 Red. Photo: G Maguire

FIRST HOODED PLOVERS BANDED ON THE TASMANIAN EAST COAST

Daniel Lees, Beach-nesting Birds Project Officer, BirdLife Australia

BirdLife Australia's Beach-nesting Birds team in collaboration with Deakin University, recently received ethics and state permits to capture, band, flag and take genetic samples from Hooded Plovers in Tasmania. A highly experienced team of six set off to Tasmania for six days with the aim of collecting Hooded Plover genetic samples (a drop of blood) from Tasmania's east coast population. A previous genetic analysis identified an isolation-by-distance relationship across the mainland east coast and describes South Australian and Victorian Hooded Plovers as being genetically distinct populations. The analysis also confirmed the status of the Western Australian Hooded Plover population as warranting its classification as a separate subspecies.

The team arrived in Hobart on the 26th of March and headed to Bruny Island, beginning field work that afternoon at Cloudy Bay. We were lucky that the motorbikes on the beach departed as we arrived, so that we had the beach to ourselves and could catch five adult hoodies from a flock that was present.

The following morning of the 27th we split into two teams, one team concentrated on Adventure Bay and Resolution Creek, accompanied by volunteer Amanda Blakney, while the other team went to The Neck Beach. The first team managed to catch a juvenile and two adults at Resolution Creek, followed by another two adults at Adventure Bay. While banding at resolution creek, a local arrived to walk his very energetic dog but after we showed



Meg assessing wing moult on S9 Red. Photo: Grainne Maguire



him the birds in the hand and explained what we were doing and why, he went to a different beach. He then returned alone to ask more questions and was incredibly interested in his local birds! The second team had a lengthy walk in to the northern end of The Neck Beach and managed to catch an adult, a sub-adult and two juveniles before the weather closed in and prevented further fieldwork.

On the morning of the 28th we left Bruny and set off for Friendly Beaches, arriving early-afternoon. After lunch we split into two teams, one team concentrated on northern section, accompanied by volunteer Amanda Blakney, while the other team went south. The northern team managed to catch a juvenile and four adults, while the southern team caught four adults.

The next morning began at Chain of Lagoons where we caught four adults, before heading to Scamander in the early-afternoon to meet volunteers Jo King and Peter Smiley and catching two adults and a juvenile at Shelley Pt beach. The team again split up, one remaining with Jo to catch the pair at Shelley, and one heading with Peter to Jeanneret Beach to catch two adults.

After a long drive north the next morning, we arrived at Mount William Top Camp. We caught two adults near the beach entry but then trekked in a fair way to an amazing dune system where we caught another five adults. Two of the birds were resting deep within the dunes and herding birds out of a dune like this reminded us of catching birds in Yalata South Australia! After the long walk back, we then drove south to Eddystone Point with time to catch just one more adult before we had to call it a day. We were also lucky to spot a 2.5-week-old Red-capped Plover chick with its parents. On the last morning before the drive to Hobart airport, we gave Binalong Bay one last chance and while the main pair weren't present, we caught the pair at the far end! We left Tasmania in good spirits as we had caught and taken samples from a total of 44 Hooded Plovers! We would like to thank the Tasmania National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and the Environment for supporting this research.



Left: The team banding 'P8' at Shelly Point, Photo: Renee Mead. Centre: Releasing flagged bird at Chain of Lagoons, Photo Grainne Maguire. Right: Juvenile 'T4' banded at the Neck Beach, Photo: Meg Cullen



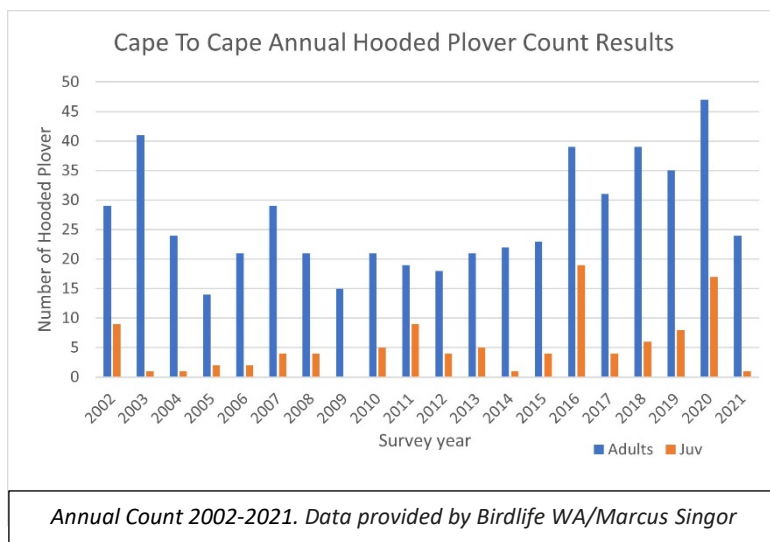
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

CAPE TO CAPE REGIONAL RESULTS

Christine Taylor, Conservation Officer, Southwest Region, Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions

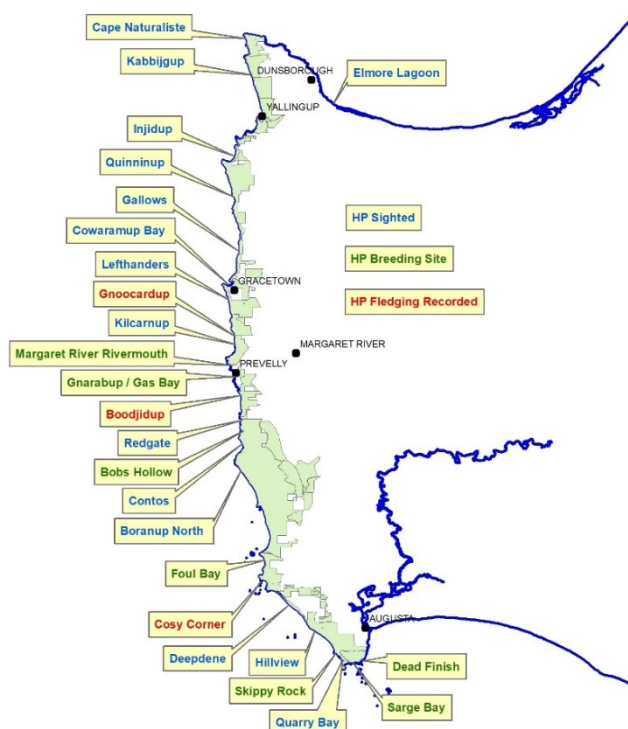
The annual WA Hooded Plover count took place on its usual first weekend in February despite wildfires, a major tropical low, and a preceding Covid-19 lockdown. Thirty volunteers walked beaches to survey most of the coastline between Dunsborough and Augusta resulting in 24 Adult and 1 Juvenile Hooded Plover reported.

The results of this year's count were a tad disappointing compared with the all-time high of the 2020 survey (47 adults and 17 juv). However, this may be partly due to incomplete survey effort; with a few beaches unable to be surveyed given the conditions and volunteer availability. Also, birds may have been hunkering down in the poor weather which blew in strong on the Sunday morning. Despite this blip in the data, with less than 30 birds reported for the first time in 6 years, based on 20 years of counts in this region the numbers appear to be on the increase. Though this may also partly reflect an increase in survey effort with a growing volunteer base resulting in very comprehensive recent surveys.



Running simultaneously, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) and BirdLife's "Cape to Cape Hooded Plover Project" now has about 30 volunteers signed up who regularly trudge beaches in search of the elusive Hoodie throughout the year along this 110 km stretch of coast. They have completed a tremendous 339 surveys so far for the 2020-21 season resulting in 188 positive records of Hoodies entered in the data portal. 11 nests were located, allowing for DBCA rangers to install fencing and signage at seven nests this season. Hoodies were seen at 25 beaches, and breeding confirmed at 10 territories – three of which we were able to demonstrate fledged chicks (Boodjidup, Cosy Corner and Gnoocardup).

One of these nests, at Boodjidup beach, was discovered by volunteers in early January during peak holiday period and was quickly fenced by DBCA staff. The nest was monitored closely, and three tiny chicks were reported hatching later in January. The keen observation skills of volunteers were able to follow the fate of this family and confirm that one chick survived to fledging on March 15th 2021, which is a fantastic outcome at such a popular Margaret River beach over the summer holiday period.



Hooded Plover Beaches Cape to Cape 2020-21

Hoodies were reported from as far north as Elmore Lagoon, Busselton and even a pair sighted in Bunbury! But in general, it does appear that the central and southern portion of the Cape-to-Cape region is the stronghold of our breeding population. Thanks everyone for their assistance in completing the annual count and their leg and detective work throughout the entire season, it is very much appreciated.



Top: Pied Oystercatchers Kilcarnup. Bottom: Hooded Plover (Western sub-species) Kilcarnup. Photos Maxine Peters