



EDITION 26 – SPRING 2021

## THE BEGINNING OF THE 2021/22 BREEDING SEASON - MORNINGTON PENINSULA

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

After singing from the rafters following the extraordinary success of our last breeding season, with 21 fledged chicks, we now plummet back to earth and the real world and begin our preparations for this season. Last year, from our 30 active breeding pairs we achieved a fledgling rate of almost 45% and a fledglings/active site rate of 70%. Pretty remarkable figures. We held an end-of-season, in-person debrief in May, where in part we tried to reconcile the success we achieved, against a host of community and environmental factors. Even with covid restrictions, the beaches were as busy as ever, there was the El Nina weather pattern than brought us a cooler, wetter summer, there were new Parks Victoria staffers and new volunteers and of course there was just a little bit of luck. But the bottom line is that we just weren't able to put our finger on the magic formula-I know- there isn't one.

Unfortunately, the Mornington Peninsula falls under the covid restrictions of the Greater City of Melbourne which has meant a total of 230 days of lockdown in the last 18 months. A number that will continue to climb. At the time of writing this article, we are currently in the 44<sup>th</sup> day of a hard lockdown with 5km limits and a 9pm to 5am curfew. We are fortunate to still be able to cover most of our beaches with local volunteers combining with the dedicated rangers from Parks Victoria. Importantly, common sense has prevailed, and this year volunteers enjoying their legal exercise allotments are permitted to enter their observations into the portal. This allows the PV Rangers to be updated via the Management Alerts, and for nest fencing to still be erected expeditiously.

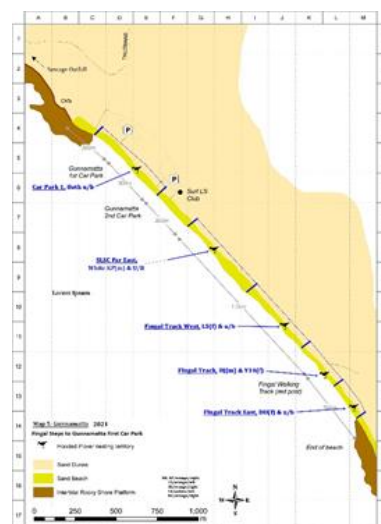
Historically our Hoodies didn't start nesting until mid-September but already this year we have had 4 nests, with the first recorded in late August.



Left: Hooded Plover at Gunnamatta. Centre: Impressive waves at Rye. Right: Chicks at Rye. Photos Mark Lethlean



While some volunteers can still get to the beaches, many of us are trying to make ourselves useful at home. Updating our territory maps was one of those jobs. For ease of management, we divide our beaches into 6 sectors, each overseen by a Beach Sector Coordinator (BSC) or Beach Leader. We have maps for each sector, which we update every 2 years, showing the distributions of the territories and the flags of the birds in each territory. Having BSC's enables better coordination of management and monitoring between volunteers and PV staff. We achieve a more even coverage of monitoring across the park. PV rangers receive all management alerts and can refer back to the BSC for help if needed. So, one person communicates any issues such as; shortages of management materials, threat issues and damage to permanent fences and signage. I think that although it is a fairly informal role, it works particularly well. Our Territory Maps are available on the Hub so if you are ever visiting the beaches of the Mornington Peninsula feel free to download the appropriate map to help you make sense of what you observe.



*Territory Map of Gunnamatta.*

APOLLO BAY SUB-GROUP OF THE OTWAYS REGION WILD DOG CREEK TO MARENGO

Richard Stone, Volunteer Friends of the Hooded Plover Otways

The seven nesting sites in the Wild Dog Creek to Marengo section of the Otways Region are monitored by a small group of Apollo Bay residents. This section is about ten kilometres long and contains two long pristine sandy beaches, the Apollo Bay Harbour and some rocky areas with sandy coves. Our resident flagged birds are 'EX', 'HH', 'MY' and 'BP'.

For a newcomer, the first reaction when looking for a hooded plover nest might be to walk along one of our beaches – but that is not where the nests are! High tides over time have created vertical sand dunes bordering the beaches, leaving no reliable places for nests to be safe for the length of an incubation period. ‘Our’ nests are traditionally found at the mouths of Wild Dog Creek and Barham River – here, tides in the past have rarely covered the sand spits in

summer. The reason has been that the West to East natural movement of sand continuously replenished these sand spits so that they become high enough to provide safe nesting spots protected from the tides.

However, that has changed in the past few years. As an example, the Wild Dog Creek sand spit, shown in the photo below, regularly has the tide sweeping over the two nesting sites making them unusable. Similar regular tidal flooding now occurs at the Barham River Mouth during summer washing away nests, eggs and fencing. In most of my Portal entries for the 2020/21 season, I recorded that the main threat to the nests and eggs was the tide.





*Wild Dog Creek nesting sites tidally inundated. Photo: Richard Stone.*

The plovers at both Wild Dog Creek and Barham River did try during the year to counter the tides. I observed them at the Barham River nesting over the top of the sand dunes - but all those attempts failed with their eggs mysteriously vanishing overnight. I placed a remote sensor camera on the Barham River Middle Nest when a new nest had been found located really high up on a sand dune – the camera recorded the tide washing away the eggs leaving a vertical sand embankment along the beach.

At the Wild Dog Creek sand spit, finding a nest was easy as the plovers used small, raised mounds on which to nest. In doing this, the eggs were often protected from the tide which flowed around the mound as can be seen in the photograph below.



*Nest on a small mound, note where the tide has washed away the sides. Photo: Richard Stone.*

During one period when the plovers finally seemed to have located a safe mound for their eggs, ravens found them. I watched one day as a raven walked around each nest, mound and scrape checking that it had not missed an egg to eat. Foxes were recorded here as well.

We had eggs but no chicks in the 2020/21 season between the Wild Dog Creek and Marengo. But there was always something to see on the beaches, especially other waders that interacted with the plovers – such as the Ruddy Turnstone shown in the photo below.

Our group would like to thank Birdlife Australia for providing us with lightweight plastic fence poles, nylon rope and signs to enable us to fence the nests ourselves. Many of our nesting sites are quite remote, as can be seen in the photo below of the Marengo West nest. These nests are difficult to reach and fence, especially when having to carry steel posts.



*Ruddy Turnstone and plover at Barham River Mouth. Photo: Richard Stone.*



We have found that two of us can now carry enough lightweight material in one trip to any of our nests to enable them to be fenced as soon as eggs have been laid. Removing the fences once the nests have been abandoned or at the end of the season is now relatively easy.



*Marengo West fenced with new materials. Photo: R Stone.*

## APOLLO BAY SUB-GROUP OF THE OTWAYS REGION: SUGARLOAF TO SKENES CREEK

Frank and Sylvia van der Peet, Volunteers Friends of the Hooded Plover Otways

Our Apollo Bay area is part of the Otways Region. The distance between Skenes Creek and Apollo Bay lends itself to split our volunteers into two sub-groups. We monitor six nests from Sugarloaf in the east to just beyond Skenes Creek in the west. This twelve kilometre stretch of rocky formations is interspersed with sandy coves which, as can be seen from the photo below, is quite remote although the Great Ocean Road runs immediately beside it.

We are really committed to monitoring 'our' nests and are pleased that we can now protect those nests with the lightweight plastic posts, rope and signs recently supplied to the group by Birdlife Australia.

Last season, the highlight for us ended on a high with two fledglings at Sugarloaf.

The 2020-2021 breeding season started off in a promising fashion with four nest sites spotted between Sugarloaf and Skenes Creek, but then it went somewhat downhill.

At Skenes Creek East there was a nest with 2 eggs on Shelly Beach just above high tide. Only one egg hatched and the parents took the chick to Petticoat Creek. The chick and parents disappeared shortly after – we suspect dogs and/or bad weather.



*Two Hoodies with Sugarloaf in the background. Photo F. and S. van der Peet*

At Browns Creek the perennial hoodie tagged TA & partner nested at least three times halfway up the midden. First three eggs, then two eggs that all disappeared, and one egg later that was abandoned. One more attempt at nesting





on the beach was washed away by the high tide. We trapped for a feral cat that was seen nearby for a month but only got one increasingly fat, trap happy bush rat.

The nests that we found during the season were mainly on sand but we were interested in this one on Shelley Beach. There were two eggs in this nest and we were lucky one day to arrive just after one chick had hatched. As you can see, the chick is the same colouring as the egg and was quite camouflaged amongst the shells.

The pair at Skenes Creek West (Thomas' corner) appeared late in the season, around the time that Wild Dog became unsuitable due to sand removal, erosion and ravens visiting. Two eggs were laid in the sand between rocks in the retaining wall and one hatched but the chick was only seen once before the parents and chick disappeared. This beach has numerous dog walkers.



*Camouflaged egg and chick. Photo F. and S. van der Peet*

At Sugarloaf the pair was first seen in November on the Biennial Count day. Their first 2 attempts to nest (2 eggs each time) were high up on a steep dune but all eggs were washed out of the nest in heavy rain events. This pair then moved a little further east and nested on the sand above the high tide mark. Despite the area being used by numerous dog walkers they hatched 2 chicks which made it to fledgling stage.

Our best day of the season was when one of the parents and its two fledglings flew in and landed almost at our feet.

## BELLARINE PENINSULA

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

The Hoodie breeding season 2021/2022, for the Bellarine, started on the 31<sup>st</sup> August with a nest established on 13<sup>th</sup> Beach 34-35W by the pair VL and XU. Brett Diehm from Barwon Coast was swift in establishing fencing and signage but unfortunately the nest had failed within the first week! As of now, we have 2 new nesting sites. SN and CR are incubating eggs on 13<sup>th</sup> Beach between 29W-30W (hatching due around 16<sup>th</sup> October) and UU (White) and unbanded on the Ocean Grove Spit between 19W-20W. Both pairs having successful fledglings last season, one being SP (White). Fingers Crossed for a repeat this season.



At Collendina, JU and KW have paired up again, yay! and incubating eggs East of 5W, higher up in the dune. John Murray has been keeping watch over this site and signs and fencing all in place with assistance from COGG.

### COMMUNITY GRANT SUCCESS!

With the help of some of our very dedicated volunteers, and assistance from Meg Cullen (Birdlife), the FoHP Bellarine were successful in obtaining a community grant from the Australian Bird Environment Foundation (ABEF). The funds will go towards:

- New high-visibility vests
- Creating and printing of a new Hooded Plover Conservation Brochure: This aims to educate and increase awareness to the local Hang gliding / Paragliding community.
- Creating artwork and Printing of new signage that alerts the public of newly fledged hoodies. As they are learning to fly, the signage will indicate that Juveniles are still on the beach and require space and the importance of keeping dogs on the lead to reduce disturbance etc....



Photo: John Murray

### FOX CONTROL PROGRAM – PROGRESS!!

Over the past 6 months, we have been fortunate to have a fox control program take place on the coastal dunes at Point Lonsdale, Ocean Grove and Barwon Heads. Regional collaboration between Borough of Queenscliffe, City of Greater Geelong and Barwon Coast working with professional vermin controllers has enabled a significant reduction in the fox population. We're hopeful this will give our breeding Hoodies a higher success rate as last season saw many nests being predated on by foxes before eggs were due to hatch.



Niel Close and John De Steiger pictured. Photo: Tash Verspeek.

### BOQ and the MENS SHED HELPING OUR HOODIES

Thanks to Shane from Borough of Queenscliffe Council, for supplying Brett and I with new materials for our resident Hoodies in Point Lonsdale. Poles, ropes and timber for signs and ply for shelters were promptly provided.

Queenscliff Men's Shed came on board after a conversation Christine Rees had with a member last year. They were very obliging and happy to whip up some new shelters for us with the materials provided. It was great to meet up with them and the project was completed in record time. Thanks fellas!





## CONGRATULATIONS ANDREA DENNETT!!

If you haven't already heard, it is with great pride to announce that Andrea was nominated and awarded a very special Biodiversity Award from the City of Greater Geelong's inaugural Community Green Achiever Awards. As a founding leader of the Friends of the Hooded Plover Bellarine, Andrea has been recognised for her tireless work of conservation of the Hooded Plover. Andrea has coordinated and cared for the group's volunteers for close to 15 years!

'Her leadership has made a significant contribution to BirdLife's Beach-nesting Birds Program that aims to protect the HP' (COGG 13<sup>th</sup> August, 2021).

"Andrea's positive attitude and commitment to caring for the diverse coastal environment sets a powerful and inspirational example." Stated by Cr Mason from COGG.

Inspirational indeed! Thanks Andrea!

Here's hoping for an epic Hoodie Season. Ready, set and go!!



*Photo: City of Greater Geelong*

## FRIENDS OF THE HOODED PLOVER BREAMLEA

Julie Riley and Jennie Turner, Regional Coordinators, Friends of the Hooded Plover Breamlea

### Through a wider lens

If there's one positive thing COVID-19 has done for us, it has been to broaden our birding interest, both literally and virtually.

Our activities have included collecting statistics on the birdlife in the Breamlea Flora and Fauna Reserve for Breamlea Coastcare's 'Save Breamlea Saltmarsh' campaign, observing shorebirds such as the Double-banded Plover at the estuary (hoping to see bands) and protecting the nesting Masked Lapwings through signage and cooperation from City of Greater Geelong who held off mowing the park until hatching.

So far this season two known sets of six Black Swan cygnets hatched on the saltmarsh. Julie recently saw four close-to-fledging swans with parents on the beach side of the estuary causeway. These might well be the first cygnets we noted hatching earlier in the season.



Four tiny Lapwing fluff balls also hatched and have been running all around Cahir park within the Breamlea township, sending their parents ballistic. Julie erected an A- frame and a make-shift sign from her old whiteboard, much to the indignation of grandson, Ace. Declaring that he didn't care about the wildlife and only wanted his whiteboard back, he dragged it away. Grandma's explanation and expressed disappointment seemed to resonate and she later found that he had drawn a dog within a circle, with a cross through it. The six-year-old then asked her how to spell 'leash' and duly wrote 'dogs on leash'. He then declared that he "cared for wildlife...now". Julie's long years in the education sector have really paid off!

Sadly, one chick was recently seen in the beak of a nearby nesting male magpie, causing an affray which ended in the maggie's death. This truly demonstrates the Lapwings fierce reputation as protective parents. We can only hope the remaining female can successfully raise her chicks and that the surviving Lapwing chicks fledge.

### But what about the hoodies?

All the above birding action has not meant neglect of our beloved hoodies. However, finding them has been a little tricky. We know our Black Rock birds, BJ white and unbanded have been visiting friends at 42W, 13<sup>th</sup> Beach and making trips home to check on their territory, with some evidence that a scrape was used or attempted. However, the whereabouts of our 46W pair has us flummoxed. As they are unbanded, we're not sure if they are the ones sighted further along Breamlea Beach, or are the estuary birds or even floaters.

As the season builds up, we hope to solve a few mysteries and are at least hoping for some action at Black Rock.

### Plover Appreciation Day

Inspired by Sonia Sanchez, Jennie immersed herself in activities around Plover Appreciation Day. Keen to share the 'plover love' with our community, the Plover Olympics theme was used to create posters for display on our Coastcare double-sided A-Frame at the Breamlea General Store. Our Plover Olympic Team posters included Hooded Plover, Red-capped Plover, Masked Lapwing and, thanks to the creative example of Sonia, Double-banded Plover.



Left: Plover Olympics Team Bancoora poster  
Right: Plover Olympics display Breamlea General Store. Photos: Jennie Turner.





### Increased Emphasis on dune habitat

The Friends of the Hooded Plover Breamlea are keen to support the continued efforts of land managers, City of Greater Geelong (Coastal Reserves Team and Hooded Plover Team) and Barwon Water, along with Breamlea Coastcare, to restore and protect dune habitat. Currently a 'Beach Behaviour' Campaign is underway through CoGG and it is hoped that some signage will be in place this season.

### Interpretive Signage

Thanks to the wonderful efforts of hoodie volunteer, Margot Busch, we now have two special hoodie interpretive signs in place for the start of the season. These signs, which have been provided through grant funding to Ocean Grove Coastcare, are placed at the Breamlea General Store/Caravan Park and at the start of beach track 50W. We have already received positive feedback and our sincere thanks to Margot, CoGG and everyone involved for making this happen.



Left (wide shot) and Right (close shot): New interpretive sign at 50W track Breamlea. Photos Julie Riley

### Friends of the Hooded Plover Surf Coast Season Update

#### Bron Ives and Janice Carpenter, Volunteer and Coordinator, Friends of the Hooded Plover Surf Coast

Hot on the heels of the Tokyo Paralympics, Team Hooded Plover Surf Coast executed a Synchronised Nesting Event when 4 nests were discovered on the same day in early September. The sites were all checked out by Great Ocean Road Authority staff and signage and enclosures put up where needed. Many of the nests were at locations the birds have previously used, good sites high in the dunes behind permanent fencing and one in the Point Roadknight Conservation Area. Volunteers watched and hoped but in the blink of an eye all nests failed. We're unsure as to the reasons but it could well have been the recent wild strong winds and bad weather. PJ White, flagged on the





Mornington Peninsula in February 2020, and sighted on many occasions on the Surf Coast since then has also been busy flying in to check out the nesting birds - there's lots of flurried wings and lunges.



*PJ White, second right, with Aireys and Fairhaven nesting birds. Photo: Bron Ives.*

Partnerships amongst resident birds have also been challenged and it looks like the resident males at Moggs Creek and the Polehouse (adjacent territory) are competing for the same female. The unbanded female has been resident at Moggs for a few years but after successive nest failures it looks like she has moved east to team up with local legend, EV White. As a consolation prize a Red-necked Stint flew into Moggs and was doing its best to befriend the male hoodie at Moggs, the Stint only lasted an afternoon before moving on. Interestingly, the Stint was spotted the previous day feeding on the exposed mud flats on the Painkalac Estuary along with 27 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, a rare but welcome sighting for this area



*Moggs Creek RA White and visiting Red-necked Stint. Photo: Bron Ives.*

Also on the relationship front, BY White, one of the pair at Red Rocks, Point Addis that successfully fledged the only chick on the Surf Coast last season, has relocated to Pt Roadknight and for now appears to have teamed up with long term resident male BL Orange - prized real estate. The stretch of beach between Urquarts Bluff and the Gulch has seen

several birds over recent weeks including SZ White with WT Orange, XT white with a juvenile and of course - PJ!



*Left and Right: SH near the reef at Aireys Inlet. Photos Bron Ives.*





## A+ CARE FOR BREEDING HOODIES

Stephen Johnson, Volunteer Regional Coordinator, Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast

### COVERS FOR PLOVERS

Beaches along the Bass Coast are one of the last strongholds for Victoria's threatened Hooded Plover population.

Hoodies live and breed on our wild ocean beaches, laying their eggs on the exposed sand, just above the high-tide mark. Unfortunately, the odds are stacked against them, as overcrowded beaches and human disturbance, predation and climate change are all taking their toll on our Hoodies. And despite our many volunteers' best efforts, their rates of breeding success are alarmingly low.

Sadly, last year, the Bass Coast had its worst breeding season on record — only 5 chicks fledged successfully out of the 34 breeding pairs monitored in 2020–2021.

However, a ground-breaking study led by BirdLife Australia's Coastal Birds Program Leader, Dr Grainne Maguire, found that a simple A-frame wooden shelter can increase Hoodies' fledging rate by up to 71 per cent. Providing vital protection from predators and harsh temperatures, these shelters are a safe refuge for vulnerable Hooded Plover chicks.

In preparation for the next breeding season, which runs from August to March, volunteers from the Wonthaggi Men's Shed have built over 50 wooden shelters, which will be placed on the open sand within Hooded Plovers' breeding sites along the Bass Coast. Hopefully we'll see a successful breeding season!



Photo: Glenn Ehmke



Photo: Peter Hudson

Many thanks to the Wonthaggi Men's Shed for their support. This 'Strengthening current and future volunteer participation in Hooded Plover conservation' project is supported by the Victorian Government through the Volunteering Innovation Fund.



## Phillip Island Update

Jon Fallaw, Shani Blyth, Mitch Burrows, Helen Masters – Phillip Island Nature Parks

The first nest this season on Phillip Island was found on Woolamai beach at Magiclands on 05/09/21 (Yellow 66 and unbanded). This is the third earliest nesting recorded during the last 24 years (the earliest nest recorded for this period was just last year 31/08/20). Unfortunately, the nest failed quickly with raven tracks found close to the nest a few days later. The second nest was located just 30m from the Woolamai Surf Lifesaving Club house (JL Right White and RL Left White) and although well up on the foredune there is a lot of disturbance.



Left: Woolamai Surf Lifesaving Club nest. Right: RL Left White on 3 egg nest. Photos Jon Fallaw

On Phillip Island, staff and volunteers conduct an island wide beach bird survey four times per year. Known as the 'Hooded Plover and Gull count' the aim is to regularly monitor all birds that use the coastline. During the winter survey on 05/08/21 there were 39 Hooded Plover recorded. Over the last 21 years of monitoring the average for this time of year is 38 (lowest 28 in 2002 and highest 51 in 2011). Of interest, as predators of beach-nesting birds, was that Roz Jessop recorded 97 Little Raven on the Summerland Peninsula. There were 33 ravens in a flock at Cowrie Beach, 10 had white engraved flags and Mike Weston informed us that all had been banded within about a kilometre, between 2015 and 2019.

The Nature Parks is planning to have a six-month internal 'Nesting Shorebird Officer' position two days per week until April 2022, and an intern position to run the remote camera project. Volunteers on Phillip Island will again sign up to the Nature Parks 'Better Impact app' as well as the BirdLife 'Portal' and 'Hub'. Phillip Island Nature Parks will again coordinate compliance alongside Bass Coast Shire Council so has dropped the volunteer warden role, this is to create a safer environment for our volunteers on the beaches. This season volunteer efforts will concentrate on nest monitoring and our quarterly Hooded Plover and Gull count. For all inquiries about volunteering for 'Hooded Plover Watch' on Phillip Island please contact our Volunteers Coordinator at [volunteers@penguins.org.au](mailto:volunteers@penguins.org.au) or 0437 476 833.





*Left: Jon Fallaw, Fiona Hume, Marjolien Van Polanen Petel on Summerland Beach Photo: PINP. Right: Nature Parks Intern, Amanda DiFuccio and Mitch Burrows banding at Smiths Beach 24/02/21 Photo: Jon Fallaw.*

Despite best efforts, each year nest refuges are washed into the sea. Unfortunately, most of the materials are not readily biodegradable. This year we are making a concerted effort to minimise refuge loss through careful deployment and monitoring. All refuges will be mapped in ESRI Field Maps with a view to audit losses and identify factors such as timing, location, refuge type etc. Long term we would like to move towards more environmentally friendly and sustainable options for protecting nests through alternative materials, design or perhaps something like a QR link to an online map with marked zones. Any ideas to improve our nest refuges would be most welcome.

## SHIPWRECK COAST

### Kerry Vickers and Lynda Avery, Volunteers, Shipwreck Coast

Very little to report from the crew here at this early stage in the season. We haven't really got into our stride yet due to COVID 19, leave and other commitments.

Some Hoodies are back on territory, though not all. When last observed, those that are settling back on territory haven't yet made any nesting attempts, though this could change any day now of course. We're looking forward to the season ahead, which will hopefully prove to be a good one for the Hoodies.

There's been a change at the site where they have had the most success in this region in recent times. Last season a pair successfully fledged four young there. Birdlife Australia's Beach-nesting Birds team banded three birds at the site last season, two adults and a juvenile. Early monitoring has revealed that, while a pair is on territory, only one of them has a flag (and ring). In previous years when no birds along here were flagged, we'd never have picked up on a change like this. Hopefully they will continue to have success there, and the second flagged adult will turn up elsewhere.



Beach Daisy *Arctotheca populifolia* continues to be found on beaches along the Shipwreck Coast. Thanks to the joint efforts of the Beach-nesting Birds team, Hoodie volunteers, Friends of the Bay of Islands Coastal Park and Parks Victoria, it appears to be being kept under control so far. To my knowledge the furthest east (in this region) that it has been seen is Worm Bay, just west of Peterborough, where I found and removed two small plants last Summer; also, three other plants were found and removed from the nearby Bay of Martyrs. A large clump was sighted further west at Terry's Beach back in 2019, that was subsequently dealt with. Lynda recently put out a call to Friends of the Bay of Islands Coastal Park to keep a lookout for Beach Daisy, which resulted in the finding and removal of another plant at Flaxman Beach.

Hooded Plovers again feature in the recently published Friends of the Bay of Islands Coastal Park calendar for 2022, which is popular with locals and visitors alike. The photo showing three very young chicks foraging on a local beach last Summer serves as a reminder to all of their fragility, and the need to be mindful of their presence on the beaches.



Left: Beach Daisy at Flaxman Beach, 6/9/21. Photo: Maureen Fitzgerald. Right: YT & BV, the most successful pair along the Shipwreck Coast in 2020/21 season. YT is back on territory with a new (unbanded) partner... watch this space...Photo: Kerry Vickers