



EDITION 26 – SPRING 2021

## BEACH STONE-CURLEWS BUSY BREEDING

Amanda Freeman, Ecologist, Nature North

Beach Stone-curlews have been busy nesting here in far north Queensland! Over the course of just one week in August, members of our Threatened Coastal Birds team found five nests, all with an egg, in the Cairns area. Three of these nests were in remote spots on Yirrganydji country, on the coast adjacent to Cairns Airport and inaccessible to the public. Beach Stone-curlews are relatively undisturbed there where quad bikes and dog walkers can't go. We think that might be one of the reasons why the area is such a hotspot for the species. As many as ten Beach Stone-curlews have been recorded on this three-kilometre-long section of coast.

Another nest was located at the Airport itself, back on the pair's 'usual' spot. This pair have nested in the same location for at least the past two seasons; successfully in 2019 and unsuccessfully in 2020. Interestingly, a bird we presume is this pair's two-year old offspring is still regularly seen with its parents, including at the nest site.

The fifth nest was located right on top of dredge spoil near a major public boat ramp. Last season we had regular sightings of a well-grown juvenile Beach Stone-curlew with two adults at this location. It had been known as a regular breeding site before its use as a dredge spoil dumping ground. When alerted to this season's nest, the Port Authority agreed to leave the area alone until the chick had fledged but sadly the egg was predated before hatching.

These two nests in industrial settings demonstrate how tenacious Beach Stone-curlews can be, sticking to their regular nest sites despite disturbance. It seems that some types of disturbance, such as planes going overhead, or vehicles coming and going, can be tolerated. Beach Stone-curlews likely experience these type of 'background' disturbances very differently than direct disturbance such as being chased by a dog or displaced by a quad bike.



*"Security Gate": A Beach Stone-curlew incubates while its mate keeps guard at their nest just off the runway at Cairns Airport. Photo: BirdLife Australia Camera.*

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We've had trail cameras on three of these nests and have been monitoring them through to hatching. This should tell us more about nesting behaviour including the role, if any, of older offspring, incubation patterns and natural threats to beach nesting birds in far north Queensland. This project is funded by the Queensland Government through a Community Action Sustainability Grant.





To date we've seen one successful hatching with the young chick being moved under cover soon after. Other video footage is still being analysed but we're hopeful that more eggs have made it to hatching too.



*"Standing Guard": A Beach Stone-curlew pair and, we presume, their adult offspring, keep watch at their nest on the coast near Cairns. Their rudimentary nest with one egg is out of view behind the bird in the foreground. Photo: BirdLife Australia Camera.*

## THE TRUE COST OF RECREATIONAL DRIVING ON BEACHES – A FOSI INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

Mary Barram, Friends of Stradbroke Island Inc (FOSI)

Over the past twenty years, cruising the wilder beaches of South East Queensland in a 4WD has become a normalised recreational activity. The pleasures of getting 'away from it all' down the beach in an off-road vehicle (ORV) is widely promoted in tourism marketing and in ads for beer, 4WDs and camping equipment. For a nominal price, any licensed driver can buy a permit that allows them the unlimited right to drive on the region's iconic sand islands and beaches – the shores of Minjerribah/North Stradbroke Island, Mulgumpin/Moreton Island, Bribie Island, the Cooloolo coast and K'gari/Fraser Island. These beautiful coastal places are within a few hours' drive of the massive, growing megapolis of the Gold Coast/Brisbane/Sunshine Coast. And what initially started as a small flow of vehicles, used mainly by fishing hobbyists, has become a massive torrent of vehicles. There is no limit on the number of permits sold. Exact numbers are proving difficult to access but, for example, on Australia Day 2021, over 2,000 vehicles were counted driving on Bribie's 12 km Ocean Beach.





So routine and uncontroversial has driving on Queensland's beaches become that many people, including nature lovers who deeply care for the environment, have thought that it must be harmless – and any negative impacts, like the wheel ruts left by vehicles in the sand, are washed away with the tides.

Unfortunately, a new investigative report by the Friends of Stradbroke Island Inc (FOSI) indicates ORVs are causing major damage to the ecology of South East Queensland's beaches and dunal systems. In summary, the available scientific evidence indicates ORVs are having many negative impacts including:

- erosion and destruction of beach and dune habitats and coastal vegetation
- death and displacement of shore and migratory birds and destruction of their roosting, nesting and feeding habitat
- death of invertebrate animals, including crabs, worms, clams and molluscs that live on and within the sand of the beaches (the food sources of many coastal birds)
- destruction of sea turtle nests and eggs and disorientation of turtle hatchlings
- bushfires in adjacent vegetation
- increased litter on the beaches and dunes.



FOSI's report *The True Cost of Recreational Driving on Beaches* also examines the damaging impact of ORVs on Indigenous cultural and heritage sites, and the related disturbance, injury and death of people using beaches and degradation of beach amenity and aesthetics. In a chapter contributed by the Environmental Defenders Office, the report also summarises the thoroughly inadequate legal regulation of ORVs on beaches in Queensland and other parts of Australia (Victoria being the honourable exception) while a further chapter looks at regulation of ORVs on beaches in the USA, UK, South Africa and New Zealand.



## BRUNY ISLAND HOODED PLOVER CARE

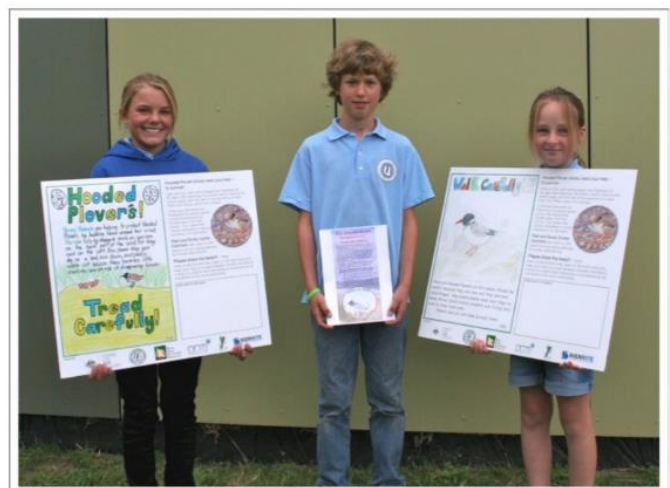
Marg Graham, Secretary, Bruny Island Environment Network Inc (BIEN Inc.)



Bruny Island, just off the SE coast of Tasmania, enjoys fabulous birdlife. Beach-nesting shorebirds delight residents and visitors alike but not all are aware how vulnerable they are. We work to increase awareness.

The Bruny Island Environment Network (BIEN) was established in January 2009. Prior to that a couple of local residents began fencing around nesting sites of Hooded plovers on popular beaches in the early 2000's. It was around this time that visitation to the island began the shift from families holidaying at their shack to larger scale, organised tours and experiences and conversion of shacks to rental holiday accommodation. In the reality of massive increase in visitation to the island. It was clear that for the small number of hoodies to survive and increase, an educative campaign combined with protection of breeding sites was urgently needed, especially in the greater Adventure Bay area.

BIEN members were also concerned for the future of species like the Swift Parrot and Forty Spotted Pardalote in the face of continued logging in native forests on the island. To highlight the value of our natural environment we decided to celebrate our fantastic birdlife with a Bruny Island Bird Festival, first held in 2010 and every 2 years since. A major element of the first festival was a project entitled 'Little Hoodies'. This was funded by a Naturally Inspired grant and focused on bringing shorebird experts to the local school to explain to the children the life cycle and the vulnerability of the nesting shore birds from human and dog disturbance. The children were bussed to the beach to observe the different behaviours of Hooded plovers and were inspired to create posters, badges and leaflets which we used as educative signage at the beach entries, in local media and on information brochures made available to shops and tourism outlets on the island. The children were also fantastic ambassadors for the hoodies by taking home the message to their families and friends and reminding beach users to 'share the beach'. This project has been repeated every four years to ensure the new cohort of children are informed and continue to be our little ambassadors. In addition at each Bird Festival since 2010, Birdlife Tasmania members have conducted popular resident and migratory shorebird information guided tours and 'dogs breakfasts' as wider community awareness events.



Bruny Island school children proudly holding signs made from their designs.





In conjunction with these events volunteers have erected signage and protective fencing at the most vulnerable sites on an annual basis. Seasons have varied in success but we have observed a steady increase in numbers and additional nesting sites being adopted. In recent years, with agreement from Parks, we have erected signage and fencing on Cloudy Bay beach in the South Bruny National Park. This is an exposed and wild beach on the southern edge of Bruny Island and is the only beach on Bruny where vehicles are permitted to drive other than to launch boats. Driving is restricted to those accessing a campground at the end of the beach. It is extremely troubling to observe the increased amount of hooning and number of vehicles driving and parking along the beach. BIEN is planning action on this over this season and intensifying the volunteer effort, signage and fencing. For the first time we are also using shelters which have been built for us by the Bruny Mens Shed. In March this year a team from Birdlife Australia and Deakin University undertook the first tagging of Hooded Plovers on Bruny as part of a Tasmania wide research project. For us this will enable an additional understanding of the territorial and pairing behaviour of the birds we think we know so well!



Part of a 'creche' of 7 chicks and two adult Hooded plovers. Adventure Bay beach 2016.