

EDITION 27 – WINTER 2022

FRIENDS OF HOODED PLOVER MORNINGTON PENINSULA: THE 2021/22 BREEDING SEASON

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

So what a difference a year makes. In many respects, the physical and social environments of the last two seasons were remarkably similar and yet after an extraordinary 21 fledglings in the previous season, that dropped to a disappointing five fledglings this season. Both years had a similar bevy of covid restrictions, including hard intra- and interstate border restrictions that slowly reduced through the season.

You may have forgotten the detail but on the 15th August 2021 Greater Melbourne entered its 6th and final lockdown that wasn't lifted until the 21st of October. An interesting stat is that at that time Melbourne had spent more time in lockdown than any other city in the world - a cumulative 263 days. Unfortunately, that meant that the Mornington Peninsula and our ocean beaches followed the same fate. So, the season began with Ranger Holly Barker's replacement, Lisa Williams, beginning her tenure on the 8th of October, with support from Rangers Jack Dewhurst, Finn Saurine and a few very local volunteers. A very tough start. Still, we managed to get most beaches monitored and management installed where necessary in those early weeks. As per the previous season, as the restrictions lifted, the



Sub-adult seen at Rye. Photo: M. Lethlean

beaches became more and more busy with locals and Melbournians venturing to the coast. We had another season of an La Nina weather pattern- a Summer that was wetter, windier and cooler than we usually experience. No prolonged periods of excessively high temperatures that slowly fry the exposed eggs of repeatedly disturbed nests. But whereas in one year we had a windfall of fledglings, this year, from 32 active breeding pairs, we recorded 92 nests, 214 eggs and 52 chicks of which 5 fledged. As a comparison we archived a fledgling rate of only 10% compared to last season's 45% and a fledglings/active site rate of 16% compared to last season's ridiculous rate of 70%.

On a sadder note, in the last few years we have seen several birds injured or killed by fishing-line entanglements. It is an on-going problem that was highlighted, late in the season, by 2 birds with horrific foot injuries that we had to catch at Flinders in just a 2-week period. The first bird, White TT, was caught by carpet net and taken to a local Veterinary Clinic, where the right foot entanglement was removed, and the injured foot treated. Only the lateral toe was viable, and the bird was released back onto its territory on the following morning. When last seen it appeared to be coping well and although it has a significant limp, is feeding and foraging with its partner, Orange UJ. The other bird, White CA, had a far more depressing outcome. This was a bird that had migrated from the Surf Coast and we had been



following carefully hoping it might find a partner. We hadn't seen it for about 6 weeks at St Andrews when it suddenly appeared on the Flinders beach. It was observed to be bunkering down, on its own and was not foraging with the other birds. When disturbed it flew rather than walked. Through a scope and with zoom cameras we found that it had lost its right foot completely and had an entanglement, including a length of seaweed, on its left leg. Steve Johnson and Meg Cullen tried on two separate occasions to capture the bird with carpet nets, but it proved impossible as the bird was reluctant to walk at all. In the end, Andrew Silcocks, from BirdLife came down and we managed to capture the bird using some mist nets. We believe a first for Hooded Plovers. The injuries were far worse that we could see from the scope. It had effectively lost both its lower feet and so very sadly was humanely euthanased by a local veterinarian.



TT Left (White) on the road to recovery. Photo: M. Lethlean

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

Frank and Sylvia van der Peet, Friends of the Hooded Plover, Otways to Apollo Bay, Victoria

It was definitely a season of highs and lows for the Hooded Plovers in the area from Sugarloaf to Skenes Creek. The Sugarloaf pair had an early disappointment when a surging high tide washed away their first nest, despite it being high on the beach in an area where they had previously successfully hatched two chicks. However, they persisted and we were delighted to see their chick take flight.

The Browns Creek pair, including the only banded bird in the area "Orange TA", lost their first nest only a day or two before the three eggs were due to hatch. This was despite the nest being carefully placed halfway up the midden, a strategy that had resulted in success the previous year. We were hoping they may have simply hidden the newly hatched chick or chicks but the presence of a fox scat in close proximity to the fragments of egg shell told a different story. Their next attempt was a nest on the beach which we half expected to find washed away each time we visited. When we couldn't find any sign of nest or chicks we feared the worst, but were delighted when Scott Hives, from



Nest at Thomases Corner. Photo: F. van der Peet



the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, told us that he had spotted the pair with a chick. This pair were excellent at getting the chick to hide whenever they saw people. It was great to see it foraging on the rock platforms with the parents and it stayed around with the parents even after it had fledged. This fledgling has been banded and we will look out for “White LA” in the future.



Release of LA Right (White). Photo: F. van der Peet

The Skenes Creek West pair took advantage of the two metre drop from their nesting area to the beach so passing people and their dogs were unaware that Hooded Plovers were nesting nearby. They hatched two eggs but one chick disappeared almost immediately leaving another very vigilant pair of birds with just one chick to teach how and when to hide. They did take the chick around to the main beach for a couple of days, but fortunately returned to their original site where there were a lot less people and dogs. It was another high five moment when this chick fledged.

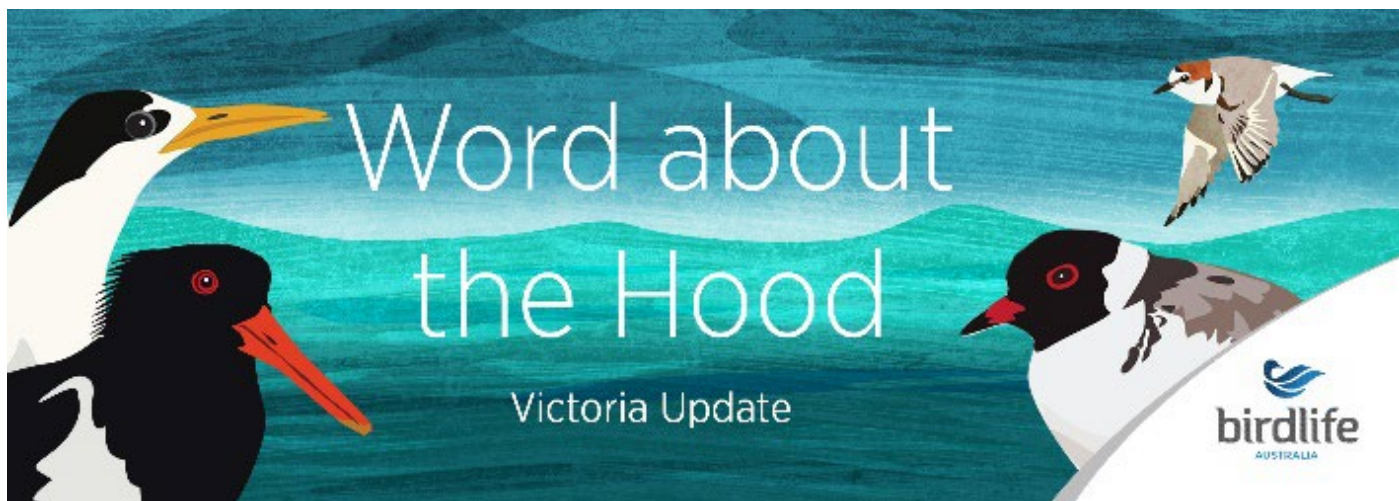
Sadly, the pair that nested in the revetment were unsuccessful despite a number of attempts. Two nests with three eggs each in the revetment itself failed, with a feral cat or fox suspected to be the cause. Another nest high on the beach within metres of the revetment also failed. Hopefully this pair might have better luck next year.

The fact that these four pairs managed to produce three fledglings between them is a testament to the determination of these little birds. We were also very grateful for the assistance with fencing, banners and site checks provided by Scott. The large banners seemed to work well although their accompanying longer steel pickets were a bit of a challenge!

FRIENDS OF THE HOODED PLOVER BREAMLEA

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

The first Julie Riley and I knew about our nomination was when we received a phone call from the curator of the National Wool Museum, Luke Keogh in August 2021. He invited us to be part of the Work of Nature: Portrait Project for the second Geelong Nature Forum. The focus of our portrait would be on our work within the Friends of the Hooded Plover Breamlea. Planning by organisers, the Geelong Field Naturalists Club, the City of Greater Geelong (CoGG) and their sponsors, had begun in 2020 but due to COVID-19 restrictions, a pared-back program of events was now scheduled at the National Wool Museum for the latter part of 2021.



Our nominator was not disclosed but we had a fair idea who'd suggested us. We were already involved in this Forum through Breamlea Coastcare, preparing our community group display for the week-long exhibition, so although we felt honoured to be put forward, we were also acutely aware that our portrait would likely sit alongside some of Geelong's environmental luminaries. As it turned out, there were 15 portraits displayed from around the region including well-known birder, John Newman and the illustrious Trevor Pescott, who for decades has educated and enlightened the Geelong community on environmental issues.

Under difficult conditions, the forum also showcased the activities of 28 environmental volunteer groups, including Ocean Grove Coastcare and the Friends of the Hooded Plover Bellarine, along with multimedia and land manager displays. Some outdoor activities went ahead but with reduced participant numbers. In total, approximately 1,000 people viewed the exhibition.

We were delighted with the outcome and very pleased to be able to take this opportunity to raise the profile of the Hooded Plover. However, we were conscious that we could not have continued this long hoodie journey if it wasn't for our involvement in and support of Birdlife Australia's Beach-nesting Birds Project and the work of CoGG's dedicated environment team.



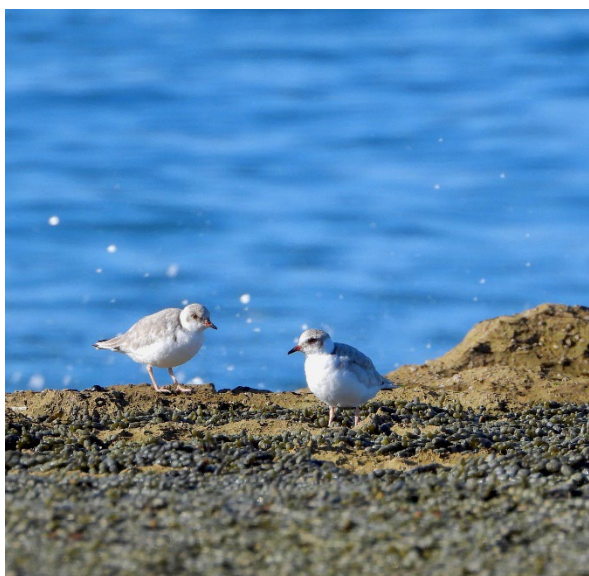
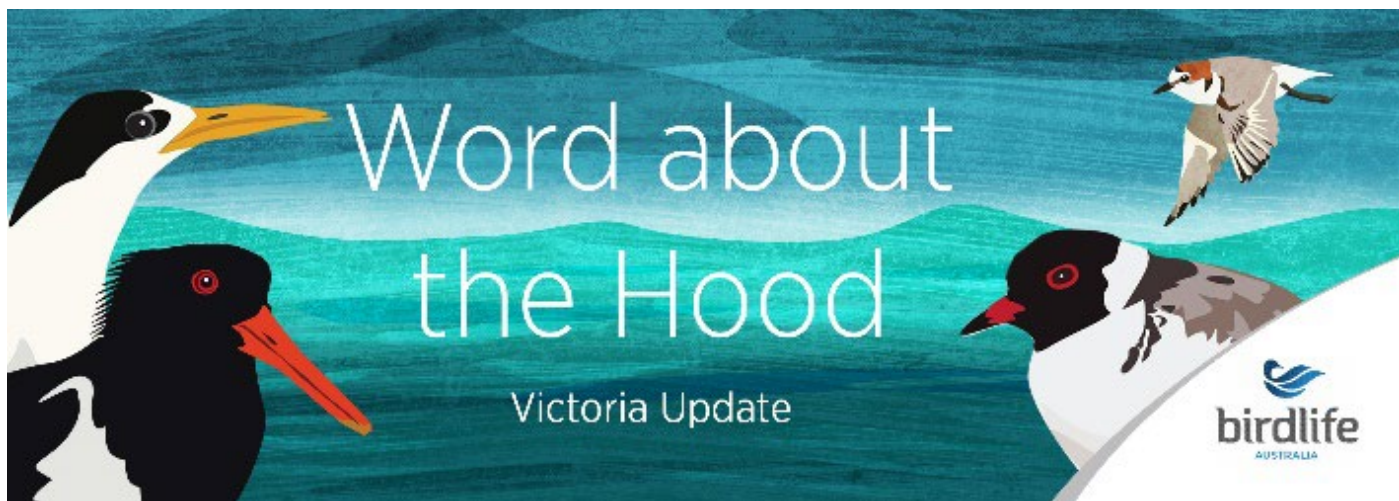
Jennie Turner and Julie Riley, Work of Nature Portrait. Photo: N. Marie.

[Friends of the Hooded Plover, Surf Coast season update](#)

[Bron Ives, Friends of the Hooded Plover, Surf Coast, Victoria](#)

The increase from one fledgling last season to three this season lifted everyone's wings. The day after Christmas the first chick hatched high in the dunes near 12th Avenue, Pt Roadknight. Volunteers watched over the family and summer crowds enjoyed the beach until everyone was interrupted by the wild storms and flash flooding that smashed the beaches. The hoodie family vanished and nerves became a little frayed given the same pair lost their chick at Day 26 last year.

Thankfully, the family emerged intact the next morning, the chick fledged that afternoon and that night Ash Barty won the 2022 Australian Open women's singles. Flagged LB (Little Barty), the juvenile has since been sighted in the company of local hoodies at the Ocean Grove Spit and Blue Rocks, Barwon Heads.



Red Rocks fledglings. Photo: B. Ives

Along with the increasingly aware locals and visitors - staff from GORCPA, DELWP, Anglesea Police and the Surf Coast Shire all helped local volunteers keep the hoodies safe – it was a fantastic community effort. And keep an eye out for the family when they feature in a segment on 'The Pet Rescuers' on Channel 9 later this year.

Within a few days of the 12th Ave fledging, two chicks hatched at Red Rocks, Pt Addis and volunteers hit the beach again. In a first for this site, Parks Victoria installed temporary dog exclusion zones and along with the bird boards, dog walkers had lots of warning. This made the lives of the hoodie family, walkers and the volunteers a bit easier. Parks Vic staff frequently patrolled the beach and on one visit had the unenviable task of relocating a headless wallaby that was providing dinner for a fox and its kits. By the tail end of five weeks the two chicks were proving to be reluctant flyers, however they eventually fledged in early March and were seen visiting Pt Roadknight with their parents in early May.

We have eight (and a half) breeding pairs on the Surf Coast and together they had about 20 nests with eggs this season. The 'half a breeding pair' comprises a single resident male who we suspect teamed up with the female from an adjacent pair. When severe winds destroyed their nest, the female returned to her long-term partner at Moggs Creek.

The upsurge in broad community awareness about the hoodies was noticeably more upbeat this season. While much of this can be credited to the hard work of volunteers and land managers, recent large-scale public artworks helped take community support to new highs.

Geoffrey Carran's stunning mural on the Aireys Inlet Community Hall sits prominently at the town's entry on the Great Ocean Road - the work was conceived by the artist and commissioned by the Hall Committee - no prompting from us volunteers was needed! Also, the large-scale installation of a hooded plover with glass eggs by Simon Normand stood proudly on the estuary during the 2022 Lorne Sculpture Biennale. Both artworks champion a



Geoffrey Carran's mural, Aireys Inlet. Photo: B. Ives



local story of hooded plovers and the efforts of Birdlife Australia, the community and many others to prevent their extinction.

And we now have 3 extra hoodie heartbeats from the Surf Coast to help conservation efforts along.

BASS COAST MAINLAND (SAN REMO TO INVERLOCH) – A SEASON OF CHANGE

Stephen Johnson, Friends of the Hooded Plover, Bass Coast, Victoria

Reflecting on the 2021/22 BNB season, several significant changes occurred within our region hopefully for the better, some however may signal the start of an alarming trend where human beach pressure and fox predation equates to zero breeding success on some of our busiest sites. At the top of the list our Hoodie fledge numbers (11) bounced back closer to our yearly average from a disappointing 5 during 2020/21 (our lowest ever recording).

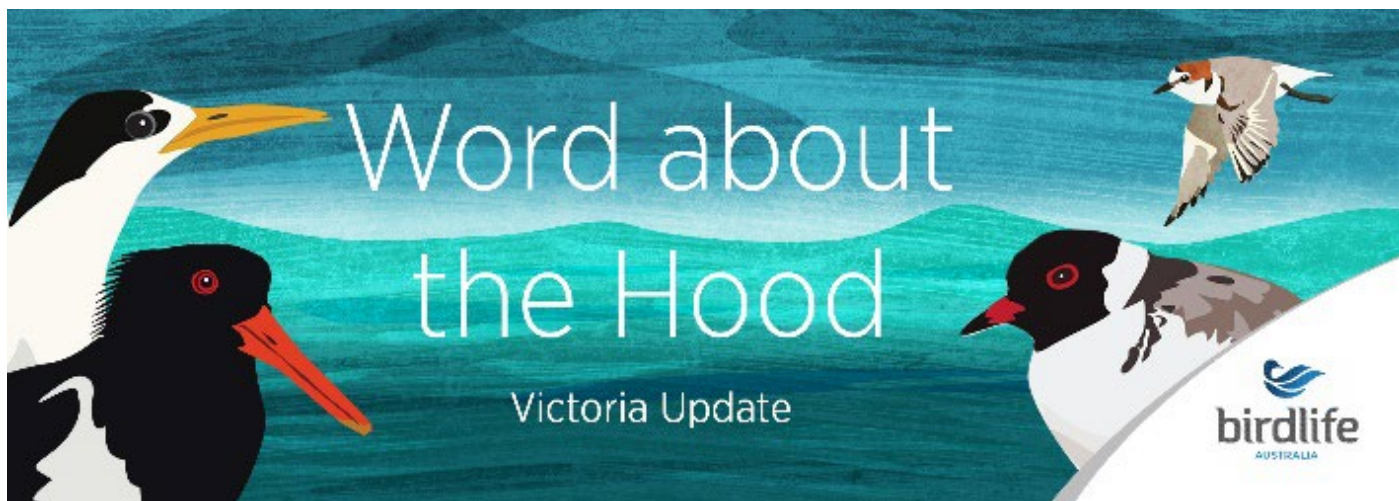
During 2021, the Victorian Government through its agents DELWP and Parks Victoria introduced and launched a new Coastal Park titled Yallock-Bulluk Marine & Coastal Park, stretching from San Remo to Inverloch. It disbanded a few Coastal Reserves and shifted some boundary responsibilities previously held by Bass Coast Shire replacing them with the one title and retaining Parks Vic as the main Coastal Managers for our region. A key feature of the new park was the promotion of a new Coastal trail between the townships of San Remo and Inverloch with beach access and beach walking along several sections. The launch received a massive take up by the public particularly after closures of Covid-19 lock down. The added pressure on our beaches is yet to be matched with staff and resource upgrading and is an ongoing concern for the Hooded Plover on the Bass Coast. Losing some Shire managed beaches after seasons of partnership building was disappointing also. Will the added pressure on our nesting pairs be too much without a counter punch by our attempts to help them? Time will tell I suspect.

A trial with Poly Flicker-stakes for nest protection along our mostly sandy coastline recommended a shift away from plastic star pickets. A stronger and more flexible stake likely to have a longer lifespan of service and delivering better value for money is driving the shift in our nest protection regimes.

The everchanging sands of Anderson Inlet particularly just inside its mouth on the Point Norman side impacted on Hooded Plover breeding at the Abbott St beach site. What was once an open flat sand plateau favoured by the birds over recent seasons has become a vast area of mini dunes with increasing vegetation including pest Marram grass and Sea Spurge. Subsequently the resident breeders moved out and we



Poly Flicker-stakes ocean side of enclosure, timber stakes on the dry dune. Photo: S. Johnson



had no hoodie nests at all this season. Will it take another major change in beach geography to bring them back?

Of the 7 breeding pairs of Hooded Plover on the East end of our coastline, none were able to produce a single fledgling despite laying 46 eggs. These are some of our most heavily visited sites within the Inverloch, Bunurong Coast and Cape Paterson areas. We are hoping to turn this trend by a more concentrated effort on foxes in coming seasons.

A call for change! For the first time since the Bass Coast Shire Council introduced their controversial dog walking controls on beaches back in 2017/18, our Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast and Birdlife Australia made two separate submissions to Council during their ten-year review of Local Laws. The FOHP Group requested a 100-metre exclusion zone of dogs and inflight drones around the Ayr Creek Lagoon edge applying all year round. Off leash dogs chasing breeding birds and gulls within the fence protected area of the lagoon edge was the driver behind this submission. Dr Kasun Ekanayake from Bird Life Australia also submitted a request for a 50m dog free zone around any fenced and sign posted beach nesting bird nests. Both submissions are in response to increased human pressure on nesting birds and are currently under review. We await a favourable outcome with hope.



Pied Oystercatcher adult with chicks. Photo: P. Hudson

To finish off on a positive note it was wonderful to see our single pair of resident Pied Oystercatchers successfully fledge two young, from an Islet nest within the Inverloch lagoon after their first beach nest was fox predated. They were flagged under VWSG Permit as BlueT1 and T2. While our small flock of 8-10 Red-capped Plover managed 4 fledglings over an interrupted season at the lagoon site. These were two of a small number of highlights in our season. Many thanks to our small, dedicated flock of volunteers who again put in many hours and kilometres in monitoring our amazing beach-nesting birds.

PHILLIP ISLAND UPDATE

Jon Fallaw, Shani Blyth, Mitch Burrows, Vivien Zajicek, Tom Nixon, Helen Masters – Phillip Island Nature Parks

The 2021/2022 Hooded Plover breeding season was above average and marks the 30th season of monitoring on Phillip Island (Millow). Nineteen pairs of hoodies bred, with nests laid from 05/09/2021 to 24/02/2022, the last chick fledged 11/04/22. There were 29 nests, 70 eggs and 25 chicks, of which 14 chicks survived to fledge from 12 nests. For the period 1992 to 2022 this is the second best fledge total (highest 17 fledged 2015/2016) and the third highest fledged per pair 0.74 total (0.94 in 2015/16 and 0.75 in 2014/15). This season, the egg to chick survivorship was 36% and pleasingly the chick to fledgling survivorship was 56%. Many thanks to the volunteers who re-emerged after the Covid lockdowns.



Volunteer activity was understandably down with a total of 173 volunteer hours. The nest guardian role and other public interactions were discontinued to comply with Covid restrictions so only activities such as nest monitoring, portal entries and participating in the 'Hooded Plover and Gull Count' were available. Their expert monitoring was key to the very high chick survival.

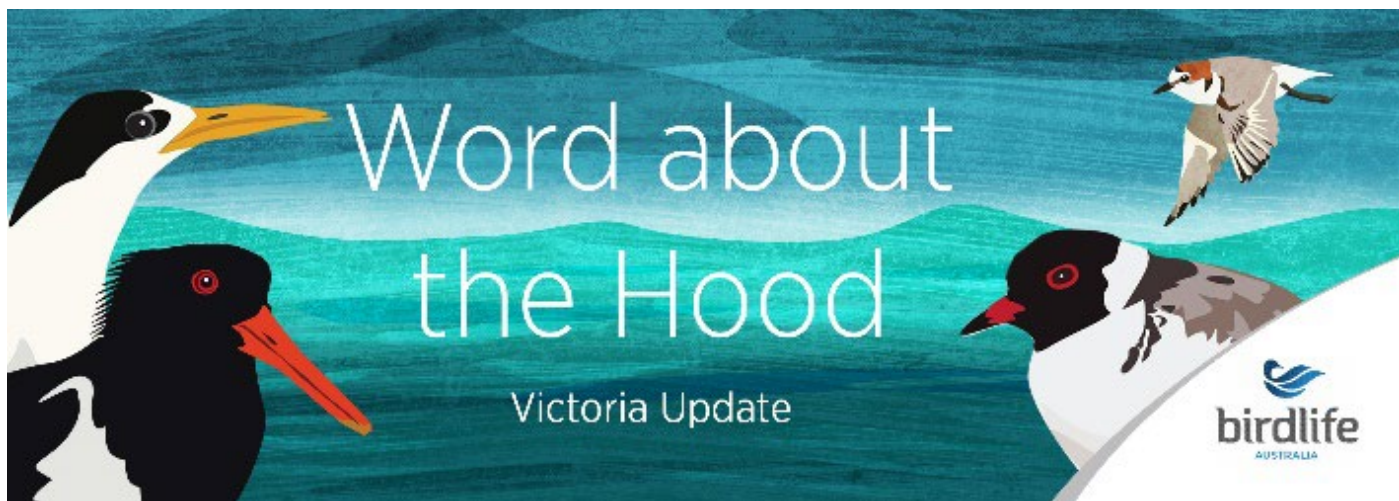
Peter Dann (Research Director) is retiring after a lifetime committed to wildlife conservation. Peter commenced work at the Penguin Reserve Committee of Management in 1980 and along with his many other pursuits has been fundamental in the positive turn of fortunes for hoodies and other beach-nesting birds on Phillip Island ref: Baird, B., & Dann, P., 2003, 'The breeding biology of Hooded Plovers, *Thinornis rubricollis*, on Phillip Island, Victoria', Emu, 103, pp. 323-328. Peters' leadership led to the island declared fox free in 2017, and the control of feral and domestic cats and uniform dog regulations on island beaches amongst other things. Peter has always been a great mentor, collaborator and enormously generous with his time and support for volunteers. The hoodie (and penguin) breeding results speak for themselves, we wish him well in his retirement but know his contribution is far from over.



Roz Jessop, Mitch Burrows and Alan Cheung releasing the three chicks at Smiths Beach 2/02/2022. Photo: J. Fallaw

Shani Blyth has left the Nature Parks and taken her considerable beach-nesting bird experience to the role of Natural Resource Management Coordinator with the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation. She will be working over a much wider area than Phillip Island, we thank her for her work and look forward to future hoodie collaborations. From February Vivien Zajicek jumped in at the deep end and took over the Shorebird officer role and did a great job to bring home a wonderful season.

Camera Trap study: The camera trapping study that commenced in the 2020-21 continued this season with four cameras deployed by Phillip Island Nature Parks intern, Alan Cheung. The project allows for five cameras per season, the aim of the study is to better determine nest fate, as many nests fail with no known cause.



Banding: Twelve of the 14 fledged chicks were banded. We finished the Yellow 00 to 99 so have moved on to a numeric/alpha system.

Date	Band	Beach	Age	Flag
18/01/2022	05268685	Anchorage Rd	chick	93 Left (Yellow)
2/02/2022	05268686	Smiths Beach	chick	95 Left (Yellow)
2/02/2022	05268687	Smiths Beach	chick	96 Left (Yellow)
2/02/2022	05268688	Smiths Beach	chick	97 Left (Yellow)
2/02/2022	05268689	Ventnor – Devon Ave	chick	98 Left (Yellow)
2/02/2022	05268690	Ventnor – Devon Ave	chick	99 Left (Yellow)
2/02/2022	05268691	Ventnor – Devon Ave	chick	1A Left (Yellow)
4/03/2022	05268692	Kitty Miller Bay	chick	1B Left (Yellow)
24/03/2022	05268693	Colonnades	chick	2A Left (Yellow)
24/03/2022	05268694	Farm Beach	chick	3A Left (Yellow)
24/03/2022	05268695	Farm Beach	chick	4A Left (Yellow)
24/03/2022	05268696	Farm Beach	chick	5A Left (Yellow)



Chris Hutcheon planting saltbush at Forrest Caves 2/09/2021. Photo: J. Fallaw

Slow development of Woolshed Bight chick: An interesting nest at Woolshed Bight was from the pair 33 Left (Yellow), which had recently returned from the Mornington Peninsula, and its unbanded partner. The 3-egg nest hatched 21/02/22, then at fourteen day the chicks were found over a kilometre south on Farm Beach. A photo showed that one of the chicks was noticeably smaller. When the chicks were banded at day 31 (24/03/22) the smaller chick 4A Left (Yellow) was significantly smaller than its siblings. A3 and A5 fledged at ~day 39 however A4 was not sighted for a period, and was assumed to have not survived, but was sighted again – having successfully fledged between 39 and 49 days old much to everyone’s relief.

Planting for chick shelter: Along with weed removal one of the projects during Covid lockdown was to plant Coast Saltbush *Atriplex cinerea* at a few hoodie breeding beaches along Surf Beach and Forrest Caves. The saltbush will compliment chick shelters and strategic planting will hopefully provide natural chick cover for the long term.



SHIPWRECK COAST UPDATE JUNE 2022

Kerry Vickers, Friends of the Hooded Plover, Shipwreck Coast, Victoria

Last season was a time of mixed success for the Hooded Plovers that call the stretch of coast from Princetown to Mepunga home, with accompanying highs and lows for those of us who monitor them. It's a spectacular coastline with a fairly low density of breeding pairs, characterized by a mixture of popular beaches, remote sites and long stretches of high, steep cliffs.

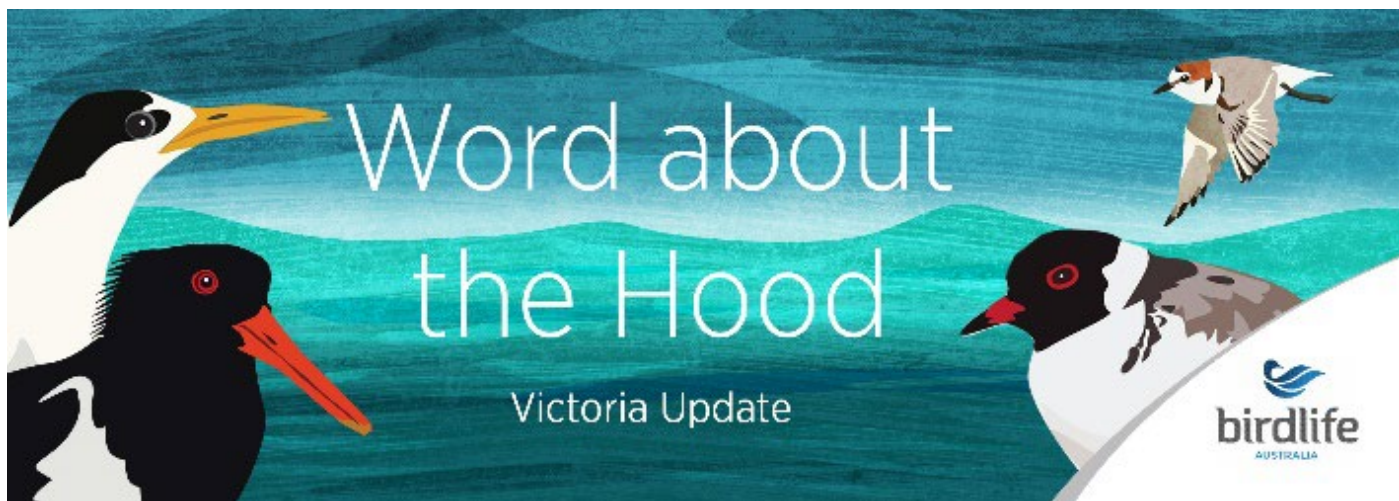
Shipwreck Coast Team: Renee Mead, Birdlife Australia, Beach-nesting Birds Coordinator and the two local volunteers, Lynda Avery (Key Contact) and Kerry Vickers caught up early in the season and decided to focus efforts on the main (more accessible) sites, with other sites to be visited opportunistically. Most of the main sites are on popular beaches and are subject to heavy foot traffic. Strategies to raise awareness among beach goers were discussed and implemented through the season. Amelia Handscombe, Ranger, Parks Victoria, who continues to make a significant contribution to the monitoring and site management is also a highly valued member of the team.



*Fledglings at the Bay of Martyrs 11-Mar-2022.
Photo: K. Vickers*

Season Summary: A total of 10 nesting attempts were observed at 5 of the monitored sites. Chicks hatched at 4 of these sites and 3 resident pairs (at Sherbrook Beach, Crofts Bay West and Bay of Martyrs) succeeded in raising 1 or more fledglings. 8 chicks hatched from a total number of 26 eggs, 5 of which are known to have fledged. So, looking at it purely mathematically the management efforts of the team appear to have improved the chances of chicks hatching and fledging. 1 fledgling per 10 eggs seems to be the accepted figure for unmanaged sites, while the fledgling rate was just shy of 1/5 at the Shipwreck Coast during the latest season.

New Sites: It was encouraging to see pairs establish territories at two new locations. One pair nested at Massacre Bay for the first time in living memory, where they gave it a good shot, wrangling eggs through high tides and protecting them from predators till only a matter of days before they were due to hatch the nest failed. Another pair successfully hatched 5 eggs from 2 known attempts at Sherbrook River Estuary and produced 2 healthy fledglings. It's a site that pairs have tried and failed at on odd occasions in the past. While it looks ideal Hoodie habitat, the sheer number of visitors over Summer adds to the degree of difficulty there. The current pair cannily moved their chicks quite a distance upstream and made use of both sides of the river. Monitoring, signage and temporary fencing certainly also contributed to their success as both nests were located in areas of heavy foot traffic.



Raising Awareness among Beach Users: Various strategies were employed during the season including informal discussions with beach goers whilst monitoring; a series of advertised guided beach walks during the peak holiday period in January run by Renee; targeted visits by Parks Victoria staff to active sites during peak periods and the production and distribution (electronic and print) of a local newsletter. Five issues of *Peterborough Bird News* have been published to date. It is targeted at a general audience including both residents and visitors, and its overall aim is to raise awareness and interest in the local birdlife, in particular Hooded Plovers and Latham's Snipe.

<https://sites.google.com/view/peterboroughbirdnews/home>

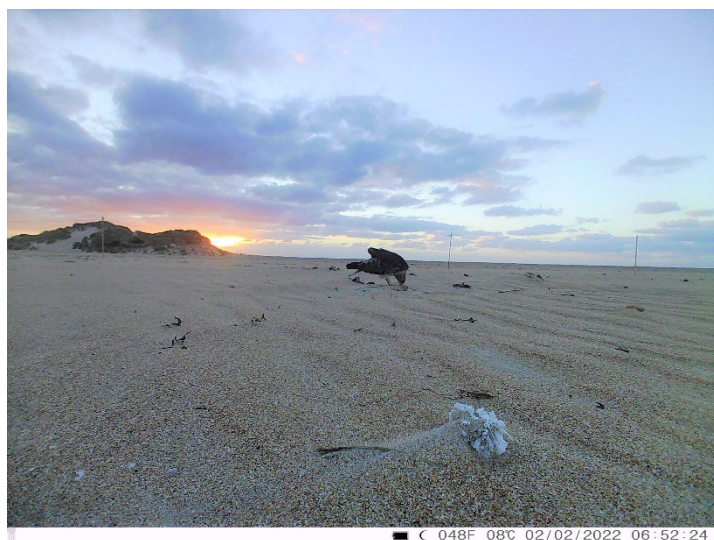


Peterborough Bird News commenced... One of several strategies implemented to raise awareness among visitors and locals. Photo: K. Vickers

FAR WEST VICTORIAN UPDATE

Dan Lees, Coastal Birds Project Officer, Birdlife Australia

The stretch of coast from Warrnambool to Yambuk holds the densest population of Hooded Plovers in the country. Although I've no scientific evidence for this I believe the coasts close location to the Bonney Upwelling along with the basalt off- and onshore reefs provide not only nesting habitat for hoodies but, under the water's surface serve as attachment points for kelp, that then washes up on shore providing ample food for invertebrates and thus hoodies.



Swamp Harrier predates the Rutledge Cutting hoodie nest.

With ongoing erosion leaving little available nesting habitat, and a combination of tidal inundation and predation causing a lack of nesting success until after Christmas, the 2021/22 season was off to a rocky start. With these failures in mind and thanks to some funding from a DELWP Community Volunteer Action Grant, myself and Joan/John Young were able to deploy four remote sensor cameras in the region (Narrawong estuary, Night Soil Depot, Rusty Rocks west and Rutledge Cutting mouth). Both the Night Soil Depot and Rusty Rocks west nests hatched, while the Narrawong estuary nest was infertile/unviable and Rutledge Cutting mouth was predated by a Swamp Harrier.

Fortunately, a pulse of laying in December along with seemingly milder swell/tides meant chicks did start to emerge in January. Once chicks were out on the ground



a phenomenal effort from the FoHP Far West volunteers meant banners and chick signage were quickly deployed along with adjustments to the fenced areas to better protect broods in their preferred foraging locations.

Over the ensuing months, 10 of 29 confirmed chicks managed to fledge (34%), bolstered by a suspected 3+ from remote sites that did not meet the minimum required number of visits across the season. This equated to a fledgling per pair ratio of 0.32; below the benchmark of 0.4-0.5 but still an outcome the FoHP Far West vols should be proud of, especially in light of the discontinuation of the Belfast Coastal Reserve rangers and reduced land manager support.



One of the three juveniles from the Abalone Farm's eastern beach. Photo: D. Lees

One final disappointing note I thought worth mentioning, if only so others reading this will be vigilant for the similar instances, is when Joan and I witnessed a group of school kids from a local high school (and being led by a teacher) completely destroy a fenced area and starting to destroying another before the teacher finally intervened (only after Joan spoke to the teacher after the first instance). Joan and I documented the evidence on our phones' and after liaising with Grainne and Meg I immediately took the evidence to the school in question and requested a meeting with the principal. The principal was apologetic and immediately himself went to see the students who were on camp at a local camping ground. He then contacted me to assure me that those responsible were identified and would be disciplined. Fortunately, the chicks whom the fenced area was protecting were almost fledged and quite independent so with the help of their parents managed to avoid harm.

HOODIE HIGHS AND LOWS OF SOUTH GIPPSLAND: 2021-2022 SEASON SUMMARY

Jonathon Stevenson, Friends of the Hooded Plover, South Gippsland, Victoria

The South Gippsland Beach-nesting Bird region is big; from Ninety Mile Beach in the east to Point Smythe at Andersons Inlet in the west. There is a lot of Hoodie habitat in that area, much of it difficult to access and monitor. But there are a good number of accessible territories and these were the focus of Hoodie monitoring for volunteers.

Once again, the season was a mixed bag of surprising successes and all too familiar failures. Volunteers and land managers managed to keep track of 11 or 12 pairs, two at



First season volunteer Dale, unravelling the Hoodie confusion of Pt Smythe. Photo: P. Hastings @giantpaul



the Prom, three at Sandy Point, three at Waratah Bay and three or four at Point Smythe. The BNB Team will report separately on the Nooramunga Islands.

The season started well with the Norman Bay pair at the Prom laying an early nest. Fencing and signage erected by Parks Victoria no doubt helped the nest survive and hopes were high for a repeat of the last seasons success. Three chicks hatched in late November. Sadly, they had all disappeared by early December and the pair weren't observed to try again.

At Squeaky Beach a pair were about but no breeding attempts were detected. They had a favourite patch of beach and even made a strong scrape in November, but that was all. Possibly the ever present passing of beach goers at this popular site was a constant disturbance preventing breeding. Without a fenced area for protection, wherever they may have tried was soon trodden over by visitors enjoying the magic of the Prom.

Over at Sandy Point the Hoodies did try really hard. From the three pairs being monitored, seven nests were observed with a total of 18 eggs laid. But none hatched. Despite the presence of native and introduced predators, it's likely the wind was the problem for these birds. The sand spit was blown by frequent strong winds that constantly re-sculptured the sand and likely buried or eroded away nests.

Around the bay at Waratah Bay, it was quiet. Between the two long term pairs, only one three egg nest was laid, but failed. The exception was a brand new unbanded pair that arrived late but started breeding straight away at Cooks Creek. Despite nesting three times, laying nine eggs and with fences erected by volunteers to protect them from passing people, they lost all their eggs. Fences don't stop foxes or storm waves. Here's hoping they return next season and try again.



*Exhausted parent and chicks, Point Smythe, March 2022.
Photo: P. Hastings @giantpaul*

And now for the success story! Over at Point Smythe, at the entrance to Andersons Inlet, we had three, maybe four pairs, it is so confusing there, making it the perfect place for new volunteers Paul and Dale to unravel the secret lives of Hoodies. Or go mad, one or the other. But most importantly, two pairs successfully hatched and raised a total of three fledglings. Point Smythe is popular with Hoodies with 12 flagged birds (White CH, White PS, Orange YJ, White EA, Orange YV, Yellow 10, Orange VT, White DJ, White TM, Orange UH, Yellow 55 & Or flag/metal) being observed there over the season plus unbanded birds.

Thanks to Hoodie volunteers Diana, Christy, Karin, Gerry, Valerie and Steve J and to Ranger Cassie for a great monitoring effort this season. Even when not many fledge, the monitoring data provides valuable information for the ongoing management of this wonderful beach bird.



TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF THE MARLO HOODIES

Len Axen, Friends of the Hooded Plover, East Gippsland, Victoria

Attendance at the 2022 BNB conference on the Yorke Peninsula again highlighted the range of human impacts and measures taken to protect Hooded Plovers, however on the high energy ocean beaches of East Gippsland it is a range of natural processes and their impact that present some special challenges that we have come to understand and appreciate. In Far East Gippsland the impact of the 2019 bushfires is still being felt. No public access because infrastructure damage to roads and bridges around the Point Hicks/Thurra and Mueller River areas still exist with tenders yet to be finalised for reconstruction works. Closer to home some roads/tracks were closed at short notice confining our surveys to the coastline between the Snowy River entrance and Cape Conran.



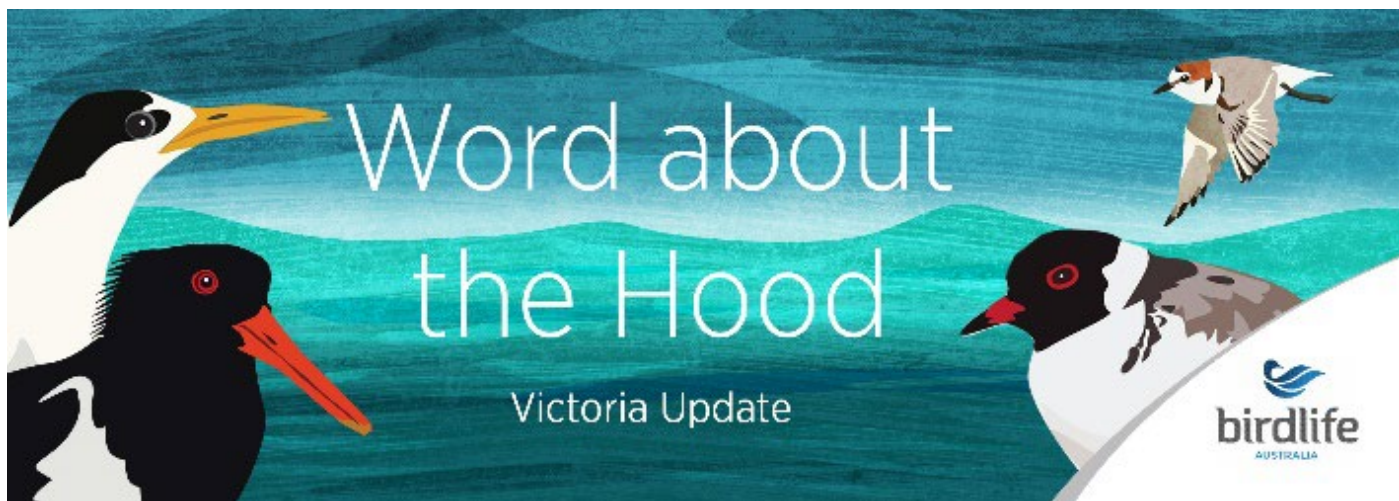
Debris washed up by the floods. Photo: J. Axen

However, by late December it was noticeable that several pairs of HPs had located well away from beach access points with three of the four flagged birds (AC, DP and CK) remaining “site loyal” from Feb 2021. Several nests were located containing 3, 2 or 1 eggs and our Conran Creek pair (CK with its NSW’s partner W0) has already produced 3 “runners” by December 31.



Pair roosting among the debris. Photo: J. Axen

“How the tide can turn?” Literally speaking. 5 minor flood warnings, 2 moderate warnings, and a major flood warning subsequently changed everything. Initially the minor floods deposited fire affected silt on the beaches at the mouth of the Snowy River. When baked hard and dry suitable HP habitat was lost particularly along the sheltered estuary shorelines. Moderate and major floods caused widespread damage as debris covered much of the ocean beaches destroying existing nests, while high water levels flooded any exposed sand flats and bars inside the entrance. Beach profiles changed overnight. Constant gale force winds created wide flat open ocean beaches (up to 80m in width) with abrupt sand cliffs at the base of the primary dunes. The surf beach on the western side of the entrance became no more than a narrow strip of sand devoid of any cover and worst of all the Snowy River entrance had moved some 400-500m towards the east and removed more of the Hoodies preferred habitat.



But some HPs were “rediscovered” during February and 2 late nesting attempts around Point Ricardo did develop but without success. Likely suspects included the dead fox found near one of the old Southern Ark bait stations and a variety of predator tracks that “criss-crossed” the piles of debris nearby. It was only when Jacquie located our Conran Creek HPs and their 3 young had survived and were independently feeding and “wing stretching” (03/03) that we knew all had not been completely lost this year.

By the time we arrived back home from the conference a new issue was emerging. Algal blooms in the Gippsland Lakes had spread along the ocean beaches to Marlo and beyond. While publicity and media releases to the general public occurred the potential impact to our beach-nesting birds is unknown and may require a detailed study as the blooms are becoming a regular occurrence in this part of Victoria. Will this be another “trial and tribulation” for the HPs to face?

MALLACOOTA AND THE BETKA BEACH HERO PAIR

Leonie Daws, Friends of the Hooded Plover, East Gippsland, Victoria

Conditions along the Mallacoota and Croajingolong coastline in the 2021-2022 season have been similar to those around Marlo, as described by Len Axen. Repeated floods resulted in some sections of beach being unsuitable for nesting while affording increased protection by isolating other sections from potential human disturbance.

The Betka Car Park pair, CE and LK, tried a couple of unsuccessful nesting attempts early in the season but appeared to relocate when their preferred area was inundated. There were also early reports of nesting on the main beach at Mallacoota and at Seal Creek. We have no record of any of these attempts being successful.



*The Betka Beach trio 11 days after hatching.
Photo: L. Daws*

Our hero Betka Beach pair, on the other hand, started early with one chick fledged in the first week of November. They then succeeded in raising a second clutch of three chicks, all three fledging successfully in late February. Their success was aided by the cool summer, and the nesting site being protected from excessive disturbance by the Betka River which flowed strongly out to sea for much of the season.



*Betka Beach Trio all grown up at 5 weeks old.
Photo: L. Daws*

Since the end of the nesting season, small flocks of up to seven Hoodies have been sighted at Betka and Quarry Beaches which is encouraging for the ongoing success of the Hoodies in this area.

My thanks to all the team who stepped in willingly and unasked, maintaining regular monitoring while I was out of action.