



EDITION 27 – WINTER 2022

SOUTH COAST FLEURIEU PENINSULA REPORT

David and Sue Thorn, Friends of the Hooded Plover, Fleurieu Peninsula South

With Covid to the fore, we wondered what problems we would encounter when communicating with the public at the beach. At our first fencing session we informed dog walkers about the hoodies nesting and asked could they please leash their dog and got the retort, “I have come here to relax, don’t tell me what to do”. We did some lateral thinking and decided on the strategy of using large handwritten signs on corflute, these were put at each end of the fenced area as close to the water as we dared. These told beach walkers what was going on and what we would like them to do for the hoodies and especially why this was necessary for the survival of these threatened birds. People were curious about these signs being handwritten and, in the area, where they walked, and as we observed from afar, we found most people complied, and feedback was positive.

As incubation and chick growth progressed, we changed the message several times keeping it relevant to the stage of growth. High tides and swells kept volunteers busy moving these signs up the beach to avoid losses, and as the writing faded, they needed to be rewritten to keep them bright. The signs did the “talking” when we were not on site. The BirdLife and council dog bylaw signs were used, and placed higher up the beach, we found walkers reading these signs as well, after taking in the information on the handwritten signs.

Once the chicks had hatched, we put up winged fencing at either side of the initial nest fence, wings were up to 180 metres apart, leaving the initial nest fence in situ as a refuge. The wings went down the beach, and the handwritten signs placed at their seaward ends. We then placed four or five birdlife signs along the beach facing the sea to create a corridor between the ends of the winged fences. We found this area became a safe haven, as the hoodies seemed to feel more secure, and they stayed between the wings up to three weeks from fledging.



Handwritten sign moved up the beach for expected high tide, Victor Central Site. Photo: D. Thorn



*PX with his 3 fledglings at Victor Central Site.
Photo: R. Edwards*

In the last two weeks of chick growth the family would venture outside the winged fences at night, and they were often seen, on our early morning visits, coming back into the wing fenced area after their nightly foraging ventures. Hoodie tracks also backed this up. The family always stayed in the secure area during the day, as the beach users came to the beach for the day.

The South Coast Fleurieu produced 16 fledglings, 9 on the urban sites, and 7 on our remote beaches. We had a set of three chicks fledging at Victor Central from parents PX and partner, and another set of three chicks fledging at Tunkalilla beach from ME and partner, Yilki's pair RR and KV manage three chicks fledging from two nests.

At Middleton West site, the beach has had a sand cliff, about one metre in height, running along it's length, but we

found the resident pair SA and partner again putting their scrapes and then eggs on top of this cliff, and the parents having to "fly into" the nest, the chicks hatched and "fell" onto the beach, and the parents took them west to an estuary, which we fenced and signed.

ADELAIDE METRO AREA – 2021-2022 SEASON

Ligita Bligzna and John Cobb, Volunteer Coordinators, Friends of the Hooded Plover, Fleurieu Peninsula Myponga – Lands' End

We had a very disappointing season with the Seacliff pair producing 3 clutches, 9 eggs, 6 chicks, 0 fledglings; West Beach 3 clutches, 7 eggs, 0 chicks; and Henley 1 clutch, 3 eggs, and 0 chicks. Breeding ended in September at Henley, October at West Beach and January at Seacliff, with the loss of "XS", our star female performer over the last five seasons having successfully raised six fledglings. Our losses can be attributed to unleashed dogs on at least two occasions, but evidence of predation by foxes is very strong at two of our sites. Thankfully good results elsewhere along the Fleurieu Peninsula help to compensate, but nevertheless, it has not been easy for volunteers who have invested a great deal of effort during the season.



Volunteers Mary-Ann and Susanne with a City of Charles Sturt banner – West Lakes shore. Photo: K. Bartley

Volunteers participated in a workshop at West Beach in December, a "Dog Day" and a "Hoodie Walk & Talk" as part of a Sea to Source event and the Brighton Primary School visited the Seacliff site as a follow-up to a project they undertook the previous season. There have been several media interviews and regular Facebook posts by local councils, in particular following the loss of "XS". Following a similar by-law in the City of Holdfast Bay, the City of Charles Sturt introduced a new by-law during the year which requires dogs to be leashed within 100m of a Hooded



Plover or Red-capped Plover breeding site. Both councils are improving compliance monitoring and enforcement as well as liaison with regard to training and breeding activity. Sand-pumping and “mining” has presented problems at two sites and we are hopeful that permanent fencing at West Beach and improved collaboration at Seacliff will prevent future potential conflicts during the breeding season. Within the City of Marion, our former breeding site at Field River, Hallett Cove, has added protection as a result of a new pedestrian walkway off the beach which will significantly reduce the amount of foot traffic (two and four legged) along the narrow beach.

Speculating about next season, it looks like our Henley pair have relocated further south, the West Beach pair are over-wintering on-site and either a new pair and/or the former unbanded partner of “XS” are being observed at Marino Rocks and will, hopefully, breed next season. The significant problem of fox predation will hopefully be ameliorated by a series of strategies including use of “Foxwatch” technology and the possibility of using a trained “sniffer dog” to locate dens in order for them to be fumigated.



Seacliff nest and sand pumping. Photo: J. Cobb

In common with some other areas we have a relatively large number of enrolled volunteers, but relatively few who undertake regular site monitoring and portal entries. Next season we will introduce a series of publicized “calendar dates” with an experienced volunteer being available on site to provide networking opportunities, further training and experience to try to improve participation rates. We are also endeavouring to identify experienced volunteers as potential replacements or supporters of existing Volunteer Regional coordinators.

Having successfully partnered with Ligita for five or six years in the VRC role, she has decided to withdraw (hopefully remaining an active volunteer). Facilitated by the high public profile and breeding successes of the Metropolitan birds, we have achieved significant results in terms of advocacy, partnerships, community awareness and improved dog by-law compliance, which has been acknowledged by BirdLife Australia.

A big thank you to all our active volunteers, staff and elected members in the three Metropolitan councils, Green Adelaide and BirdLife Australia for their support, encouragement and practical assistance throughout the season and let’s hope for more success next time.



ONKAPARINGA REGION UPDATE

Sue and Ash Read, Volunteer Regional Coordinators, Friends of the Hooded Plover, Fleurieu Peninsula Onkaparinga Beaches



This fox was responsible for many of the nest failings at Ochre Cove.

Our 2021-22 season was defined by a single word- foxes! We have always had nests lost to foxes on our beaches, but this year the problem was both more severe and widespread. Foxes decimated our nesting this season with all of our nesting pairs having suffered the loss of at least one nest to foxes. Fox predation of our nests was so severe that on 5 of our sites they were the only cause of nest failure (the other sites had nest failures from tide and avian predators as well as foxes). Fox predation of nests caused several of our pairs to move significant distances within their territory to try to avoid foxes. In some case this was successful, but in others the foxes still managed to find their new nest sites. For some pairs, the limited size of their nesting territories meant that moving to avoid foxes was not an option.

We have been trying to limit losses to foxes, but we are restricted in the methods we can use. We mainly rely on finding the fox dens and then having them fumigated. This is a hit-and-miss strategy at best with it being difficult to find the dens and that when dens are found, fumigation is not always totally successful. This was the case at Ochre Cove where a single fox escaped fumigation and the hoodie pair lost 6 consecutive nests to fox predation. Birdlife and the Council decided to install a Foxwatch device to see if it could deter the fox from taking the eggs. Although not an official trial, the nest did survive to hatching, so we have some encouragement that the device played a role in the nest's survival. Unfortunately, the chick that hatched disappeared after only a couple of weeks.

One pair at Maslin Beach moved nest sites and were successful, moving to an area on the beach where no hoodies had nested before. They successfully fledged 2 chicks which were banded (VZ and SV) and at the time of writing they were both still moving about in our region in the company of a variety of adult hoodies (but not their parents).

Discussions have continued with the Onkaparinga Council on rules and regulations regarding cars on beaches where our hoodies nest. We have been trying to have the Council restrict where cars can park in the vicinity of fenced nesting sites, although this seems to be a legal grey area and we have had some setbacks. Volunteers have been wardening to try to increase the chances of nesting success. This season 4 pairs nested in car zones, but despite the best efforts of the hoodies and volunteers, we did not have any successful fledglings. The pair at Aldinga Beach repeated its efforts of last season of taking their 2-3 days



The juveniles from Maslin Beach (SV and VZ). Photo: S. Read



old chicks over a kilometre away to a beach out of the car zone, but the chicks did not survive more than a couple of weeks.

RED-CAPPED PLOVER 2021/22 BREEDING SEASON UPDATE FOR WEST LAKES SHORE AND WEST BEACH AND METROPOLITAN BEACHES

Kerri Bartley, Sharing our Shores with Coastal Wildlife Coordinator, BirdLife Australia

West Lakes Shore and West Beach are two sites where Red-capped Plovers are monitored by BirdLife Australia volunteers using the MyBeach Bird Data Portal to observe and record their findings. This stretch of Adelaide metropolitan beach is extremely popular among locals and visitors alike and can be a very crowded place during summer holidays making it a particularly challenging location for our beach-nesting birds who live and breed there.



West Beach Plover breeding area planned for habitat restoration and dune fencing in Winter 2022. Photo: K. Bartley

Last year City of Charles Sturt implemented changes to their dog by-laws, whereby all dogs must be on a leash within 100m of a plover breeding sign and regular patrols by council rangers are being undertaken to enforce this new regulation. This has greatly benefited the nesting and breeding activities allowing the birds to raise their young without fear of being chased by off leash dogs.

West Beach is one of only three recorded sites along our coastline which has both sets of plovers attempting to breed in the same area, adjacent to the Torrens River (Breakout Creek) outlet. The small colony of Red-capped Plovers made 6 nesting attempts during the 2021/22 season on this super busy stretch of beach, which after an eventful season, resulted in 1 Red-capped Plover chick successfully fledging. Unfortunately, the hoodies did not have any success this season, but we are all hopeful that this site will become more 'beach-nesting bird friendly' after a new dune exclusion fence, sea-wheat grass control and spinifex plantings occur this winter.

We were all 'over the moon' excited to report that the West Beach site produced one beautiful fledgling and West Lakes Shore was successful in producing (drum roll please) ... three! From 9 nesting attempts at West Lakes Shore, a record 3 chicks fledged for the first time in one season since breeding commenced at this site. In the 9th and final nesting attempt, which was very late in the season, 2 tiny chicks emerged on 10th March 2022. Both chicks managed to make it through to 20 days under the very diligent and devoted care from both parents. Unfortunately, one of the chicks disappeared on day 21 through unknown causes. The remaining chick continued and was observed responding to parents' orders to go into hiding when danger approached. This final chick managed to survive the next two weeks



The 3rd Red-capped Plover chick to fledge from West Lakes Shore under the protection of Dad's wing. Photo: K. Bartley



and successfully made it through to fledge on 14th April under the close watch of our dedicated volunteers – it was an extremely happy day for all!

Green Adelaide and the City of Charles Sturt shared the plight of this Red-capped Plover family on their Facebook and Instagram social media pages, which resulted in an overwhelming response from followers. Several posts were shared throughout the hatching to fledging stage with an amazing 30,000 users being engaged!

YORKE PENINSULA UPDATE

Nanou Cabourdin, Friends of the Hooded Plover, Yorke Peninsula

Yorke Peninsula’s breeding season saw 43 chicks become airborne, which is 26 more than last season when 17 Hooded Plover fledglings were recorded. That’s a significant increase but may be due to the fact that more volunteers (including many visiting migratory shorebird volunteers) found more of the breeding pairs that were not previously counted. There are still many beaches of our coastline not regularly monitored, mainly in Dhilba Guuranda (Innes National Park).



Point Turton chicks. Photo: N. Cabourdin

I must say after speaking to a lot of visitors and inhabitants that more and more people seem to know about the Hooded Plovers plight and were a bit more careful around them, thanks may be to a bigger coverage to the metropolitan resident hoodies. With all these factors we had a great result this year. I monitored 4 pairs of hoodies around Point Turton, and this year was the first time I saw a total of 6 chicks reach the fledging stage. I have never had such a good result in my 5 seasons of monitoring, and this during the busiest season we had after Christmas.

Beaches with heavy vehicle traffic, like Flaherty’s beach are a growing worry. People are driving on dunes accelerating the erosion and above the high tide mark where the beach-nesting birds like the Hooded Plover breed. If volunteers don’t spot the nests early enough to put up fences and signs the nests have no chance of survival. The increase of drivers on Flaherty’s beach since it has been named the 4th best beach in Australia by Tourism Australia is certainly not a big win for the wildlife, with 200 visiting in one day around New Year. This needs to be controlled by the authorities, otherwise the results of all the good work done by volunteers and respectful beach users could be quite easily reversed by just a few that think the beach is just a playground for their big toys.

At the end of September keen eyed volunteer Anne Hopkins spotted an entangled hoodie on a Port Victoria beach. Kasun moved heaven and earth to find a solution before the long weekend, and coordinated the operation. Young vet Dr Bhakti came on her day off to un-entangle the birds extremities before the bird lost complete circulation in its toes. Thanks for everyone who helped, this pair had 2 miraculous fledglings late in the season! What a wonderful result!



Word about the Hood

South Australia Update



*Rosina Jantke handing over one of the chicks to Janet Moore.
Photo: S. Jantke*

Another lucky rescue happened on the 31st of December when volunteers Rosina and Stephen Jantke spotted two 3 day old chicks that had fallen through the metal grate of a large drain at Port Hughes. Many people came to help lift the heavy grate and Rosina jumped in and rescued the chicks, reuniting them after with their parents.

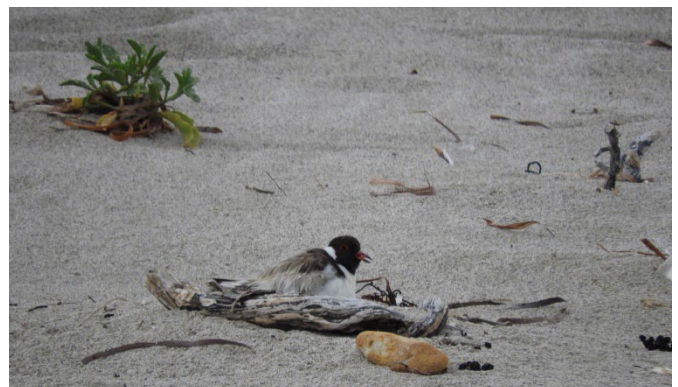
The highlight of this year was the BirdLife Conference that took place this May in Moonta. It is always a pleasure to be surrounded by like-minded people, to put a face to various people you talk to on various platforms, and share ideas and learn from experts. Lots of participants were quite excited to create a collection of their own unique clay tiles inspired by nature, for a future public art installation directed by the talented Karen Carr (@SquashedCocky). Karen also visited local primary schools Stansbury and Warooka, where students learned about the hoodies plight, and then created their own tiles. Karen plans to use these tiles during the creation of a new functional artwork / seat, which will be an interactive outboard game within the superb new nature play space at Point Turton. A tile artwork / board game will tell the story of a Hooded Plover chick from egg to fledgling and the perils of growing up on the beach.

This is a great example on how art can be meaningful & educative for your community, with some beautiful and ingenious ideas! Karen is a fantastic facilitator with lots of experience. Soon you will be able to visit the final piece at Point Turton.

PERSPECTIVE FROM NEW YORKE PENINSULA VOLUNTEERS

Carol Black and Julie Rex, Friends of the Hooded Plover, Yorke Peninsula

Recently retired and loving our beach walks we had always noticed the beach signs referring to the Hooded Plovers and beach-nesting birds sparking some interest in our conversation. In that next week we saw this Lady on the beach fencing off an area so we introduced ourselves to Annie and for the next 2 days we were being trained on how to care and monitor the Hooded Plovers. We were smack bang in the middle of the breeding season and with 4 pairs to consume our time with monitoring and putting up the appropriate signage covering approx. 4.5km of coastal area.



Nest at Rifle Butts Beach, Port Victoria. Photo: C. Black



Chick evades an incoming wave. Photo: C. Black

Coming on board mid-season we had some unfortunate lows and extreme highs especially with the well known pair Bob & Marge on Rifle Butts Beach in Port Victoria having a very late in the season successful nest. Basically in the middle of a highly populated beach with many dog walkers, beach combers and swimmers. Resulting in 2 chicks fully fledged chick becoming typically teenagers – not wanting to fly the coop. They know a good thing and have followed their parents and appears they have grouped up with other local Hooded Plovers on Second Beach. Now in the off season the Hoodies have deserted our local beaches; we are looking forward to the next breeding season meanwhile investigating where they maybe flocking to for winter.

WHERE DO HOODED PLOVERS GO IN WINTER?

Rachael Kannussaar, Landscape Officer, Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board

The Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board (EP Landscape Board) set themselves a challenge to learn more about the secret winter life of Hooded Plovers across the region. We know from previous research throughout Australia that Hooded Plovers can form groups of up to 30 individuals in a flock at coastal locations during the non-breeding months before they disperse back to their breeding territories from late July onwards (Weston 2009). What we were keen to explore in our region were historical reports that Hooded Plovers may visit inland areas away from the coast during the winter months, with a particular focus on salt lake areas. With the help of trained volunteers, the EP Landscape Board completed the first Hooded Plover inland lake surveys two years ago in May/June 2020. Survey sites included Seagull Lake, Lake Newland, Lake Hamilton, Lake Malata, Lake Greenly, East Greenly Lakes and Sleaford Mere (Figure 1).

The 2020 and 2022 winter surveys were completed as part of the Saltmarsh Threat Abatement and Recovery (STAR) Project. STAR is delivered by the Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board, through funding from the Australian Government.

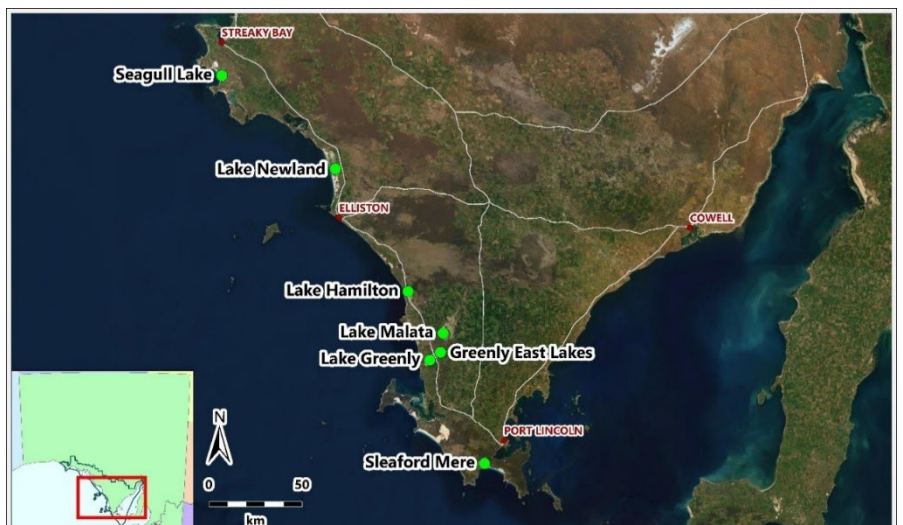


Figure 1. Winter survey sites on Eyre Peninsula.



The aims of the EP Landscape Board’s Hooded Plover winter surveys were to:

- engage volunteers in surveys
- record the presence of Hooded Plovers at priority inland sites on the Eyre Peninsula during the non-breeding season
- record observable threats to Hooded Plovers and inland salt lake habitat
- record the presence of other shorebirds and waders at each survey site
- document Hooded Plover behaviour and if available, collect samples of food sources.

In 2020 a total of 22 Hooded Plovers were observed inland, with both adults and juveniles recorded.

To build on baseline data collected in 2020, all sites surveyed in 2020 were re-surveyed in 2022. During this year’s survey, teams were ecstatic to record a total 55 Hooded Plovers, with the largest flock discovered at the East Greenly Lakes survey area. Here, the survey team were fortunate to observe a mixed flock of 20 juvenile and adult Hooded Plovers feeding together. Interestingly, a small *Coxiella* species of gastropod was often discovered on the shoreline of lakes where Hooded Plovers were recorded. The number of juveniles and adults observed at each site during 2022 surveys are summarised in Figure 2.

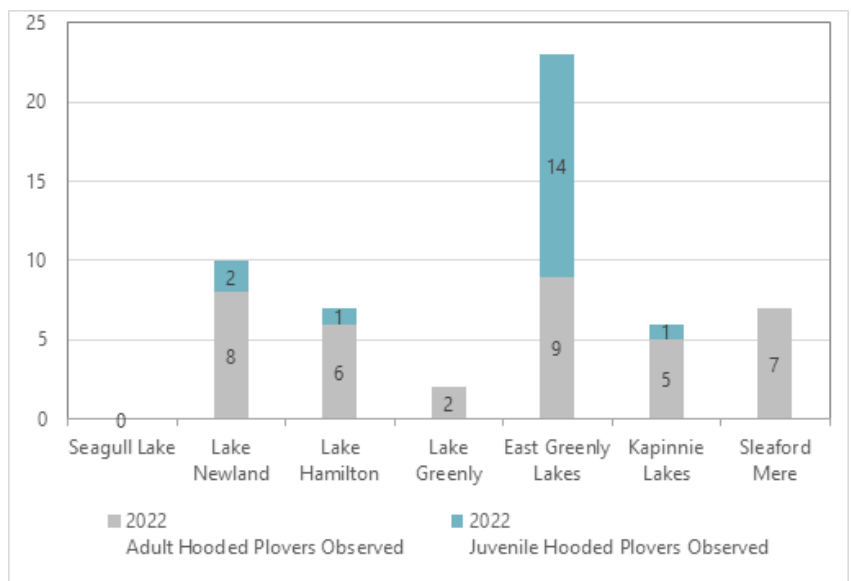


Figure 2. Adults and juveniles recorded across survey sites.

The presence of foxes through sightings, scats and prints was recorded at all survey sites, whilst Seagull Lake was the only site to record the evidence of cats. Stock and rabbits were observed at Lake Newland, Lake Hamilton, Lake Greenly, East Greenly Lakes and Lake Malata. Other threats recorded were off-road vehicle tracks and native mammal tracks – kangaroo and emu.

While the focus of these surveys was recording the location of Hooded Plovers, all other bird life observed was also recorded. Survey teams were excited to see a flock of Banded Stilts at Lake Newland, Red-necked Avocets at Seagull Lake and Red-capped Plovers scattered across Lake Newland, Lake Hamilton and Lake Malata. Large mixed flocks of more than 1000 individual ducks were also observed at Lake Malata and included Chestnut Teal, Grey Teal, Australian Shelduck and Musk Duck. A variety of migratory shorebird species were also observed during the surveys including flocks of Red-necked Stints at Lake Newland and Lake Hamilton and a Curlew Sandpiper observed at Lake Newland and East Greenly Lakes. Although the value of inland salt lake areas to bird life is well documented, the use of these inland salt lakes areas by the nationally threatened Hooded Plover was not well understood. Observing Hooded Plovers during the non-breeding season in numbers across multiple inland salt lake areas on Eyre Peninsula confirms the value of these habitats during the winter months.



*Volunteer Sonia Tidemann surveying East Greenly Lakes.
Photo: EP Landscape Board*

Although we don't know how far afield juveniles sighted inland have travelled from, observing juveniles amongst these inland flocks is a good indication of the success of the previous breeding season. It is likely Hooded Plovers, adult and juvenile, that leave their coastal breeding territories over the winter are seeking refuge away from the high tides and harsh weather conditions, and making the most of alternative food sources available inland. The EP Landscape Board's winter Hooded Plover surveys have certainly confirmed this threatened species is utilising inland salt lakes during the non-breeding winter months. This newfound knowledge will hopefully lead to opportunities in the future to work with land managers, to improve the protection of non-breeding season habitat inland.

KANGAROO ISLAND HIGHS AND LOWS 2021-22

Jean Turner, Volunteer Regional Coordinator, Friends of the Hooded Plover, Kangaroo Island

Kangaroo Island (KI) has around 510 km of coastline, with 112 km of sandy beach habitats available to Hooded Plovers and other beach-nesting shorebirds (Schultz 1995). Plenty of scope for beach-nesting birds to find a safe haven! However, like elsewhere, pressures on our coastal habitats and birds are ever-increasing. While some KI beaches are remote or inaccessible to the public, others are easily accessed and heavily visited by locals and tourists alike. Quieter coastal habitats with adjoining beaches are under increasing pressure from travelers seeking free, "off-grid" coastal camping in Crown reserves; and some long-held private coastal properties have sold recently for tourism development. Our small enthusiastic band of volunteers works hard to monitor the Hooded Plovers across KI, but with more than 50 potential breeding territories it's a tough gig. So we focus on 13 priority breeding sites, checking others as we can. In the 2021-22 breeding season KI volunteers reported on 37 Hoodie breeding territories - a fantastic effort! Some pairs were checked only once or a few times, while other were monitored intensively through the whole season.

We have some great 'Hoodie Highs' to celebrate, even at high-visitation beaches. Emu Bay's 'estuary' pair returned to breed and successfully fledged 1 chick after complete absence the previous season. Snellings Beach pair miraculously hatched 2 chicks, which both fledged. Antechamber Bay 'estuary' pair hatched 3 chicks and successfully fledged 2. On Dudley Peninsula two Hoodie pairs had consecutive successful clutches, one pair fledging 3 chicks then 1; the other pair fledging 2 chicks then 2. Separate visitors to KI alerted us to newly hatched chicks at Pennington Bay, a nest at Vivonne Bay and confirmed fledging at Antechamber Bay - all really valuable observations we otherwise might have missed. Dudley Peninsula walking group discovered a Hoodie pair nesting in a brackish wetland habitat - a previously unexplored and unknown breeding territory. Some of the walkers are BNB volunteers, but certainly would never have found find the birds if not for the group's walk.



Of course we had some 'Lows' as well. Penneshaw's Hog Bay Hoodies had a rough time, taking 3 breeding attempts to fledge 1 chick. Hog Bay beach is under huge disturbance pressure from people and dogs, both local and visiting, including those awaiting ferries at the adjoining terminal. Thank goodness for the winter break! At Island Beach a new Hoodie pair claimed the territory, but 5 consecutive breeding attempts all failed. Each time things went wrong soon after hatching: we suspect a chick predator lurks in the dunes. But top marks for persistence! The Stokes Bay pair were absent through breeding season, possibly deterred consistent visits by off-leash dogs. Subsequently a Hoodie pair with 1 fledgling appeared, maybe the Stokes Bay birds returned?



Hoodie chicks at Pennington Bay. Photo: J. Cowan

Flipping negative to positive. While the Hog Bay pair ultimately succeeded, disturbance took a great toll on birds and volunteers alike. Volunteers reported serious incidents of uncontrolled, off-leash dogs impacting on the Hoodies to KI Council. Currently dogs on the beach must be leashed or under effective control of the owner. Clearly not the case! A local Councillor took action, proposing to Council that for safety of beach-goers and wildlife, all dogs on Hog Bay beach should be on-leash at all times. Following public consultation on the proposal KI Council is moving to declare times in the 'beach season' when dogs on the beach must be kept on-leash. This is a big step forward in managing disturbance to breeding birds. Kudos to the volunteers, Councillor and Council for taking action.

I can't finish without mentioning our other beach-nesting shorebirds. A few KI volunteers also monitor Pied Oystercatchers at more than 50 breeding territories, mostly on the north eastern half of the island. Some pairs were monitored intensively while others were checked only a few times. Overall the Pied Oystercatchers had a poor breeding season. Forty-eight pairs bred, laying at least 103 eggs, but out of 18 chicks hatched only 7 fledged. Many clutches were lost to super-high tides or human disturbance near beach access points; some pairs had up to 3 breeding attempts. Sadly two breeding birds died in separate incidents while breeding was underway. Their partners remained single for the rest of the season, resulting in total breeding failure at those sites. Results for have been summarized in the SA Team Oystercatcher newsletter and in a poster at the Beach-nesting Birds conference. Contact me if you are interested.

Red-capped Plovers breed on only a few of the KI beaches we monitor, but with limited time, little monitoring effort is devoted to them. But I love these plucky, endearing little birds so I try to keep tabs on them while monitoring Hoodies and Oystercatchers. This season seemed exceptional for Red-capped Plovers at Island Beach, with multiple breeding attempts in 2 or 3 semi-colonial groups



"Quick! Follow me!" - Red-capped Plover male & chicks on foredune. Photo: J. Turner



throughout the season. While some nests were lost to high tides, overall many nests hatched and very young chicks were seen. Red-capped Plovers along the beach to Cygnet River estuary didn't fare so well, with breeding pairs sighted but no chicks seen. Red-caps are extremely sneaky and hard to monitor once chicks hatch. Parents are masters of distraction hiding chicks in the dunes and quickly move them to safer locations. Overall the Red-capped Plover population appears to have done OK, but it would be nice to know.

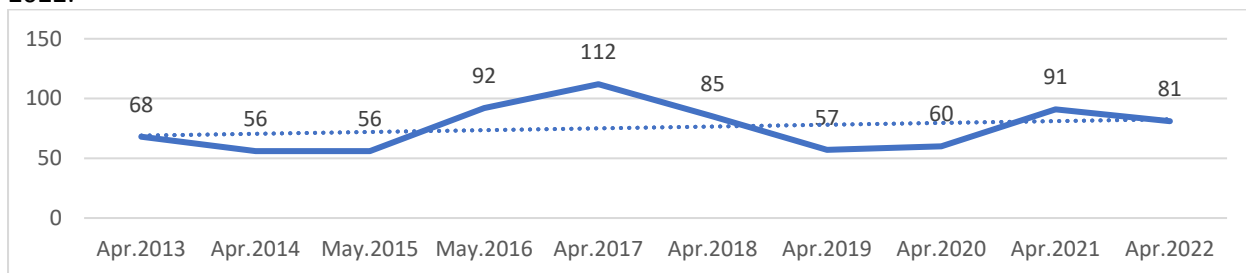
We can always do with more trained volunteers keeping watch over our breeding beach-nesting shorebirds on KI. Nearly every beach supports at least one of these three species. New local volunteers are warmly invited to join us; and trained volunteers from the mainland encouraged to check KI sites and enter observations in the Portal whenever they visit. We can get by with a little help from our Friends!

SOUTH EAST SOUTH AUSTRALIA SEASON REPORT

Jeff Campbell, Friends of Shorebirds South East (FoSSE)

Fledged Hooded Plover counts were carried out in selected sites in the Lower South East of South Australia in April 2022. These counts are undertaken in order to attempt to obtain a measure of breeding success; that is to count Hooded Plovers which have reached fledging age. Since the November 2018 Hooded Plover count, the count area was extended to cover The Granites to Cape Jaffa in the northern end of the zone, and Piccaninnie Ponds Track to the Victorian border in the southern end. This was done to cover the area encompassed by the *Enhancing the Coorong and Managing Ramsar values along the Limestone Coast Project*. Thanks to the dedicated team all of the selected sites were once again fully surveyed in 2022.

The April 2022 count total of 81 birds (adults and young), was lower than the 2021 total of 91, but well above that of 2020 (60). It was however lower than the corresponding 2017 count (122). In addition, the count of 13 fledged young birds was less than the 2021 total (24) but above the numbers in most recent years. The counts cover the majority of the suitable habitat between The Granites and the Victorian border, a total distance of around 220 km. The total number of birds seen on this count equates to 0.368 birds per km, and the total number of fledged young equates to 0.059 birds per km. The below graph describes SE South Australian April Hooded Plover counts between 2013 and 2022.



Fledgling numbers depend of course on the success or otherwise of nesting, and nesting attempts do not always lead to fledged young. In many previous years it has often not done so. A lack of success can occur for many and varied reasons, be it storms inundating nests, nest or chick predation by feral animals or dogs, trampling by humans, being run over by vehicles or the spread of weeds such as Sea Wheat-grass (*Thinopyrum junceiforme*) on the beach which destroys nesting habitat. This weed appears to be increasing its geographical cover in the South-East. The plant is



dispersed by both seed and rhizome fragments and can lead to the formation of sand cliff faces and foredune terraces and ridges which can create new foredunes up to 10m wide. In this region the weed was rated as having a threat value of 8 – weeds which are highly invasive, spread rapidly and producing dense stands and a blanket cover (*Limestone Coast and Coorong Coastal action Plan*, Caton et al, 2011). Such ridges and foredunes, covered by a thick stand of Sea Wheat-grass, along with increasing beach erosion in areas such as the Nene Valley region, render previously suitable nesting sites unusable for beach nesting shorebirds such as the Hooded Plover.

It is hoped that the recent announcement that the Friends of Shorebirds SE has been successful in obtaining funding from the Federal Governments *Environment Restoration Fund – Threatened Species Strategy Action Plan – Priority Species Grants* will lead to an improvement in this situation. The grant is for a project entitled *Protecting Hooded Plovers by controlling beach weeds on the Limestone Coast* and will involve various means of determining the spread of these weeds including aerial photography, weed control, revegetation with native species and the effect of these actions on the breeding success of Hooded Plovers and other beach-nesting species. It is envisaged that this will lead to an increase in available Hooded Plover breeding sites.

The trendline for the number of fledged young continues to show an increase following this count, which is pleasing. This is coming of an extremely low base of just six birds in April 2013. It is of course possible that some of the fledged young observed during this count originated from outside the count area. As immature birds are known to leave the natal area region soon after fledging, sometimes moving considerable distances. Although these counts may not give a true and complete measure of fledging success it is considered that they do give a general picture of success. The only way that we could be surer of success would be to either have more regular checks of activity during the breeding season and to individually mark young birds with engraved leg flags; in order to track their movements; or to carry out fledged counts during more than one month. Monitoring breeding activity and marking young birds is possible but would require considerable effort, particularly in the more remote areas such as Canunda National Park. The extra counts option is not really practical as it would require many more volunteers than we have available and a huge logistical and time consuming undertaking.

The trendline for numbers of adult birds shows an almost flat line, with neither a significant increase nor decrease. Given the quite long life-span of the Hooded Plover, up to at least 15.5 years, there is a danger that if many of the adult birds reached the end of their life at the same time, numbers could suddenly ‘drop off the cliff’ without adequate recruitment of young birds into the population.