



EDITION 28 – SUMMER 2023

**FRIENDS OF HOODED PLOVER MORNINGTON PENINSULA – THE 2022-23 SEASON TO DATE (15/03/2023)**

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

Although not quite the end of our breeding season, our birds do unfortunately, tend to pack-up-shop quite early and it is rare to see more nesting after mid-February. With that said, we have managed only four fledglings for the year and currently only have 2 remaining active nests and no chicks. So yet another poor season.

Once the massive January holiday crowds have dissipated and the children are back at school, we often hope for some later season success. But this year, only a week later, we were hit by an exceptional storm with monstrous swell that took out the majority of our remaining nests and chicks. A major disappointment.



*Silver gull in action against a Hooded Plover. Photo: Mark Lethlean*

so she is really 'One Toe'. They have managed to hatch a couple of nests so far but unfortunately, I had the displeasure of hopelessly watching as Silver Gulls swooped in and took their 1st batch.

In mid-December, I had an exciting encounter with a lonely Leopard Seal on the beach at St Andrews. The Marine rescue unit at Melbourne Zoo advised me that it was only the 5<sup>th</sup> recorded Leopard Seal seen in Victoria for the year. It was a young male which are known to roam enormous distances while feeding.

We also have the great pleasure of monitoring the restricted area of Point Nepean. It is amazing what we sometimes find. A few years ago it was an enormous channel Buoy that had washed up but this year it was



*Leopard seal, Rye. Photo: M. Lethlean*



# Word about the Hood

Victoria Update



Leopard seal, Rye. Photo: M. Lethlean

a lone Jet Ski. Two people had ventured out into the open ocean from Port Phillip Bay and had lost control in the rough seas. They managed to scramble onto one ski and return home but unfortunately had to surrender the other ski to the elements. They were then financially responsible for removing it from this very isolated spot.

Also, this year, while monitoring along this beach, we found a very ancient, unexploded ordinance from the 1860's- an Armstrong Shell, usually fired from a horse-drawn cannon. An amazing find considering it had been laying in the sand for over 150 years and suddenly appeared, exposed by the drifting tidal sands. The army had to be called in to remove it.



1860s Armstrong shell embedded in sand. Photo: M. Lethlean

Thanks to all our volunteers and Parks Victoria rangers for all their tireless efforts and to the Beach-nesting Bird team for their encouragement and support.

## SURF COAST (VIC) HOODED PLOVERS MARCH 2023



Aireys Reef. Photo: B. Ives

### Bron Ives, Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover Surf Coast

This season has seen ups and downs for the Surf Coast Hooded Plovers and their friends. Numerous scrapes have been built, lots of eggs laid and many eggs lost. Some birds have abandoned long held sites and others have taken over the territory of nearby hoodies. Support and encouragement from beach walkers and local communities continues to steadily grow yet we've also seen a drop off in regular and new volunteers. There's also been a last minute flurry of nesting and chick hatchings and as the season comes to a close, hopes are high that more chicks and eggs will safely hatch and fledge.

The **Moggs Creek** hoodies remained on territory throughout winter in 2022 but left in September, only to return two months later. After losing two nests and contending with large summer crowds they have been intermittent visitors since - this is new behaviour for this pair.



Off to a flying start, the **Aireys** birds laid their first eggs between the Inlet and the Mad Max Steps in late August 2022. This first nest was lost, as were the following five nests. Volunteers put most of the losses down to the large numbers of ravens and magpies constantly present on the beach or possibly the fox whose prints were seen on most mornings.

**Urquharts Bluff** saw its resident Hooded Plovers nest half way to Hutt Gully in early January. Volunteers haven't seen a nest here for a few years so this sighting was a welcome return. For the first time at this very popular dog walking spot a *Dog Exclusion Zone* was set up by the land managers, Parks Victoria. Community support for the temporary dog-walking inconvenience was encouraging, but sadly, around hatching time, the eggs disappeared and fresh fox or feral cat tracks were throughout the nesting area and dunes that morning. Thankfully the parents survived and are currently incubating another clutch of eggs not too far away. Extreme tides washed over the nest on Day 14 yet the parents rescued all three eggs and deposited them in a new scrape higher up the dune.



EV Fairhaven. Photo: B. Ives

Heading further east up the coast, two hoodies have recently been sighted on a regular basis between **Guvvos** and **The Gulch**. One is EV Left White born at Pt Roadknight in early 2018 and the other an unbanded adult.

**Pt Roadknight 12th Avenue** saw some early activity when the birds that had been long term residents at the tip of Pt Roadknight suddenly up and left to claim this successful territory previously held by NS Right White and unbanded. Three nests in to the season, researchers from Deakin University installed a trial fox deterrent device and motion sensor cameras to track progress. Sadly this nest, and the next, were lost to high tides.



Juvenile, Point Roadknight. Photo: B. Ives

The surprise of the season came when Dr Grainne Maguire found a nest at the tip of **Pt Roadknight** in late January, with three chicks appearing a week later. This pair of hoodies from around the corner moved in to this territory when it was vacated earlier in the season. The chicks were lost three days later, cause unknown. Almost all locals and visitors respected the permanent *No Dogs Conservation Area* and only a few were unwilling to help. Another nest was recently found by the intrepid Hamilton from Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (GORCAPA).

As the season winds down the Surf Coast hoodies have made a late run and the latest news in is that the two chicks at the **Nudist Beach, Pt Impossible** have fledged - well done JM, unbanded and the amazing team behind them.

The remaining chick at **Red Rocks, Pt Addis** has been seen doing great practice flights with liftoff over the ocean expected in coming days. Thank you Parks Victoria and the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority for the patrols and for putting up temporary *Dog Exclusion Zones*. Land managers and volunteers are keeping a close eye on the remaining two nests of the season.



## SHIPWRECK COAST (VIC) UPDATE MARCH 2023

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

The 2022/23 season at the Shipwreck Coast can be summed up in one line: *The best laid schemes o' Mice an' [Women an'] Men, Gang aft agley\** (Robert Burns, 1785).

End of report... well, not quite.

After a couple of modestly successful seasons, the Hooded Plovers at monitored sites along the Shipwreck Coast raised no fledglings this season. Local volunteers are sifting through the main reasons for the failure and will attempt to ensure that the 2023/24 season is a better one. In other words, we'll follow the lead of the Hoodies themselves, by putting the disappointments of the past season behind us, giving it some thought and trying our best again next season.

**Season Summary:** Western section: A total of 11 nesting attempts were observed at 5 of the monitored sites around Peterborough. 29 eggs were sighted, 5 of which hatched. Chicks hatched in only 2 of the 11 nesting attempts (at 2 different sites). None of the 5 chicks survived. One lived for around 3 weeks, which was the closest to fledging observed. There is a possibility that there was some level of breeding success at one or more of the remote (unmonitored) sites around Mepunga and Nullawarre near the western edge of the region. A recently fledged Hooded Plover was observed near Peterborough on January 5. It is unknown how far it had flown, but it's possible that it originally came from one of the remote western sites (or possibly even the Far West Region).

Eastern section: No nesting attempts were observed at any of the sites in this part of the region, which includes the section of coast around Port Campbell through to Princetown. In fact, Hooded Plovers were rarely seen in the Eastern section this season.



*Attentive pair incubating and guarding chicks early in the season. Photo: K. Vickers*

**Season Review:** The \$64,000 question of course is *What caused the lack of Hooded Plover breeding success along the Shipwreck Coast this season?* As local volunteers we can speculate about what went wrong drawing on our observations and a basic analysis of the data. Without going into too much detail here I'll simply highlight a few points. At the risk of repeating what others will say in other parts of this newsletter; with the end of the restrictions imposed during the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic people were free to travel once more for the whole of the season. As a consequence, the holiday period was exceptionally busy, in terms of the number of people spending time on the local beaches. It seemed like it was a case of people making up for lost time.

Dogs on beaches were an even greater problem than usual on the Shipwreck Coast this season. Clearly dog ownership increased during the pandemic. Not only did more people become dog owners, the number of dog owners who



obtained additional dogs increased noticeably. During the height of the season, poorly controlled off-lead dogs were a regular feature on local beaches. Signage, suggestion and education seemed to have little or no impact. One evening I recall seeing a family out with 3 dogs, a lone walker with 2 and a couple with 5 between them at the 'No Dogs' Port Campbell National Park. All were off lead, on a beach where there were two fenced Hooded Plover nests and all the usual signage. Tackling this issue will be a priority locally next season.

Just when it appeared that the Hooded Plovers may have more of a chance of success, at the end of the main holiday period, a series of high tides swept the beaches clear for weeks. So, in other words, it was a season when both the birds and volunteers couldn't take a trick. In addition, all the other usual threats were also present of course including foxes, gulls, magpies, ravens and raptors.

**Raising Awareness among Beach Visitors:** As in the past, various strategies were employed including informal discussions with beach goers whilst monitoring, targeted visits by Parks Victoria staff to active sites during peak periods and the production and distribution (electronic and print) of a newsletter, *Peterborough Bird News*. A Beach-nesting Birds stall (with handouts and giveaways) was staffed at the annual Peterborough market over summer. In future more effort will be made to target specific groups, especially dog owners.

*\*Rough translation of the opening Burns quote for those of us who aren't Scots! Despite all our plans and efforts things often go pear shaped!*

It's been a tough season with no fledglings observed at monitored sites in this region. Let's hope next season is a better one.



*Holiday season: Footprints of people and dogs all around (and some dog prints through) a fenced and sign posted nesting site. Photo: K. Vickers*



*Hooded Plovers flocking along the Shipwreck Coast recently. Photo: K. Vickers*



PHILLIP ISLAND (VIC) MARCH 2023

Jon Fallaw, Vivien Zajicek, Mitch Burrows, Phillip Island Nature Parks

In the build up to the breeding season it was great to take time out to look through wintering flocks. Of interest was to witness the change of juvenile plumage. The transition appears to be quite rapid as young birds transition to adult plumage and some birds will breed in their first year. An example of this was Yellow A1, which fledged 9/02/22 at Devon Avenue in Ventnor that was well on the way to adult plumage when it was photographed on Summerland beach just six months later.



Sub-adult hoodie 19/08/22. Photo: J. Fallaw

On Phillip Island we do an island wide ‘Hooded Plover and Gull Count’ four times per year. The November count coincided with the Biennial survey and a total of 33 Hooded Plover were recorded. This was a little down on the previous ten years where totals were all in the low forties. For the February count 02/02/23 there were 43 hoodies recorded. Of great excitement was that volunteer Kay Schroer and Andrea Love found two half grown chicks on Summerland Beach. Both chicks fledged nineteen days later on 21/02/23.

This summer intern Lucy Wotherspoon has overseen a project, which is in its third year, using remote cameras to help better understand the causes of local nest loss.



Lucy Wotherspoon at Anzac west nest (left). Vivien Zajicek and Lucy setting a camera at Berry’s Beach (right). Photos: J. Fallaw



Lucy deployed cameras on five hoodie nests, two just before Christmas and three in January and February. Early analysis of the photos had large off leash dogs walking through the nest at the Colonnades almost crushing the eggs, and a Magpie very close the same nest, and the tide with swell washing out the nest at Berry's Beach. At Shelly Beach a raven was caught taking an egg. Of interest was that the raven had leg flag (White Left 12 2).



Raven (White Left 122) with egg. Photo by a remote camera

A few quick emails established that the raven had been banded by Laura Tan from Birdlife about eight years ago only five hundred meters away. She said that “the Cowrie beach carpark and Point Sambell are popular raven flock sites, so Hoodies (or anything else) nesting in the vicinity may be in for a rough time”.

The first fledgling for the season were two chicks from Anchorage Rd 10/01/23. Dave Martin from the Bass Coast Shire was kept busy extending refuges, installing chick shelters and putting up a banner. We are sure that these measures along with good volunteer observations by Kay and Meg went a long way towards the success of the nest.



Dave Martin and Lucy Wotherspoon at Anchorage Rd 21/12/22. Photo: J. Fallaw



Red capped Plover chick at Elizabeth Cove 21/02/23. Photo: J. Fallaw

We were very happy to find a 2 egg Red capped Plover nest at Elizabeth Cove Ventnor as most RCP nesting has historically been confined to the Silverleaves and Observation Point area. Despite it being a busy beach, one of the two chicks fledged 21/02/23. When we tried to catch and band the chick on day 35 the fledgling had other ideas and confidently took off. Later, looking at the photo of a wing stretch I could see both how advanced the primary feathers were but also how transparent with the toes seen through the wing.



To the start of March six hoodies had fledged on Phillip Island, there was a chick each at Surf Beach and Forrest Caves, a nest at Colonnades and a camera at Anzac west. All of the fledgling have been banded so hopefully they will be seen by volunteers as they spread their wings. The six fledglings are Anchorage Rd (Y6A, Y8A); Colonnades west, either Y9A or Y0A; Summerland Beach (Y2B, Y3B) and Crazy Birds Y4B.

*Crazy Birds banding team 02/03/23: Sharon Woodend, Vivien Zajicek, Lucy Wotherspoon and Roz Jessop (out of shot). Photo: J. Fallaw*

## BASS COAST VIC

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

What was shaping up as a disappointing season on the Bass Coast (one fledgeling by 23/2/23) saw a sharp peak in chick arrivals in the following week (14 sites with chicks). An exciting outlook.

The Bass Coast has had some significant developments in volunteer participation. Some working partnerships have been formed to tackle fox eradication, site monitoring and Beach-nesting Bird awareness and to launch a Facebook page. We have also updated our equipment with a successful VG Funding Grant and endured a rise in signage vandalism within the Yallock-Bullock Marine/Coastal Park. All of which kept our small band of dedicated volunteers very busy.

Our **Cape Paterson Volunteers** adopted 6 breeding sites with the assistance of a generous donation from "The Cape" Sustainable Housing Estate. The funding provided for a Hooded Plover Management Plan prepared by Birdlife Australia, new signage which included QR Codes linked to the "Cape Chatter" website with breeding updates and other important information. New material supplies for nest protection, a publicity drive for volunteer recruitment, new permanent signages and the launching of our Hooded Plover Bass Coast Facebook page. The profile of the Hooded Plover in the Cape Paterson area has been enhanced considerably due largely to the



*Almost fledged Hooded Plover with parent AS Wilson Rd Cape Paterson. Photo: D. Hartney*





drive and energy of David and Jeanie Hartney, two residents of The Cape Village. Our thanks go to them and the new Cape Paterson volunteers who have done a wonderful job.

**Local Landcare and Deakin University partnerships for fox eradication**

South Gippsland and Bass Coast Landcare joined together with BC Friends of the Hooded Plover to launch a massive soft jaw fox trapping project right along our coastline between San Remo and Waratah Bay. It included workshop training in Hooded Plover breeding behaviour for the dedicated Landcare volunteers and open public education and displays at troublesome beaches impacted by fox predation.

Deakin University and Birdlife Australia provided an honours student, Finn Saurine, who installed acoustic fox repellent equipment along with video cameras to record the effects on foxes at false nest sites originally then moved onto real life nest sits with some positive outcomes. We look forward to Finn’s ground-breaking research outcomes.



*Powlett River Pop-Up stall on 17<sup>th</sup> December, with Mel Sheedy, SOHO Compliance Officer, Landcare representatives and Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast Volunteer. Photo: M. Sheedy*



*Example of vandalism at Wilson Rd, Cape Paterson, where a sign with the message “No regulations welcome” was displayed by someone in the community in place of the No Dogs sign. Photos: S. Johnson (left), D. Hartney (right)*

**Pop-Up information and display stalls**

Three were held at Powlett River Estuary and Cape Paterson during the busy holiday periods in December/January. Melissa Sheedy, a new BNB team member, facilitated and attended along with local volunteers to interact with public and potential volunteers. Five new volunteers came on board consequently.

**A Successful Parks Victoria Volunteer Growth Fund Grant**

allowed for the much-needed upgrading of nest protection materials and additional Corflute signs for new Dog Regulations on parts of the Yallock-Bulluk Marine / Coastal Park. This is critical to help maintain and encourage new volunteers for our work on the Bass Coast. Sadly, we have seen an increase in the vandalism of new Parks Vic signs relating to NO DOG beaches introduced in sections of the Park for the first time. This resistance to change will hopefully subside



with time and a few more visits by the Compliance Officers with the SOHO project to remind offenders the new rules will not be going away.

Finishing on a brighter note the Inverloch Lagoon pair of hard-working Pied Oystercatcher successfully fledged 2 healthy chicks again this summer. BlueT3 and T4 are still on territory at preparation of this report.

*Release of Pied Oystercatcher chicks. Photo: S. Johnson*

## CHALLENGING SEASON FOR SANDY POINT (SOUTH GIPPSLAND, VIC) – HOODIES AND MONITORS

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

In South Gippsland, Sandy Point and the spit to Shallow Inlet entrance became a bit of a monitoring focus this season. In the spotlight was a new pair that had established on the beach just southeast of Sandy Point township.

The new pair, labelled Horse Track due to the name of the closest access, grabbed the attention of new volunteers and early on provided insights into the stark realities of the difficulties facing breeding pairs on a busy beach. This pair started nesting early but without fencing or signage and increasing visitors, no nest survived. Education was obviously going to be crucial here as existing beliefs ranged from denying any Hoodies were even on the beach to knowing everything about Hoodies as they regularly saw large flocks feeding on the water's edge, so why did they need protecting as there were so many. Sandy Point beach is a hotspot for Sanderling, a migratory shorebird and it was these birds that were being seen.



*Hooded Plover attacking a Silver Gull. Photo: J. Stevenson*

On Horse Track's fourth nesting attempt, a fence and signage was erected which helped immensely. A physical structure seemed to add credence to the volunteers' words and many people began to respect the nesting area.

The Hoodies settled in for the incubation period, with a hatch date in early February. The busy January did test them, and along with seeing off gulls and magpies, the adults were kept busy protecting their nest despite the fence. Then just a few days before hatching, potential disaster loomed. A large south-westerly storm with high tides was approaching. It was hard to imagine that the beach would not be scoured by waves, washing away the nest. Indeed,



*Floating a Hooded Plover egg. Photo: J. Stevenson*

initially that is what appeared to have happened. The first check after the storm revealed the nest gone. But some patient observing revealed the parents returning to a spot a couple of meters away, where two eggs were found. On floating these eggs it was realized they were late stage eggs, so they must have been from the fourth nest. It appears that a wave during the storm had just reached the nest and rolled the eggs out, but the parents managed to recover two of the three and keep going.

A few days later the two eggs hatched, and we were delighted to see two fluffy chicks taking their first steps in the world. Unfortunately, that's the end of the good news. They hatched on a Friday and the weekend was warm and sunny, bringing droves of people to the beach. Despite some early wardening, it was just too much to try and educate so many visitors that the chicks could be anywhere on the beach, not just inside the fence. The result was a day of constant disturbance by people, dogs and native predators like gulls, magpies and ravens. By Sunday the chicks were gone. Obviously, this was a very disappointing outcome after so much effort had been put into monitoring and protecting this nest by volunteers and the amazing effort the parents did in recovering the eggs post storm.

Looking to next season, the learnings clearly show the importance of signage, fencing and active volunteerism in educating others about the nesting Hoodies. Getting more volunteers onboard to help with regular monitoring, education and wardening of nests and chicks will be vital to maximize fledging opportunities for the Horse Track pair. This process has started with the local wildlife protection group, Wildlife in Sandy Point (WiSP) coming onboard and coordinating new signage, community bulletins on social media and newsletters. With more people being aware, hopefully more will get involved and take the protection of the local Hoodies under the community's collective wing and give these little beach battlers their best fighting chance next season.



*People, dogs and a Hooded Plover. Photo: J. Stevenson*

## 2022-23 BNB REPORT: CAPE CONRAN COASTAL PARK TO THE SNOWY RIVER ENTRANCE

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

Adverse weather conditions on local estuary and ocean beaches during last year's Biennial Count rendered most of the coastline unsuitable for breeding BNBs. The table below may begin to reflect a worrying trend with low numbers of birds observed and the continued impact that natural phenomena is having on these birds.



A series of major and minor flood alerts, storm surges and severe erosion over the summer period resulted in the development of wide flat ocean beaches that were constantly swept clean of any debris. The phenomenon of twin entrances suddenly appearing at the mouth of the Snowy and Yerung Rivers made both locations unsuitable as nesting sites for BNBs and in particular, Little Terns. One lonely APO nest and flagged pair of HPs ('CK' & 'WO') on 3 eggs at Conran Creek rescued our biennial survey from being a complete disaster. Local land use managers have been unable to access this area with ATVs during the summer period and as of Feb 2023 the Southern Ark fox baiting program has not recommenced.

2022 BNB Biennial Count Yeerung River west to Snowy River entrance		
Species	N <sup>os</sup>	N <sup>os</sup>
	Nov 2020	Nov 2022
Hooded Plover	12	12
Red-capped Plover	7	6
Little Tern	2	27
Australian Pied Oystercatcher	42	37
Sooty Oystercatcher	1	0

Late nesting attempts are more apparent. As of the 15<sup>th</sup> Feb '23, there are 3 pairs of HPs attempting to nest. 'CK' and 'WO' are sitting on one egg after the unknown fate of their earlier attempt. Two unflagged pairs (one at Point Ricardo and another closer to the Snowy entrance) are both incubating clutches of 3 eggs. Flagged HPs from Feb 2021 continue to remain "site loyal", however 'DP' and 'AC' both previously seen with unflagged partners before Christmas have now joined forces. Will this be a permanent arrangement or just "a flight of fancy" - only

time will tell? Having notified Parks Victoria V Orbest of our latest observations, we were heartened to see their prompt response with signs being erected the very next day.



Vigilant Hooded Plover at Point Ricardo. Photo: L. Axen



Signage en route to Point Ricardo by Parks Victoria staff. Photo: L. Axen



Jacquie and I have only recorded 1 very active and independent juvenile HP post-Christmas despite walking the entire ocean beach from the mouth of the Snowy to Cape Conran. Observations of other BNBs or their young still remain incredibly low. Predator impact remains unclear as tracks have been washed away by the time we make a return visit. What is most noticeable however is the location of the current HP nests. All are located on ridges or platforms behind the back of the beach, often on steep slopes and adjacent to or under the shelter of marram grass. If this trend continues, then future survey work and monitoring will require a completely different approach.



*Hooded Plover nest at Point Ricardo situated under Marram Grass. Photos: L. Axen*

## HOODED PLOVER REPORT MALLACOOTA 2022-23 SEASON



*White LD banded at Betka Beach as a juvenile 11/02/2021 and photographed there in a small flock of seven Hoodies 12/02/2023. Photo: M. Butterfield*

**Leonie Daws, Volunteer Regional Coordinator, Friends of the Hooded Plover East Gippsland.Vic.**

It has been a slow season locally as beach conditions have generally been unfavourable for nesting. Potential nesting site availability has been limited by high water levels and limited sandy beaches at both Mallacoota Inlet and the Betka River entrance.

The regular Betka Beach pair did find a safe period of sufficient length to raise a single chick, which fledged in early February. They now have a new nest but the Betka entrance has closed again and the site is perilously close to being inundated. No other successful nesting sites have been recorded so far this season.

On a brighter note, we have been seeing small flocks of up to ten adults fairly regularly, and two Hoodies banded here as juveniles in February 2021 have



been sighted. One banded at Seal Creek turned up at Nadgee Beach (NSW) in October 2022 and one banded at Betka Beach was seen back at Betka in February 2023.

An adult Hoodie, banded at Seal Creek in February 2021 has been seen on Rigby Island at Lakes Entrance and two adults banded at Betka Beach have been seen fairly regularly around the local Mallacoota beaches.



*Betka Beach pair's third nesting attempt now perilously close to water and almost surrounded as the lagoon fills up behind the closed entrance of the Betka River 02/03/2023. Photo: L. Daws*