



EDITION 30 – AUTUMN 2024 (Victoria update)

MALLACOOTA UPDATE 2023-24 SEASON

Leonie Daws, Volunteer Regional Coordinator, Friends of the Hooded Plover Mallacoota/Friends of Mallacoota

After two nesting failures early in the season, resulting from a fatal combination of inclement weather and high tides, the Betka Beach ocean side pair finally managed to raise two chicks to fledging at the end of February.

Our second regular nesting pair (CE White and LK White) were initially forced to abandon their preferred nesting site near the Car Park at Betka Beach, which was inundated, in favour of a site on Davis Beach where they raised two chicks. We were unable to confirm the outcome of this nest but believe both chicks fledged successfully. Later in the season they were able to return to their original nesting site following the opening of the Betka River entrance.



Adult with 2 juveniles. Photo: Leonie Daws.

Masters of the art of deception, we first became aware of this only after they had successfully hatched a second clutch of two chicks. Their secretiveness has clearly been important in their chicks' survival particularly on this beach, which continues to be popular with owners of unleashed dogs and people pumping worms for bait.

These chicks certainly survived to fledging and have brought joy to locals and visitors alike. Throughout the season a small flock of up to ten adults has been sighted from time to time along our beaches and the juveniles have continued to be seen with them.

While retrieving signs and fencing at the end of the season, we were delighted to have a couple of visitors volunteer to help carry equipment back to the car park. They were not familiar with Hooded Plovers and simply assisted out of generosity. After explaining the purpose of the fencing, we learnt that they were visiting from Mornington and were unaware of the presence of Hoodies on their own beaches. They have returned home with renewed interest.

CHANGE OF REGIONAL COORDINATOR IN FAR WEST VICTORIA

Dan Lees, Coastal Birds Program Officer, BirdLife Australia

Since 2011, Toni Ryan has served as Friends of the Hooded Plover Far West Victoria's Volunteer Regional Coordinator (VRC), demonstrating exceptional skill, particularly in managing the challenges posed by the influx of commercial racehorse trainers on the beach as well as wide-scale changes in dog leashing regulations, both of which heightened community tension. As of late, Toni has chosen to step back from her role as VRC. We owe a great deal to Toni and express profound gratitude for



Toni Ryan, Bob Brown and Grainne Maguire. Photo: Renee Mead



her tireless efforts and unwavering dedication spanning over a decade. We have been reassured by Toni that she will remaining engaged with the program keeping an eye on her local Towilla breeding pairs.

With Toni's decision to step back, we welcomed Andrew Patterson to take on the role of VRC for Friends of the Hooded Plover Far West Victoria. Since joining the program in 2020, Andrew has proven to be an invaluable asset to the region. He has eagerly responded to requests for assistance, whether it be deploying signage and fencing, monitoring nests / broods that have not been monitored for a while and checking estuaries prior to artificial openings. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to both Toni and Andrew for their dedication and contributions to the program. Thank you immensely Toni and Andrew!



Andrew Patterson. Photo provided by Andrew Patterson

TWO HOODIE PAIRS SUCCEED ON BUSY PORT FAIRY BEACH

Andrew Patterson, Volunteer Regional Coordinator, Friends of the Hooded Plover Far West Victoria

Southcombe (South) Beach is the main designated dog-walking beach in Port Fairy and is always very busy over the summer holidays with swimmers, dog walkers and sunbathers. It is also a perfect beach for Hooded Plover breeding with wide stretches of sand and plenty of seaweed.

There were two pairs of Hoodies who attempted to breed on this beach this season and ultimately fledged one chick each. The pair at the western end of the beach had five breeding attempts, laying a total of 11 eggs to get one fledgling. The pair 300 metres east had one attempt and laid one egg to get the same result. The main reasons for failures appeared to be high tides and probably predation by other birds. There was one near miss early on where a person had stepped within a few cm of an egg before we had a fence up.



Looking west from eastern end of South Beach. Photo: Andrew Patterson.



Hooded Plover chasing Silver Gull at South Beach. Photo: Andrew Patterson.

Our small but dedicated team of volunteers worked very hard on this beach to minimise the impact of people and dogs. We tried to maintain an active presence on the beach moving fences, changing signage and providing shelter when required as well as chatting to people on the beach to educate them about the Hoodies. Regular dog walkers are generally compliant and helpful, even letting us know of new sightings at times.

We have also made use of Facebook to educate the local community through the Community page as well as starting a



closed Facebook page for our own volunteers and stakeholders to keep up to date with what is happening in different parts of our region. Both initiatives have been positive in raising awareness of Hoodies in the area.

At the time of writing (second week in April) the South Beach fledglings have joined seven other local fledglings and many adults in a couple of flocks west of Port Fairy and the western pair have just laid another egg!



*Adult & chick plus chick in shelter at South Beach.
Photo: Andrew Patterson.*



*Beachgoers making the most of our signage! Photo:
Andrew Patterson.*

BIG SWELL – BIG PROBLEM!

Judy Galewski, Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover Great South West

Cape Bridgewater Hoodies have a big problem. Every September, their first nest gets washed away by a big swell. At Cape Bridgewater there is a big swell covering the entire beach every four to six weeks.

But not this breeding season. This season the Hoodies went up onto a huge limestone boulder. So, when the big swell came about two weeks later, they were sitting high and dry, as the entire beach was covered in a wild sea. High on the boulder the eggs were safe from big swells, dogs and humans. Clever birds!

By the last week in November, the Hoodies hatched three little chicks on the boulder. Somehow, they got the chicks down from the boulder, through the thick grass and onto the beach, where they thrived. Life was particularly good because the nearby car parks were closed, the boat ramps were closed and the main pedestrian access was closed while the foreshore was being redeveloped. People and dogs were directed away from the Hoodies. The Hoodie family moved onto the main beach right in front of the cafe and made it theirs.



Hoodie Nest on the Boulder at Cape Bridgewater. Photo: Judy Galewski.



Hoodie Family on the Beach. Photo: Judy Galewski.

All went well for three weeks until one of the two boat ramps reopened and boat launching resumed with vehicles driving right through the Hoodies' feeding area. The first dead chick was found in wheel tracks, obviously run over by a vehicle with a boat trailer. The following day a second dead chick was found, also in wheel tracks, but this time possibly killed by a dog.

At this point the boat ramp was closed by DEECA and the last remaining chick successfully fledged two weeks later at the beginning of December. By mid-December, the Hoodies had their second nest on the

boulder. Now the nearby car parks were open, all pedestrian access was open and then the second boat ramp was open. The Christmas holiday crowds arrived, the surf life savers set up and boats were being launched within 50 metres of the nest. After two weeks the Hoodies abandoned their boulder nest.

They retreated to the quiet, west end of the beach and two weeks later nested again. Again, they had the big problem of the swell. One egg was washed away by a big swell. Two eggs remained and two chicks hatched. One chick disappeared at the same time that a fox was seen on the beach. The last remaining chick was three weeks old when it could not be found after another big swell during the night.

So, from three nests with nine eggs, the Cape Bridgewater Hoodies fledged one chick. Life is so tough on the beach!

BELLERINE PENINSULA UPDATE

Jennifer Carr, Julie Riley, Jennie Turner, Pam Addie and Carol Poutsie, Volunteers, Friends of the Hooded Plover Bellarine

Jennifer Carr (Barwon Heads):

Volunteering for the Friends of the Bellarine Hooded Plover Group has come with some great outcomes over the years, as well as disappointment and frustration at the lack of care and concern shown by some. This year was quite relaxing compared to others, as UU White and KW White nested at the end of the beach near the Barwon Heads Bridge, where it's easier to control pedestrian traffic on the beach. But people floated across the estuary on paddle boards from the Barwon Heads side to the roped off area. One family did this and started playing beach cricket in the habitat! The roped off area was popular for many birds, Crested Terns, Silver Gulls, 3 Sooty Oystercatchers and the Hooded Plovers. Unfortunately, the Hooded Plover chicks only survived for a few days. It's great a few chicks have survived on other beaches around Geelong this season.



Signage near Barwon Heads Bridge. Photo: Jennifer Carr.



Julie Riley and Jennie Turner (Breamlea):



ZB, ZL and LB at Pt Impossible. ZB is a fledgling from Bukareeyoo. Photo: Ian McConchie.

Black Rock pair (BJ White and unb) had no luck this season, nor new young pair (LB White and ZL White) first time nesting at Pt. Impossible estuary. Success, though, for a Red-capped Plover colony breeding for the first time in decades, producing at least four fledglings. Another highlight was being involved with hosting students from Nagoya, Japan at Bukareeyoo.

When a single chick hatched at the Point Impossible Nudist beach to seasoned parents, dad JM Orange (after John Murray) and unbanded mum, we ventured across the creek along with other Bellarine volunteers. Fledging is imminent and our Surf Coast buddies have been very grateful for the support.

Pam Addie (Point Lonsdale):

Against all odds I was privileged to witness two Hooded Plover chicks hatch on the 5th January 2024 at the end of the Point Lonsdale Life Saving Club Vehicle Access Ramp. I watched them leave the nest and negotiate deep footprints in the sand as Mum kept returning to her nest to check for more chicks. The buzz of this miracle was amazing with even the lifesaving crew and beachgoers taking an active role in protecting them. Sadly, the chicks didn't survive for more than several days.

Carole Poustie:

My phone has been dinging with a lot of WhatsApp notifications over summer but I never mind because it usually signals someone from FoHP Bellarine is out on the beach trying to give a Hoodie chick a greater chance of survival.

'...6.50am. No sign of eggs...'

'...Nankeen kestrel my end...'

'...I'll try to replace the signage that was pulled out by someone...'

'...just saw a person with a dog coming down...spotted me and went back!'

The life of a Hoodie volunteer is never dull!



Hoodie Parent with chick. Photo: Pam Addie.



BASS COAST TRICKSTERS, A COUPLE OF OLD TIMERS & TWINS FROM THE REEF

Janine Thomas, Warwick Mears and David Hartney, Volunteer Beach Leaders, Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast

The more remote beaches of the western end of the Bass Coast continued to produce the goods with 10 fledglings so far this season.

One pair (NV White and unb) along the Kilcunda-Powlett River stretch, continue to amaze volunteers with their tricky parenting behaviour and success at fledging chicks (a total of 6 fledges from 4 chick events since they began at the Paperbark Track site in 2018/2019). This season was no exception, taking 3 weeks post hatching before their 2 (now fledged) chicks were first spotted. Before this sighting, when approached on different occasions, the vigilant parents exhibited a range of behaviours including leading, roosting casually on the beach and mixing with the neighbouring pair. Perhaps this stretch of beach, where there is an absence of rocky platforms to retreat to with their chicks, requires parenting strategies of confounding behaviours and keeping the chicks hidden in the foredune for longer than usual periods!



NV White tricksters fledglings. Photo: Janine Thomas.

In the Cape Paterson/Harmers Haven sector, there was one fledge, but more unbanded birds were flagged. One, a 'metal only' banded bird, was recaptured and flagged AP White. Amazingly, AP White is 17 years old, fledged from Phillip Island in 2007 but now calls Harmer's home and has been breeding there since 2011.



KK Orange. Photo: David Hartney.

Still going strong, this season it had 6 nests and 11 eggs but sadly no chicks! Popular Bass Coast Hoodie, KK Orange (also known as Stumpy) is 14 years old and is starting to show her age, with grey, mottled feathers appearing on her hood. She lost the foot in a fishing line entanglement but has managed to keep going, producing 5 fledges to date. She returned this season to her very first breeding site after several years absence and partnering with the bird that moved her off initially!

At the east end of the Bass Coast, two chicks fledged at Twin Reefs to 13 Yellow and unb in what has been a challenging year from a range of threats and disturbances. 13 Yellow moves about this section of coast and had a fledge last season on the nearby Oaks beach. The local FoHP volunteers have worked hard raising public awareness with information stalls, public presentations and a stand at the Inverloch Expo, teaming up with BirdLife Bass Coast to publicise all things avian.



Twin Reef pair. Photo: Peter Hudson.



SURF COAST BREEDING SEASON REPORT

Janice Carpenter, Volunteer Regional Coordinator, Friends of the Hooded Plover Surf Coast

We have had the best results in recent history with five chicks fledging this breeding season!

Unusually for the Surf Coast, a chick at Pt Roadknight fledged before Christmas. We were so pleased that the chick was flying before the crowds arrived for the Christmas holidays.



*Flocking Hoodies at Pt Roadknight West.
Photo: Bron Ives*

Then we experienced a surprise when RA White and his unbanded partner moved from their usual nesting area at Moggs Creek to Lorne. This was the first time in the recording of Hooded Plover nests that a pair has settled at Lorne. Initially we didn't have much hope that the nest would produce chicks because the beach at Lorne is so busy and there were no volunteers in Lorne to protect the nest. Soon however the people of Lorne rose to the challenge and 27 volunteers offered to assist. GORCAPA the land managers, decided that such a busy beach needed a People and Dog Exclusion Zone. Excluding people from a section of the beach was possible as there was a walking track behind the beach that was easy for beach goers to use. The chicks survived New Year's Eve Fireworks, the Pier to Pub crowds and Surf Carnivals. Two chicks fledged at the beginning of February.

There was no time for our guardians to rest as immediately the Lorne juveniles were flying LM Orange and unbanded were back at Pt Roadknight with a new nest and eventually three chicks. A People and Dog Exclusion Zone was established which made the work of the Guardians much easier. Unfortunately, only one chick eventually fledged the others having been taken by unknown predators.

Our final success was at Pt Impossible, Torquay. The pair, JM Orange nested on the beach west of the point. Our guardians had the interesting task of protecting the family from off leach dogs on a nudist beach. Congratulations to all those who helped for braving some unusual situations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Beach-nesting Birds program is funded by a diverse range of funding sources and each year we apply for new grants and opportunities to develop new resources, carry out targeted research or to provide support to volunteers and key regions. Donors, grants and philanthropists make the program possible, and we often leverage small funding to go for bigger grants to achieve special projects.

Thank you to Felicity Hoff, our fabulous volunteer who assisted with the production of this newsletter.