



EDITION 30 – AUTUMN 2024 (South Australia update)

## HOODED PLOVERS DISCOVERED BREEDING ON INLAND SALT LAKES ON EYRE PENINSULA

Rachael Kannussaar, Landscape Officer, Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board

During the winter of 2020 and 2022, the Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board conducted surveys of inland salt lake sites to explore and confirm the use of these inland habitats by Hooded Plovers during the non-breeding season. These surveys were completed as part of the Board's Saltmarsh Threat Abatement and Recovery Project, funded by the Australian Government through the National Landcare Program. Many of these inland salt lake systems are privately owned, with access requiring landholder permission.

Surveys were completed in May revealing Hooded Plovers were present at these locations during the non-breeding season. Hooded Plover flocks of up to 23 birds (including juveniles, sub-adults and adults) were observed at six of the seven inland salt lake systems surveyed. What was not evident at the time, was the potential value of these areas on Eyre Peninsula during the breeding season.



*Three-egg nest confirmed adjacent an inland salt lake. Photo: Sandra Wallace.*

The Eastern population of Hooded Plovers typically do not breed away from the coastline and are characterised by being strictly coastal, nesting on beaches and in nearby dune systems adjacent to high energy coasts, unlike the western population which have been documented to breed on the shores of inland salt lakes (MyHoodie resource, 2012). A volunteer found a pair of Hooded Plovers suspected of nesting on an inland salt lake more than 15km from the ocean. The source was reliable and the photos didn't lie. Eyre Peninsula had its first inland Hooded Plover nest reported and confirmed in November 2023. A three egg nest was located on a clay spit dividing two salt lakes amongst small samphire plants and woody remnants from plants, in a very shallow scrape. The adults were observed on the lakes edge and in the shallow lakes feeding, during monitoring visits.

In late November 2023, three chicks successfully hatched and were recorded. Unfortunately, two chicks were lost within the first week of hatching. With one chick remaining, a brazen fox was observed traversing the spit dividing the two salt lakes. The adults immediately had the chick crouch and the chick seemed to survive this encounter.



*Hooded Plover adult incubation. Photo: Sandra Wallace.*



*Fox spotted adjacent to salt lake breeding territory. Photo: Sandra Wallace.*



Silver Gulls and Swamp Harriers were also observed during monitoring visits. Sadly, the third chick was gone by day 14. While we cannot be 100% certain, based on the interest the fox showed in the area it is likely the chick loss is due to the presence of a fox. The pair quickly nested again, with their second nest reported close to the first location, in late December 2023. The two egg nest failed two weeks later for unknown reasons.

Unlike beach environments, prints are often not left behind in these wetland environments. As a result, locating the nest site to confirm status required the careful use of landmarks to ensure this could be done safely. If the volunteer had not spotted the Hooded Plover sitting for a period of time, this nesting activity would likely have gone unnoticed.



*Three chicks spotted. Photo: Sandra Wallace.*

Confirming Hooded Plovers can and are nesting inland on Eyre Peninsula is an exciting discovery, with these habitats largely protected from access by the general public. The risk of vehicle and dog disturbance is also reduced when compared to Eyre Peninsula's coastal nesting habitat. Monitoring the inland nesting attempt has revealed that despite the absence of some key threats present in our coastal environments, threats such as gulls, birds of prey and foxes remain and will have an ongoing impact on the success of breeding into the future. This information will help guide future management decisions and communication with landholders should Hooded Plovers be found nesting inland again. We certainly hope they are back nesting during the next breeding season.

## ADAPTATION AND FRIENDS - KEYS TO SUCCESS!

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



*Stokes Bay Hooded Plover 'XA Right White' released after banding. Photo: Natasha Verspeek.*

Stokes Bay's Hooded Plovers breed on a picturesque, safe family beach voted "Australia's Best Beach" in 2023. It's challenging on such a popular stretch and the pair's first two attempts this season failed.

In late October one bird was banded and flagged XA White by the Beach-nesting Birds team, making it easier to follow the pair's movements. Despite regular checking over following weeks, they weren't sighted again on the main beach. Five weeks after banding, local volunteer Becky spotted XA White and partner with 3 small chicks on the rocky beach out from the café and caravan park. Looks like XA White and partner decided to move to a different spot, nearly 1km away. As far as we know the pair hasn't nested there before but their risk paid off. Their brood flourished without disturbance and in late December all three chicks were spotted, fully fledged, flying along the main beach. A great adaptation!





Volunteers have been adapting too. After finding extensive damage by hoon drivers in the Middle River estuary at Snellings Beach, local volunteer Caroline decided to rope off vehicle access to the estuary. This is a “vehicles prohibited” zone without a barrier and is where the Hoodies usually breed. Caroline strongly suspected chicks, but sadly when next monitored the chicks had failed. The pair looked like trying again, so the fence was left in place. Surprisingly, the rope fence and signs proved effective at restricting vehicle access, with no further evidence of driving in the estuary. A big thanks to beachgoers for respecting this change.



*A beach visitor kindly helped rope off the “No Vehicles” area at Snellings Beach. Photo: Caroline Paterson.*

Adaptation has been more difficult for the Hog Bay Hoodies at Penneshaw. Usually successful on this busy beach, all four breeding attempts this season failed due to chick predation and disturbance.



*Cruise visitor and local volunteer Bruce (right) at Hog Bay Beach with cruise ship and ferry offshore. Photo: Jean Turner.*

Penneshaw is the transport and passenger gateway to Kangaroo Island, including cruise ships. Unfortunately, cruise season coincides with Hooded Plover breeding season. Thirty cruise ships landed passengers this summer. Most passengers spend the day around Penneshaw, including a walk on the beach. With an average of 2,300 passengers per ship, that’s a lot of extra people walking past the Hoodies.

To off-set disturbance pressure, local volunteers spent some cruise ship days on the beach, talking with passengers and diverting them away from the Hoodies. Amazingly, everyone supported our efforts to protect the birds. But we dropped our guard just as the birds started their fourth clutch,

two days before the next cruise ship. Luckily some volunteers visiting from Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast walked the beach that Sunday morning, spotted the Hoodies and found their new nest underway.

Huge thanks to Steve and Julie for phoning Kasun, relocating our rope fence and signs (from the recently abandoned third nest) and alerting me to their find. HD White and partner steadfastly incubated that clutch but tragically the un-banded bird disappeared just before hatching. The nest was abandoned, leaving HD White to mope alone.



*The Laver family ferrying signs across Harriet River at Vivonne Bay! Photos: Deb Laver.*

At Vivonne Bay the Laver family is nurturing our next generation of Hoodie Friends. When they found a new nest in the summer holidays the whole family helped to ferry signs, rope and stakes across the Harriet River and install them around the nest. One family protecting another!



New threats are always on the horizon, but our KI Hoodies can get by with some adaptations and a little help from their friends!



## FRIENDS OF THE HOODED PLOVER SOUTH COAST FLEURIEU 2023-24

### David and Sue Thorn, Volunteers, Friends of the Hooded Plover South Coast (Fleurieu)

Despite a downturn in fledged chicks, our volunteers continued to work hard for our Hoodies.

Kasun with help from Kerri and several volunteers banded five Hoodies. Some of these newly flagged Hoodies then changed territories, so it will be interesting to see where these flagged birds finally settle for the coming breeding season.

HC White male, fledged and banded in the 2019-20 season at the Hindmarsh River Mouth was found with two chicks on the South-eastern side of the Murray Mouth on the ocean beach earlier this season. We were saddened to find this Hoodie dead on the Surf beach section of Bashams beach. Necropsy results showing extensive bruising of its back. We had another banded Hoodie HJ White found dead in the same vicinity this season.



*Central Victor Site. 7 fledglings over the past 3 Breeding Seasons. Photo: David Thorn.*



*Remote Tunkalilla Beach with the ultimate in vehicle security entry for which we have a key. Photo: Sue Thorn.*

On the South Coast Fleurieu we have two distinct areas, Urban sites, with seven pairs of Hoodie and Remote beach sites with nine Hoodie pairs.

The Urban sites had a huge influx of visiting walkers with and without dogs and as we all find it doesn't matter how many signs, large or small, many people don't stop to read them. We have managed two fledglings from the Victor Central Site.

We had hoped that Tunkalilla beach (remote) with its four pairs of Hoodies would be a winner for fledglings this season, but though we found 36 eggs only two hatched and one of those fledged.

At the Tokuremoar West site, the pair TT Orange and SV White have had four nest attempts, the second and fourth producing chicks. Their 4<sup>th</sup> attempt was sited in a twenty-four/seven, dogs off-leash area. This was fenced, signed and banners placed widely to inform the walkers of the breeding site. Though we had great interest and respect from most dog walkers, sadly the last fourteen-day old chick was witnessed being taken by an off-leash dog. Wildlife Welfare Organization Goolwa took the chick into care and after treatment from Doctor Fowler who is a bird specialist vet, the chicks injuries were extensive, and it did not survive.

We provided a submission for the Victor Harbor Council's proposed High Biodiversity Protected Areas to have dogs on leash 24/7 in the two estuaries found in the Victor Harbor city's boundaries. After public consultation, there were two foredune areas close to the estuaries coming under these changes, but not the estuaries themselves.



*Remote Callawonga Beach with a fox highway, interspersed with Hoodie tracks. Photo: David Thorn.*





## MINDA BEACH - LAZY CHICKS AND STALKING FOX

John Cobb, Volunteer Regional Coordinator, Friends of the Hooded Plover Adelaide Metro

The “Seacliff” pair chose to nest here for the first recorded time and were plagued from the outset by resident foxes; dens within the privately owned property were repeatedly fumigated, but foxes observed every day. Three chicks hatched very early in the season which were renowned for their inactivity; we have multiple photographs of them using shelters, sleeping, resting – all very boring and raising questions about diet and health or were they just too fat and lazy to do anything?

Our ongoing concern about their survival peaked at hatching plus 33 days when the remaining two chicks were doing their thing – sleeping on the beach - with a fox lying close-by obviously stalking them. Chased away, the fox was later observed watching the birds from the dunes before being chased away a second time before disappearing into bushes and the storm-drain system.



*Sleeping Chicks. Photo: John Cobb.*



*Licensed fox trapper, installing trap. Photo: John Cobb.*

With consultation with BirdLife Australia and the local land manager, the urgency of the situation was discussed and a last resort emergency management intervention was implemented. Roast chickens! Roast chickens were purchased and sections placed in drains and the rear of the dunes as a decoy – the theory being that foxes could be encouraged to feed away from the beach and leave our chicks alone! Our bait was taken and later repeated, with agreement from the land manager, this time in a monitored cage, without success.

Our two lazy chicks were the first recorded fledglings nationally this season and unusually, were permitted by parents to stay until after the second set of eggs hatched.

We think the first nationally recorded nest for the season (July) marked the beginning of a long struggle for RT White and partner at the Torrens River Mouth: eggs eaten by lizards, eggs inundated by sand and later recovered, and chicks lost to Silver Gulls. Four unsuccessful breeding attempts are possibly attributable to the popularity of the area to predators and competition with a breeding group of Red-capped Plovers and, in an apparent attempt to avoid threats and/or competition, the family swam across the river outlet in a futile attempt to find security.



Off-leash dogs are always a concern, and BirdLife Australia were invited to participate in a “Doggy Day on the Beach” event organised by the local Council to coincide with the introduction of “Daylight Saving” which marks the beginning of general dog leashing requirements. The event was well attended and gave volunteers the opportunity to network with many local dogwalkers who were required to visit every stall to qualify for a prize.



*Doggy day on the beach. Photos John Cobb.*

*Note added by the Beach-nesting Birds team: The management intervention of ‘free feeding’ foxes was only implemented after much consideration for this unique situation. BirdLife Australia do not broadly endorse free feeding foxes as a management intervention without further investigation into the risks and scenarios, and this decision was made with multiple experts (including fox experts) consulting on the potential impacts this may have.*

## PORT VICTORIA, YORKE PENINSULA 2023/24 SEASON

Carol Black and Lea Papworth, Volunteers, Friends of the Hooded Plover Yorke Peninsula

“Pete and Vicky” (nicknames for the pair at Jetty south, Port Victoria) arrived when it was still deadlly cold in late August. They would both walk in front of me leading off in all directions, then for 2 weeks it was only one of them. I was worried one had been lost to a predator, then they both reappeared on a windy day 23/9/23 as did three fluff balls emerging from the salt bush on the beach. They put up with some horrid weather and the three stayed three, great success! Finally, they all fledged on or around 16th October with the parents letting them stay for a couple of weeks and then moved them on having a new nest with four eggs, found on 4/11/23.



*Second nest, 4 eggs. Photo: Carol Black.*





On the 6/12/23, four fluff balls ran out to take cover under a salt bush, but one came back out, being a brave little rogue. Their first days seemed to be in the bushes or close to them. Despite a most dreadful weekend of bad weather, somehow the parents managed to keep the chicks warm, protected and feeding. Really high tides, blasting wind and rain didn't stop them! The parents must have been freezing with their feathers wet as they stood with wings held out and little legs protruded out below them.

The four made it through the weather, but Rogue chick hadn't learnt chick behaviour. Three chicks would tuck themselves against rocks perfectly camouflaged or hide in weed. Rogue would run up the beach with the parents only stopping to hide when they had out run him. Sadly, at about 3 weeks one chick disappeared, I assume Rogue's adventurousness didn't end well. The three chicks took a bit longer to make their first flight around 1<sup>st</sup> December but all three made it from fluff ball to perfect pale versions of their parents. They stayed much longer than the previous chicks and the parents still protected them even though they flew quite well.



*One of our four fluff balls! Photo: Carol Black.*



*Pete & Vicky, formidable parents! Photo: Carol Black.*

Pete and Vicky proved to be amazing strong protective parents with 6 out of 7 chicks fledge this season. The Volunteers regularly checking the beaches, monitoring nests, adding signs and banners certainly helps enormously. Educating the many people visiting our beaches certainly is making a difference to chick survival, luckily this particular beach doesn't have any vehicle access but dogs and feral cats are a constant threat.

The other 3 beaches at Pt Victoria had some success this season but we are particularly proud of these two Hoodies.

## BEST EVER CHRISTMAS PRESENT!!

Wendy White, Volunteer Regional Coordinator, Friends of the Hooded Plover Fleurieu Peninsula Central

After many years of very little success at Shelley Beach on the Fleurieu we were amazed to watch 3 chicks from the same clutch fledge two days before Christmas. In the middle of October some volunteers were lucky enough to see the adult pair mate, after which they washed and played in the small creek at the beginning of the beach. They seemed so happy! Shelley Beach is a dog free beach, although there are often dogs accompanying fishermen or swimmers, however the family took themselves down to the southern end of the beach and stayed amongst the rocks until they could fly. In the past 12



*One of the juveniles. Photo: Kerri Duncan.*



years this beach has only produced 4 fledglings, even though it seems an ideal spot for Hoodies. The volunteers did an excellent job of monitoring this family and we also have to thank the shack owners who always keep an eye out for them when they are in residence. The pair at Carrickalinga North did not waste much time earlier in the season and we had 2 fledglings from the same clutch. The last fledgling from this site was in 2016!

In February we held a Paint 'n Sip fundraiser at Yankalilla, where we got to paint the amazing Hoodie family from Shelley Beach. There were 10 budding artists under the supervision of local artist Jen Biscoe. We all had a great time and with the amount of food left over I think everyone forgot to eat. However, they certainly finished the bubbles. We raised \$200 for the local Hooded Plover population and were surprised at our achievements.



*Shelley Beach triplets. Photo: Chris Fitzgerald.*



*Paint & sip fundraiser. Photo: Jen Bisco*

## SOUTH EAST 2023/24 HOODIE REPORT

Cath Bell, Senior Ranger, Lower Limestone Coast (Robe), National Parks and Wildlife Service

Some interesting Hoodie happenings in South East SA with a reasonably successful nesting season, particularly around the Robe area.

The local legends at Long Beach have had a successful breeding event for the fourth season running, with 'HX' chick fledging in January. Best news was another nest found in early February by volunteers who arrived to pack up the exclusion fencing only to find a new nest being incubated inside the exclusion zone! The 2 eggs hatched during the heat wave (thank goodness for chick shelters!) and currently still have both chicks which are due to fledge 14<sup>th</sup> April 2024.



*HX and parents, using the chick shelters, Long Beach.  
Photo: E. Blythman.*





Two chicks at Wrights Bay (12km North of Robe) were banded on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024 and are due to fledge 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024. Interestingly, a pair re-laid their second clutch inside the exclusion fence after losing their clutch during the busy January period. It's likely that the breeding pair carefully chose the site for its preferred attributes. The fence is in their preferred location and it is interesting that there is a common pattern of nesting pairs in this area. Choosing to re-lay a new clutch inside an area where cars, people and dogs are excluded. Coincidence?? You tell me!



*EM fledgling from young parent HV. Photo: E. Blythman.*

Another exciting event this season was the fledging of 'EM' from a nest in a nearby Conservation Park on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2024 (12km South of Robe). The most interesting fact was that one of the parent birds was 'HV'. HV was one of 3 chicks which fledged on 8 February 2023, so the bird has successfully fledged its first chick in 12 months! Now that is a good news story for population recruitment!

One last interesting story from this area - 'ZH' a fledgling from West Beach (Robe) in 2022 was found with 2 small chicks by volunteers at Rivoli Bay (55km South). This beach also had another pair nesting with chicks at the same time. Unfortunately, ZH chicks disappeared not long after the nest was found and the other nest was also unsuccessful, despite volunteers doing their best to keep signs up despite some unsupportive people who kept driving over them.

The Hoodies also had to deal with very high tides and a highly trafficked beach.

To see more about our Hoodies visit our Facebook page: [@robeneibourhoodie](https://www.facebook.com/robeneibourhoodie)

## ONKAPARINGA REGION

Kerri Duncan, Volunteer Regional Coordinator, Northern Onkaparinga Beaches

Sellicks Beach was the scene of a tragedy later in the season, when a dead juvenile Hoodie was found between the tracks of a car. Reported by regular beach walkers to a volunteer, it was yet another example of the havoc that speeding drivers on beaches can have on our vulnerable wildlife. A necropsy found that blunt force trauma was the cause of death, suggesting impact with a travelling car rather than being run over.

But it wasn't all bad news in this area. On December 12<sup>th</sup>, a chick lovingly known as "Lighty" became the first Aldinga chick to fledge in the last eight years! The joy was doubled in February when newly banded XN White and partner produced a second successful fledgling at the adjacent site of Snapper Point!



*Lighty. Photo: Dianne Randall.*



The powerhouse pairs at Port Willunga managed to reach a whopping five fledglings this year and it was mostly from the superstars Harvey (HV Orange) and partner. They beat all records for one pair in one season by producing four fledglings from two successful clutches, out of an attempted total of four. YL White and partner raised the fifth fledgling at Port Willunga (Chinaman Gully) in early December, the only chick to have hatched from its clutch of eggs.



*Superstar Harvey. Photo: Kerri Duncan.*

The Port Willunga crew faced many battles to achieve these victories, including several problematic members of the public. These were countered by a swath of new Hoodie fans, cheering on the efforts of our dedicated volunteers. A chick from Harvey's second clutch was found tragically squashed at Blanche Point, and one of its siblings was seen with a drooping wing in January. We all feared the worst for the little guy, but after consulting a vet, the team watched and documented its progress, sending in regular photos and videos for analysis. The loving parents kept a close eye on it as well and although it fledged a little later than usual, it eventually showed strong flight skills and was considered a success.

Harvey and partner currently adorn the backgrounds of all Onkaparinga Library staff computers, an honour that is well deserved. There is not enough space available to effectively honour all the efforts and hours given by the volunteers across the Onkaparinga region to give our Hoodies the chances they need to succeed.



*Harvey and partner adorn Onkaparinga Library staff desktops. Photo: Kerri Duncan.*

## 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.