

# Word about the Hood

Biannual newsletter of BirdLife Australia's Beach-nesting Birds Program

Edition 24 – Summer 2020



## UPDATE FROM THE BEACH-NESTING BIRDS TEAM

Dr Grainne Maguire, Coastal Birds Program Leader, BirdLife Australia

2020 has been a year we are probably quite keen to see the end of! It was a big change for us all, particularly the Melbourne-based team, to switch our work method and go largely online for everything. 'Teams' and 'Zoom' meetings, shared documents in 'OneDrive' and 'Sharepoint', and even communicating via old fashioned post! Our regional coordinators also learnt to use various platforms so we could connect with each other, which in some ways has connected us more than ever before, particularly with people who live in remote parts of Australia. It was really nice to login to meetings or online workshops and see faces that we'd usually only get to see once every few years. We even presented at an international online conference this year, sharing our efforts to overcome one of our biggest challenges, off leash dogs in important shorebird areas, with people from all over the world, including Bangladesh, Korea, Canada, USA and China. The feedback was that this was a challenge all over the world, and it was good to share ideas.

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant some changes to the way we carry out our activities and we have a new risk assessment that works to mitigate any risks so that all our volunteers and staff are safe. Please make sure you have a thorough read of this.

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AUSTRALIA

The breeding season began early this year, with lots of Hooded Plover nesting activity in August and September, and hatching success earlier than the norm for some regions. This is a contrast to the past two seasons, where we had quite a slow start and the bulk of chicks weren't until the peak summer period. This sets us up well, with some fledglings already on the 'tally', meaning we may have a much-needed good season this year, particularly for Victoria. For the past few seasons, Victoria has not met fledging targets and this could mean that we begin to see declines occurring again down the track. After 14 years of halting extinction and seeing the population trajectory begin to climb again, it would be disappointing to see our conservation progress stall. Why is this? It is because threats are escalating at a faster pace than our small-scale efforts, and while we have ruled out some threats almost completely (e.g. human nest crushing) and have even increased 'survival days' of nests or chicks by mitigating the most prevalent and early operating threats, we now have some of the most challenging threats left to figure out how to overcome.

We also have new and emerging threats. One of these is coastal armouring. Sand carting and sea walls are threatening key habitats, and becoming common solutions (or stop-gaps) for bracing the coast against rising tides and eroding beaches. Due to the poor planning decisions of the past (infrastructure built close to or within the dunes), coastal managers are now turning to annual sand replenishment or building rock groynes and sea walls to protect houses, roads and even to stop rubbish tips falling into the sea. Sadly, some of the most valuable habitats are under threat from these actions. We are working hard to educate coastal managers of the indirect threats as well as direct threats of these actions, as well as to work towards alternative solutions. Another key challenge is the absence of a strategic and standardised approach to regulating access to critical habitat. Here there may be mechanisms within state-wide legislation for the protection of threatened species or more broadly wildlife habitat, and we are working to explore how these can be feasibly activated. And finally, the impacts of native avian predators (ravens, magpies and silver gulls) are a real concern for a number of sites where numbers of these predators have become so great and their foraging strategies so efficient, that they are becoming a major barrier to fledging success. Next year we will begin trials exploring conditioned taste aversion with ravens as one potential solution.

While we continue to strive to improve our conservation outcomes, we cannot overlook the fantastic successes the program continues to have, largely because of the invaluable support from our volunteers, program partners and many coastal communities. Below are just some of this year's achievements:

- Lockdown ended just in time for the Eastern Hooded Plover biennial count and count coverage is looking fantastic! Special thanks to Kangaroo Island, East Gippsland and Southern NSW participants who attempted to survey many fire-affected areas with challenging logistics.
- We held our first Conservation Action Planning workshop in WA, bringing together active participants in Hooded Plover monitoring and coastal management to identify key threats and management actions urgently needed.
- An injured chick was successfully rehabilitated and released on the Fleurieu Peninsula.
- Plover Appreciation Day reached 2.6 M people on Social Media with 58,517 interactions!
- Development of a new resource for boaters and fishers to assist with identifying birds in the bays and inlets of Victoria, and to encourage participation in reporting sightings of the critically endangered Fairy Tern.
- The Colonial Nesting birds data form went live on Birddata this year – this is a restricted access form for collecting nesting data on colonies of terns.
- Development of a local council toolkit for councils on the Yorke Peninsula to assist in identifying any issues or risks to beach-nesting birds (to be adapted for other regions)
- Development of a compliance reporting flowchart for Victoria to assist volunteers in reporting breaches of compliance and ensuring their information reaches the right people
- Our new online Beach-nesting Birds Hub, a centralised location for information, training inductions, event notifications and contacts, went live
- Development of new training courses for specialised research or management techniques
- Over 1000 registrants for our online Coastal Birds workshop series. We will continue to provide an online course each year, in addition to face-to-face, as we realise that it makes it more accessible.
- Friends of the [Hooded Plover Mornington Peninsula](#) and [Surf Coast](#) started new Facebook pages which are highly engaging, please follow!

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## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

The 8<sup>th</sup> National Beach-nesting Birds Conference will be held Thursday May 6<sup>th</sup> to Sunday May 9<sup>th</sup> 2021 in Moonta, on the Yorke Peninsula SA. We will be keeping a close eye on COVID-19 restrictions that may be in place. If the pandemic situation escalates, the conference may be postponed. We will keep you updated in the coming months of conference planning progress.

## **VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT**

Nanou Cabourdin, Volunteer with Friends of the Hooded Plover Yorke Peninsula

### **What made you want to volunteer on the Beach-nesting Birds Project and when did you start?**

I moved to Yorke Peninsula in May 2017, then in December I spotted eggs on a busy beach right in the middle of a sailboat launch. From the sign that was at the entrance, I guessed it could be the eggs of an endangered Hooded Plover, a bird which I knew nothing about beforehand. After contacting the council, they put me in touch with Janet Moore (who has been really supportive) who told me that there was going to be training with Kasun Ekanayake from BirdLife Australia happening very soon, and Kasun trained me on the best practices to monitor these little birds (he is a world of knowledge).



Photo supplied by: Nanou Cabourdin.

I was really taken by the resilience of these birds, not only do they have to surmount extreme nature events and natural and introduced predators, but also to cope with the impact of human use of their habitat. I also just experienced a sudden personal loss, and helping these little birds to survive in turn helped me to overcome my grief.

So, this is my fourth season looking after them.

### **Whereabouts on the coast do you volunteer?**

My base is at Point Turton on the southern end of Yorke Peninsula but as we don't have enough volunteers around to cover all the coastline, I do sometimes visit other sites like Hardwick Bay, Port Moorowie and Innes National Park. In any new area I visit, I am always on the lookout for Hoodies and also Red-capped Plovers and Oystercatchers who suffer the same predicament.

### **What sort of activities do you undertake as a volunteer?**

In South Australia, unfortunately Four-wheel drives can access the beaches, so it is imperative to fence and put-up warning signs at nests as soon as they are found. I try to put up update signs with photos sharing the progress of the eggs/ chicks to involve the public. I distribute flyers to rented shacks and talk to walkers (mainly ones with dogs) so people are more aware of the presence of the Hooded Plovers. I must say that I have seen a positive increase of awareness of their plight.



(Maybe because we actually have Hooded Plovers nesting close to busy Adelaide beaches and they are often in the news).

### **What has been one of your highlights whilst being a BirdLife Australia Friends of the Hooded Plover volunteer?**

After 2 seasons of heartaches, seeing eggs and chicks disappearing for one reason or another (one pair tried unsuccessfully to lay a clutch 7 times), last season (19/20) I saw 3 chicks in Point Turton reach the safer fledging stage! What an exciting moment!

It was mainly due to the fact that part of the beach usually accessed by cars was closed because of dredging work (it shows you that we don't need much to turn around their future). I have asked the council to organise a seasonal close of this section again and they are looking into it..... fingers crossed!

I also love meeting other volunteers in Yorke Peninsula who are really dedicated. Another highlight was the National BirdLife Conference in Inverloch, Victoria. Really nice to meet like-minded people and also really informative. You should never stop learning, and now my interest in birds has broadened to other birds, like shorebirds that travel thousands of kilometres to migrate to our shore.

Also, after spending 25 years working behind a computer, being a volunteer helped me reconnect to nature and made me more aware of the importance to look after it and in return it made me much fitter.



Photo: Nanou Cabourdin.

[Lucinda Plowman, Melbourne Metro Office Volunteer, BirdLife Australia](#)



Lucinda (selfie) on Clonmel island (left); Grainne, Lucinda, Sonia & Emma releasing Hooded Plovers (right), photo Renee Mead.

### **What made you want to volunteer on the Beach-nesting Birds Project and when did you start?**

I was a Wildlife and Conservation Biology student at Deakin Uni a few years ago. My professor Mike Weston, had a guest speaker from BirdLife Australia for one of the unit's lectures, it turned out to be Grainne! I graduated with my degree, travelled overseas and came home unemployed. Whilst looking for a job I had remembered Grainne's lecture- she seemed nice ☺- and emailed BirdLife for volunteer work to help fill the void of unemployment. Grainne assumed I was going to monitor birds on the beach; however, I don't live on

the coast and couldn't monitor regularly. I replied asking for data/office-based volunteer tasks. Grainne replied quickly, can you come in next week?! That was February 2017 and I am still here!

### **Whereabouts on the coast do you volunteer?**

I volunteer in the Melbourne Metro office with the rest of the team 😊. I have travelled with the team across Victoria and South Australia over the years, and have been lucky enough to be a part of two BNB Conferences and helped with the Biennial Count monitoring between Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale where my family vacations every summer.

### **What sort of activities do you undertake as a volunteer?**

I am mostly sedentary doing data work. Helping with nesting summaries, camera photos, collating the Word about the Hood newsletter. Trying to help organise, what feels like an infinite number of files on the BNB desktop, transferring field and workshop paperwork to excel and updating contact files. I do get to head out of the office here and there for banding trips, workshops, monitoring or educational programs which is always a delight.

### **What has been one of your highlights whilst being a BirdLife Australia Friends of the Hooded Plover volunteer?**

There are a couple of highlights throughout the nearly four years of volunteering. Only a few months in to being a volunteer I was amazed to have my trip to South Australia for the Conference covered by BirdLife Australia. I didn't even expect to be invited! I was very chuffed. On my first banding trip it was awesome to see the team in their element, they love being in the field, always educating me on the program, which bird is okay to catch, how to catch a bird, what to do when you have the bird, why the measurements, blood collection, faecal collection, photo id and banding is important. At the end of a long day, after walking in the sun, wind and sand we were finishing up with our last bird, when Grainne let me release the Hooded Plover! It was an awesome end to the day; I was very happy.

Earlier this year I was on another banding trip, we were hoping to catch and band a juvenile on Nude Beach. The juvenile had been difficult to catch and we had made a few attempts to catch but had to leave and come back. Luckily, we had enough time for another attempt later in the day. Dan gives me the chance to herd this juvenile, I had watched the others catch hoodies for the last two days but I was very nervous! It is quite a skill to be able to read the bird, what distance, direction and pace to push the bird forward so that it walks through a trap when it could easily fly away, BYE! Especially when other birds are around and can influence the desired target or be caught instead of the bird you wish to catch! There is a lot going on! And I got the little guy in the trap!!! That was a pretty spectacular feeling. Lastly, a highlight for me is that my mum loves the BNB team so much, she is very proud of my involvement and think they are fantastic so will tell strangers that I work there!

## **LAND MANAGER SPOTLIGHT**

**Pam Gray, Tweed Shire Council, Pest Management Program Leader**

### **What organisation do you work for and how does your organisation work with beach-nesting birds?**

Tweed Shire Council, in North Eastern NSW. We actively support our local community to protect nesting Beach Stone-curlew, Bush Stone-curlew and Pied Oystercatchers. While we have not recorded Sooty Oystercatchers and Red-capped Plovers nesting, we do work to protect their foraging habitat in areas they have been seen.

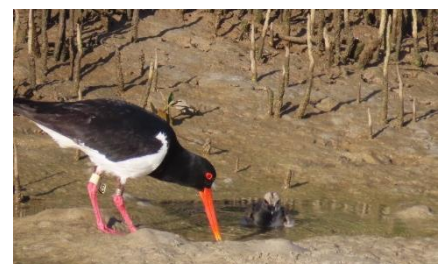


Photo: Frances Cummings. Bathtime for Pied Oyk Chick

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### **How big is the team that contributes to beach-nesting bird conservation?**

We have an enormous team. It's not just Council staff, it's the huge range of people who work together to protect beach-nesting birds on the Tweed coast. We work with BirdLife Northern Rivers Members, as well as a lot of very dedicated residents. We also have dedicated off duty staff members who volunteer their own time.

Within Council, many different Departments act to protect beach-nesting birds. This includes the Sustainability and Environment Unit, Ranger Staff, Events Planning, Parks and Active Communities Staff, Communications and Front Counter Staff. Each department has their key role, from communications, online social media, coordinating and delivering on ground management, awareness raising events, and compliance.

### **How long have you been working with beach-nesting birds and what types of activities do you participate in as part of your role to help these birds?**

I have been actively involved with Bush Stone-curlews since 2010, and Beach-nesting birds since 2013, when the first fence was erected around a vulnerable Pied Oystercatcher nest. When the Pied Oystercatchers abandoned their nest, Little Terns took over this space and fledged a chick. This is highly significant as no Little Terns had been recorded as fledging in Tweed Shire Council since 1994. This nest site was on an extremely busy surf beach and volunteers and community members worked with Council staff to protect this nest site from disturbance.

In 2014, Tweed Shire Council applied for and successfully received a grant from BirdLife Australia's Beach-nesting Birds Program for \$5,000 which was the starting point of the beach-nesting birds program that we have today.

We have continued with community awareness raising, through the communication and marketing unit across a lot of different platforms. On the ground, we do a lot of active nest protection. We have a coastal ranger now, who patrols beaches, public parks (for Bush Stone-curlew), and in recent years has worked to enforce the NSW Companion Animals Act, particularly regarding keeping dogs on leash in public places. The Coastal Ranger is able to work when needed, so is able to do targeted patrols on weekends, before and after business hours. This has really improved compliance with leashing laws.

We also do lots of face-to-face interaction with beach goers – particularly when we have a nest, or chicks. We try to provide fun, positive and educational experiences for the community to learn about the birds. We also hand out the Beach-nesting Bird Programs awareness raising materials which are fantastic.



Photo: Renee Mead. Hastings Point

### **What are some of the greatest challenges facing the birds in your region?**

Increasing volumes of people, both local and visitors. We've noticed more people coming down from Brisbane, and because Byron Bay is so busy now, more people are exploring the Tweed Region. Most of these visitors have no idea about the birds needing the beaches for their breeding and habitat. Dog walkers don't understand the impact they are having, so it's a constant need for education and awareness raising.

We also have climate change and disruptions in climatic and weather patterns, with many destructive coastal events and storms and floods which release acid sulphate soils down the river, which damages the estuarine habitat, including food sources for the beach-nesting birds.

Feral animal management is continuing, but is always subject to successful grant applications.

### **What are some of the benefits of working together with BirdLife Australia and the beach-nesting birds program volunteers?**

So many benefits! We get amazing on ground motivational and emotional support. Volunteers and the Beach-nesting Birds Team, really help and understand how hard each small win is to achieve, and they're always there to help celebrate the small wins, which helps us keep going. Just having the support network of people who understand each other is a great benefit.

The Beach Stone-curlews nesting at Hastings point were recorded because the Beach-nesting birds Team provided a community workshop at this location. One of the residents from Hastings Point, attended the workshop, recognised the nesting birds and alerted council. Council staff immediately erected a fence around the nesting birds and that site has been managed as a Beach Stone-curlew nesting site ever since. The same pair of Beach Stone-curlew have successfully fledged two chicks at that site, and are currently raising a third chick.

The beach-nesting bird program has provided us with so many materials, including, signs, books, stickers, pins, leashes etc. These are key to a successful on ground response and awareness raising. We also use their Data Portal, and attend their Conferences. The Conferences are an incredible opportunity to see what is happening around Australia with Beach-nesting Bird Conservation and how we can share the journey together.

The BirdLife Management Manual is a key resource that we use, and also the ability to contact the Beach-nesting Birds Team if we have any specific management queries. Just having access to their "Brains Trust" if we don't know how to manage an issue, we can just call the Beach-nesting Birds team.



Photo: Bruce MacGregor. BirdLife Australia Signage

### **What is one of the achievements for beach-nesting bird conservation that your organisation is most proud of delivering or being a part of?**

Nest protection work, brings in multiple teams within Council, and we're extremely proud that because of our efforts, we are able to see the birds achieve nesting success.

The community is getting behind us and our efforts to protect the birds. Seeing the growth of the program and number of volunteers involved, in so many different capacities – wildlife carers, volunteers who check the fences and signage everyday, monitor the birds, talk to the public and those who take the photos of the birds for us to use. The community has really gotten on board and its rewarding to be a part of.

### **What has been one of your personal highlights of working with beach-nesting birds?**

My personal highlight was watching that first Beach Stone-curlew chick learning to fly. It was amazing, after weeks of not knowing if this chick would survive, to see the little bird get into the air, albeit wonky, was my highlight.



**What organisation do you work for and how does your organisation work with beach-nesting birds?**

I work for Parks Victoria in Mornington Peninsula National Park. Our job as rangers involves conserving threatened species and on our coastline that means looking after the Hooded Plovers! We have approximately 30 breeding pairs to monitor and manage, these pairs span across 35km of our linear national park.

**How big is the team that contributes to beach-nesting birds conservation?**

Our southern peninsula team is made up of 14 people and then we are split into different areas; East (Coolart, Greens Bush, Flinders- Cape Schanck), West (Gunnamatta- Portsea) and Point Nepean National Park.



Photo: Mark Lethlean. Kasun and Holly banding.

**How long have you been working with beach-nesting birds and what types of activities do you participate in as part of your role to help these birds?**

I have been working with Beach-nesting Birds for three years now as a full time Hooded Plover Ranger. This involves anything from on ground fencing and monitoring and education with the public to working with our fantastic Friends of the Hooded Plover and working with BirdLife Australia and our local beach-nesting bird coordinator, Kasun. I also spend a fair amount of time mentoring our summer rangers and seasonal rangers with all things Hoodie related in Summer. I have also had the opportunity through Parks Victoria to be sent to Nepal for the World Ranger Congress to present on our communities' conservation of the Hooded Plover. Our park team has been heavily involved with conserving Hooded Plovers for many years now, since the 90s!

**What are some of the greatest challenges facing the birds in your region?**

The biggest challenge we face in our patch of land is the masses of people that come to our beaches over the summer period. It will be even more interesting to see the numbers of people we get this year with overseas travel being restricted. We also have an ongoing issue with foxes due to the proximity of the park to residential areas as well as dealing with illegal dog walkers.

**What are some of the benefits of working together with BirdLife Australia and the beach-nesting birds program volunteers?**

There is strength in numbers! I could not look after our 30 breeding pairs alone that's for sure! It is so valuable working with Birdlife having the scientific expertise around Hooded Plover management as well as the wealth of knowledge and experience Birdlife and our Friends group have. Friends of the Hooded Plover Mornington Peninsula also assist me with education programs such as junior ranger programs as well as championing other innovative projects for example the commissioning of the Hooded Plover mural at Sorrento Back Beach.





Photos: Mark Lethlean, Point Nepean (left); Sally Hutchinson (right).

## **COMPUTER CORNER**

### WHERE DO I FIND...

Meg Cullen, Beach-nesting Birds Program Coordinator, BirdLife Australia

As technology advances it becomes easier and easier to make information and processes accessible online, however with these advances comes challenges and complexities. Who of you find yourselves rolling your eyes or sighing in frustration when you are faced with creating another password to access what you are after online? Don't forget it has to be 17 digits long and must include 6 numbers, 3 capital letters and 2.4 symbols (haha, not really)! You finally create a suitable password and then when you want to login in again 3 months later you have no idea what your password could be ... where is the forgotten password button!??

We do understand the frustration and recently attempted to overcome the issues of having so many things in different places. In early 2020 we launched the Beach-nesting Bird Hub, which drew all the volunteer registrations, inductions, contact and event information into the one location. This was a complex job, but it is already making a big difference toward volunteer management and support. This resulted in the Beach-nesting Birds project having the BNB Hub for volunteer and project partner coordination and the MyBeachBird Portal to collect and access the actually beach-nesting bird data. That isn't too complex right?

Well, 2020 then brings us around to the Beach-nesting Bird Biennial Count, this data is different to the nest monitoring data and has typically been collected on hard copy datasheets since the 1980s! However, over the last few years we have been working with BirdLife Australia's general data portal 'Birddata' so that biennial count data can be submitted through this system and even via an app! This is great, but it now brings in a 3rd online system! If you have been involved in the project over the years, you have made the journey with us through all these systems and probably find it reasonably easy to understand the difference, but for a brand-new volunteer this is definitely more overwhelming.

In order to help new (and not so new) volunteers understand when and where to use each system we have developed 4 simple cheat sheets. Each have the direct link to access the site, an overview of site or portal including which information to access or enter at that site and where to find any guidelines for usage.

We hope these help you navigate your way on your beach-nesting bird journey and never hesitate to contact us if you need some extra help [beachnestingbirds@birdlife.org.au](mailto:beachnestingbirds@birdlife.org.au)

## Beach-nesting Birds Project Website

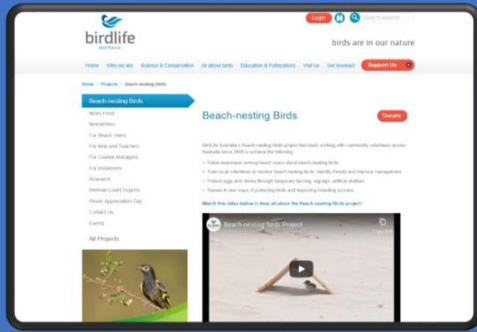
**Where?** [www.birdlife.org.au/beach](http://www.birdlife.org.au/beach)

**Why?** Provides lots of useful information for those interested in Beach-nesting Birds (BNB) and BirdLife Australia's BNB conservation project.

**What?** Use the menu on the left-hand side to access detailed information for volunteers, coastal managers, beach users and schools. You'll find downloadable materials, such as forms and guides, at the bottom of each of these pages.

**Which?** Hooded and Red-capped Plover, Sooty and Pied Oystercatcher, Beach Stone-curlew and Fairy Tern.

**How?** Accessible to everyone via the BirdLife Australia website or directly via the link above.



## The Beach-nesting Birds Hub

**Where?** <https://beachvol.birdlife.org.au>

**Why?** Established in 2019, the hub has been designed for people who want to participate in or receive news about Beach-nesting Bird conservation.

**What?** You can sign up for our twice-yearly newsletter, register to become a volunteer, access training materials and complete inductions, access research papers, reports and templates for managing BNBs, learn of upcoming events in your local area access and identify key points of contact.

**Which?** Hooded and Red-capped Plover, Sooty and Pied Oystercatcher, Beach Stone-curlew and Fairy Tern.

**How?** This hub is a specific system for the BNB project and has unique login details. If you are already a BNB volunteer/contact, you probably have an account but need to re-enable – this video shows you how <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YY7dp0mxZJM>



## MyBeachBird Portal

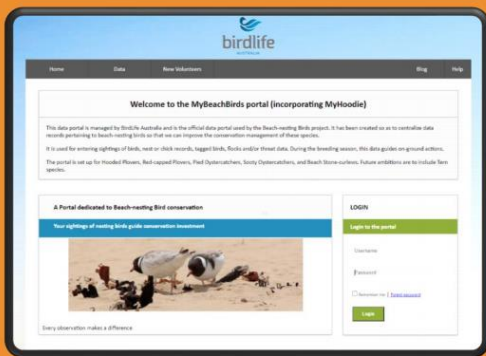
**Where?** <https://portal.mybeachbird.com.au/>

**Why?** Established in 2012, this portal has resulted in consistent collation of data along the coast and sharing of information and actions between project participants.

**What?** Enter data and view information on your local beach-nesting bird pairs, their nesting status, management actions and the threats in their habitat. The user guide for the portal can be downloaded here: [https://www.birdlife.org.au/documents/BNB-MyBeachbird\\_data\\_portal\\_user\\_guide-Sept-2017.pdf](https://www.birdlife.org.au/documents/BNB-MyBeachbird_data_portal_user_guide-Sept-2017.pdf)

**Which?** Hooded Plover, Red-capped Plover (pairs and semi-colonial), Sooty and Pied Oystercatcher, Beach Stone-curlew.

**How?** Only accessible by those involved in the Beach-nesting Birds project or a partner project. Due to the sensitivity of the data, in order to access this portal, volunteers must have completed the registration and monitoring induction in the BNB Hub. **Login details are different from those used to access the BNB Hub.**



## Birdata

**Where?** <https://birdata.birdlife.org.au/>

**Why?** BirdLife Australia's data portal, established online in 2016 and used to collect data on all bird species, with an option to enter specific program data.

**What?** This portal is used to enter data for the Biennial Count or other targeted population surveys (Beach-nesting Birds program) or for tern species (Colonial Nesting Birds program). Use the **MyBeachBird Portal for BNB pair monitoring**.

**Which?** Hooded and Red-capped Plover, Sooty and Pied Oystercatcher, Beach Stone-curlew and Fairy Tern.

**How?** It can be used online or via the Birdata app. General instructions can be found here - <https://birdata.birdlife.org.au/Video-Tutorials>. Birdata and the Beach-nesting Birds Program is accessible to anyone who creates an account. Access to the Colonial Nesting Birds Program is restricted, contact [beachnestingbird@birdlife.org.au](mailto:beachnestingbird@birdlife.org.au) for more details.



## INJURED BIRD RESCUE

### A GREAT COMMUNITY EFFORT ON THE FLEURIEU!

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

Recently, Keith, a 10-year-old boy was riding his bike along the coast and observed one of the Watson Gap Hooded Plover chicks being attacked by a Pacific gull. The boy immediately went to rescue the chick and chase off the gull, but realised it was quite badly injured. He took it home and it was delivered to Rena at Goolwa



Wildlife Rescue, who cleaned the wound and reported there was a fair bit of tissue damage, quite bad bruising on the left leg and a suspected fractured wing. Rena tubed it with electrolytes and some nutrition. She said it weighed 53g and seemed in good body condition. It was a tense night, but the chick survived and was transported to Dr. Anne Fowler, a bird specialist vet at Adelaide Bird and Exotics Vet Centre at Richmond.

The chick was 25 days old when attacked and had been foraging on the beach with its sibling, unfortunately the other chick has not been seen since. This Watson Gap pair, BX and an unbanded adult are one of our most tenacious pairs on the Fleurieu having multiple nests each year which have not been successful due to foxes and ravens. We were all getting very excited that these 2 chicks might fledge!

Dr. Fowler reported that there was no wing fracture but a bit of tissue damage which was cleaned and dressed with duoderm. However, there was quite a bit of trauma to the hock joint, which had what was thought to be a compressed fracture and had rotated a bit. This was splinted in the correct place and Anne was quite confident that it should be ok.

Six days later the chick (who has been nicknamed 'Percy' by the carers) was taken back to Anne's for an assessment on his leg issue. This was the first time Anne was able to see the fracture clearly on the Xray, unfortunately it was directly on the growth plate which was causing some issues. It was splinted again for the third time and assessed again in a few days.

Despite all these setbacks, Percy was recovering well and gaining weight. On December 1, at 5.5 weeks-old, he/she was 86 g. He/she had been seen flying around the aviary, and although his/her leg wasn't perfect yet, he/she was doing pretty well. We were all keeping our fingers crossed for Percy's release! And then, it happened! After seeking approvals and deciding in consultation with scientists and volunteers on the ideal site that would be safest for release, Percy was ready to go and he/she was released at Bashams Beach on Wednesday 9th December. The release was a success. Percy was seen wandering along the water's edge and eating within minutes! Since then, this Watson Gap's little champion has been doing great and it's still at Bashams Beach, where another juvenile has joined him. Yes! Percy is healthy and has a buddy now! What a story! Percy is the clear example of the resilience and determination of Hoodies.

A huge thank you to Keith and his Mum for their quick action, Rena at Goolwa Wildlife Rescue, Dr. A Fowler and Gayl Males from South Coast Environment Centre. What an excellent group effort.







Photos of Percy, supplied by Wendy White.

## THE EVENTFUL FIRST YEAR FOR JUVENILE HOODIE, XT

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

The last issue of 'Word about the Hood' contained an article by Dan Lees of BirdLife Australia relating the rescue operation executed by BirdLife staff and our local vet to remove fibre that was caught around one of our juvenile Hoodie chicks at Fairhaven, Surf Coast, Victoria. In this article I am going to provide you with an update on XT's progress during 2020.

XT hatched with another chick by parents SH(White) and HP(White) on Fairhaven beach in February 2020. Many volunteers spent hours protecting these precious chicks and they were about to fledge when some of our volunteers noticed that XT had an entanglement around its left foot. Dan's article described the rescue operation. Although a band and flag were attached to the right leg, blood was not taken so we do not know XT's sex.



Photo: Dan Lees;  
Local Vet, Liz Wood, removing entanglement.

XT was monitored closely for the weeks after the fibre was removed. Unfortunately, we noted that although the left leg appeared to improve almost immediately the right banded leg was swelled and appeared to be causing XT to limp. Photos were sent to the Birdlife team and expert advice was sort. It seems that XT had developed a mild clinical pox, an injury due to overuse of the right foot or some infection. XT seemed to be finding it hard to keep up with the rest of the family.

Eventually XT seemed to come to terms with having a problem foot and, as animals do, just got on with life. XT's sibling left the family and as it wasn't flagged, we haven't been able to tracks its journey. Over the winter months, XT and its parents stayed on the beach at Fairhaven. The family was frequently seen with the other Hoodies that have remained on the beach between Aireys Inlet and Moggs creek.

In August, SH and HP began to mate and no longer wanted the young XT around. Fortunately for XT, his/her uncle EV was happy to have XT as company. In September, October and early November, juveniles started to visit the Fairhaven beach. EV, the uncle, appeared to be organising a crèche of three to four juveniles. By late November, EV had a partner and he no longer wanted juveniles in his chosen area of the beach.



Photo: Bron Ives; XT and parents SH and HP

XT has finally made the decision to move on and I recently saw him/her at Pt Roadknight, Anglesea, about eight km to the east of Fairhaven. At first XT was feeding on the beach with NS and partner. Knowing that these two birds had a nest, I was surprised that XT was not seen as a threat; however, as I was watching, another adult Hoodie flew in and both XT and the adult were seen off.

XT is still limping but able to keep up with other birds running along the beach by occasionally flying low. There are other juveniles along the beaches at Pt Roadknight and also an extensive rocky shelf where groups of Hoodies and other shorebirds feed. So we believe XT will be able to live a happy Hoodie life and we hope, breed along the Surf Coast.



Photo: Bron Ives; XT with sore foot

## **Student Corner**

### ABSTRACT FROM HONOURS THESIS

Madeline Barker, Honours Student, School of Life and Environment Sciences, Deakin University

#### **Non-breeding habitat of Hooded Plovers (*Thinornis rubricollis*) – Filling critical information gaps to aid recovery.**

The temporal partitioning of species' life history Phases according to seasonal environmental variation is pervasive, yet most ecological studies have focused on breeding rather than non-breeding periods. This study explores the habitat selection of a non-breeding, resident shorebird on a southern hemisphere, high energy shore (the Hooded Plover *Thinornis rubricollis*). I identify, characterise and describe differences in beachscapes between distinct types of non-breeding habitat occupation: flocking sites, year-round territories, breeding season only territories, and sites without birds. Potentially important habitat variables (36) were measured within a Geographic Information System (GIS) and analysed using multivariate techniques and multinomial regression following variable selection (Least Absolute Shrinkage and Selection Operator [LASSO]). Plovers evidently make distinct choices about which habitats to use during the non-breeding season. These were mainly driven by beach aspect, amount of available swash area and distance to the nearest neighbouring breeding territory. Flocking sites were characterised by having south facing beaches and were closer to nearest neighbours than no bird sites, and year-round territories had closer nearest neighbours than

no bird sites and typically were at southwest facing beaches. Breeding territories that were unoccupied during the non-breeding period had less available swash area, were further from nearest neighbours than year-round territories and typically were southwest facing. Sites without birds were further from nearest neighbours than occupied sites and typically were southeast facing. These differences are likely driven by social and ecological factors (i.e. foraging habitat and ecological productivity). This study has identified sites and habitat features that warrant priority protection from threats such as development, disturbance, marine pollution events and sea level rise.

*A copy of Madeline's thesis will be available in the Hub for you to access.*

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

### **PLOVER APPRECIATION DAY**

Inala Swart, Beach-nesting Birds Program's Social Media volunteer

Springtime brings the return of resident shorebirds nesting and feeding up a storm on our beaches, and with that comes Plover Appreciation Day – a day to celebrate and raise awareness for these incredible creatures. Held on September 16th, this event uses primarily social media to promote plover-related information and activities to spread the plover love to the wider public.

This year saw a boom in the number of people joining in, with the #PloverAppreciationDay hashtag reaching at least 2.6 million people and engaging approximately 60,000. To have millions of people seeing at least some form of plover-appreciation content is a fantastic result for raising awareness of these often-misunderstood birds. Our other hashtags for this year included #LoveAPlover and #PAD2020, which also saw plenty of action, and you can still see the content or join the conversation by checking those out now.

Diving a little deeper into the analytics of the day shows us that our reach was truly worldwide, with folks from at least 17 countries across six continents getting involved. Over on BirdLife Australia's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts at least 100,000 people were reached and we engaged with 5,000, and the Beach-nesting Birds Program socials reached more than 50,000 and engaged with more than 5,000. Excitingly, the BNB Program also picked up more than 100 new followers across our social platforms, a fair effort for our small team and an encouraging result for educating more plover lovers into the future.

As much as we loved sharing facts about our migratory and resident plovers with you across social media, Plover Appreciation Day 2020 also had us dressing up and showing off our best plover themed outfits- inspired by the fantastic Instagram account @australianbirdoutfits. We were also lucky enough to be featured on Grant Williams' podcast *The Bird Emergency*, with our very own Sonia Sanchez appearing alongside Rick Simpson from Wader Quest (UK) and Andrea Gress from Birds Canada to discuss plovers, their threats and the plover community's various projects across the globe. You can catch up on this episode by searching for *The Bird Emergency* wherever you get your podcasts or even watch the live recording on Twitter.

Finally, we also had some incredible artworks produced by our youngest plover appreciators in our 'Draw a Hoodie' competition. The talent from these young artists was impressive and it was a tough call to pick out some winners, but in the end Maya (9), Lucas (9) and Rumi (6) took out the top honours. However, we were truly blown away by all the artwork we received so in the end all our other participants- Isis, Beni, Eve, Claire, Arooj, Jacee, Loghan and Rylann – also received a small prize for being such awesome champions for Hoodies!

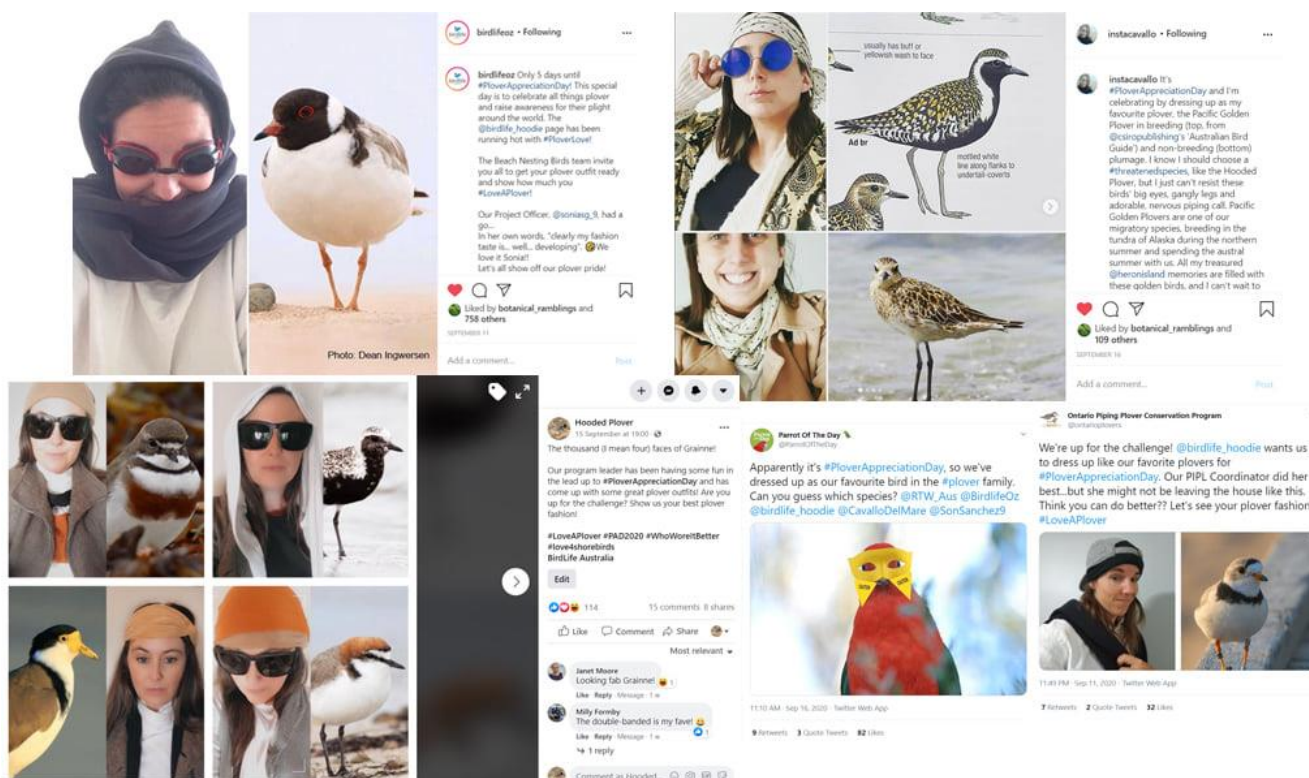


All in all, it was a successful day, and we hope we can continue to build on the momentum we are gaining each year to keep teaching the world about these amazing little birds we already know are so special.

### 'Draw a Hoodie' Competition

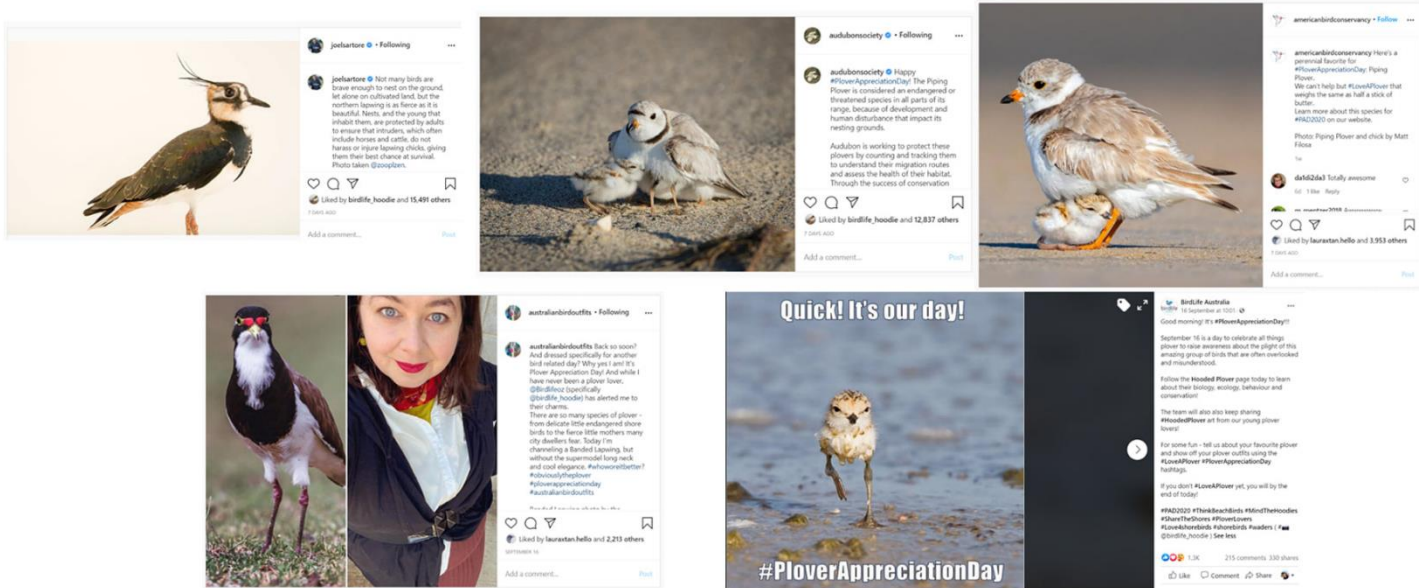


Drawings from our kid artists for the 'Draw a Hoodie' competition.



Some of the plover outfits shared on social media, featuring our very own Sonia Sanchez (topleft) and Grainne Maguire (bottom left). Also shown here Cathy Cavallo, Parrot Of The Day and Andrea Gress (Ontario Piping Plover Conservation Program's Coordinator).

## Top 5 #PloverAppreciationDay posts



The top 5 #PloverAppreciationDay posts across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, including the Banded Plover outfit by @australianbirdoutfits.

## THE UNUSUAL PET VETS – PATRONS OF BEACH-NESTING BIRDS

Sonia Sánchez, Beach-nesting Birds Program Officer, BirdLife Australia



It's not a secret that raising awareness of threatened species is key to protecting them and that's one of our main tasks within the Beach-nesting Birds Program. One of the more difficult things to raising awareness is reaching a broad audience so we're not always preaching to the choir. But how can we reach those who don't know about beach-nesting birds yet to raise the public profile of these birds? Partnerships and networking are the answer if you ask me! And that's why we reached out, with the help of Diane Lewis, to Dr James Haberfield from [The Unusual Pet Vets](#).

We were very excited when James agreed to become a patron for beach-nesting birds. He was so excited and enthusiastic about the idea of helping to reach awareness for these birds! Since the beginning of the breeding season, The Unusual Pet Vets have shared on their [Facebook page](#) content that we created about beach-



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nesting birds and how to help them. With more than 80,000 Facebook followers, we have the potential of reaching thousands of people from all walks of life! We schedule these posts just before key holiday dates, like long weekends, school holidays, and when people are likely to flock to the beach. This way, it's more likely that people will have our message fresh in their minds when they hit the sand.

We can't stress enough how important reaching and engaging a broad and diverse crowd is to protect beach-nesting birds. But trying to do this on our own would be impossible! We're so grateful that The Unusual Pet Vets is helping us spread the word about beach-nesting birds. Keep an eye out for their posts and share them in your socials so everyone knows and learns about our amazing beach-nesting birds! As a bonus, click [here](#) to see the first post if you haven't yet and share it with your friends, family, neighbours, hairdresser, cashier, everyone! And if you have any other ideas to spread the word or know of other reputable businesses that might be keen to become beach-nesting bird patrons, we'd love to hear about it!

## BEACH-NESTING BIRDS AT THE INTERNATIONAL SHOREBIRD TWITTER CONFERENCE, 7-8TH OCT 2020

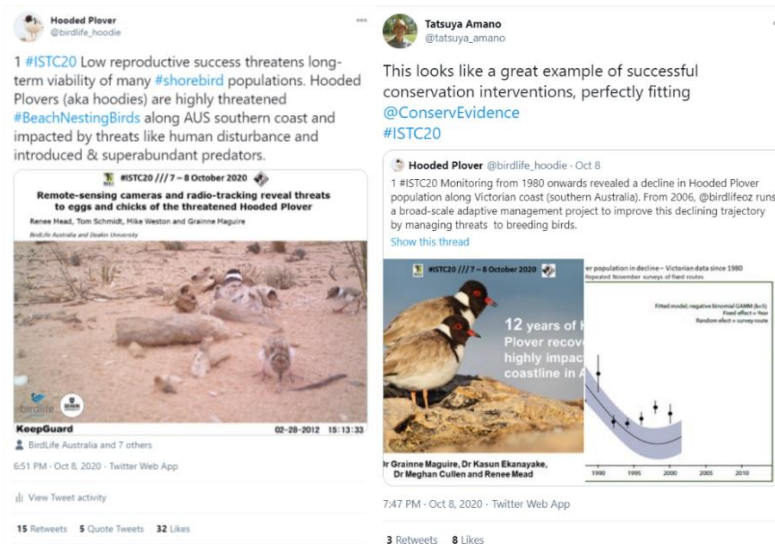
Sonia Sánchez, Beach-nesting Birds Program Officer, BirdLife Australia

First things first – have you ever heard of a Twitter conference? Or did you think Twitter is only used by celebrities and politicians to share their (not always welcome) views? If you're not new to this Newsletter, you probably know that I'm an enthusiast of social media to raise the profile of threatened species but also to share knowledge and research! I came across the concept of Twitter Conference four years ago when I presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Seabird Twitter Conference (#WSTC3) and I LOVED IT! So, what is it and how does it work? Like in a physical conference, presenters have a time slot allocated, and within that slot, instead of talking, you tweet. That easy. You usually have around 5-6 tweets (depending on the conference rules) to share your research, and you can also add videos, photos, graphs, GIFs... to your tweets. And you can do all this and follow the conference from your couch in your pyjamas! Too lazy? Maybe, but no carbon footprint! Another great thing of Twitter conferences, besides being introvert friendly, is that anyone can attend by simply following the conference hashtag – you don't need to be a researcher or have a Twitter account – and you can go back to it years after it happened! Science communication at its best!

You can imagine my excitement when the [International Wader Study Group](#) announced the first ever [International Shorebird Twitter Conference](#) (#ISTC20). I immediately informed our team and we decided to submit two "twalks" (I hope you see what I'm doing here, it's not me misspelling!). We presented some previous research on remote nest cameras and chick radio-tracking and the outcomes of 12 years of Hooded Plover monitoring at the Bellarine/Surf Coast (VIC). You can see our presentations [here](#) and [here](#). We were very pleased to see our research was well received by the broad community and a very interesting conversation about the impact of off-leash dogs started. And guess what? Management challenges and impacts of off-leash dogs are pretty much the same all around the world.

Besides presenting our research, we also had the opportunity to learn about all the amazing shorebird research that is happening around the world and in Australia. For example, check out this amazing [research on embryonic vocalisations](#) by Kristal Kostoglou. There was even some interesting [research](#) on how shorebirds were impacted by COVID-19 beach closures in Georgia (USA), and much more! It's impossible to cover all the conference content here, BUT remember what I said earlier, you can go back and check Twitter conferences any time! So, check the hashtag #ISTC20 on Twitter and be blown away by all the fascinating shorebird research across the globe!





Examples of some of our tweets and responses in the International Shorebird Twitter Conference #ISTC20

## GRANTS

### MACPAC FUND FOR GOOD GRANT

Sonia Sánchez, Beach-nesting Birds Program Officer, BirdLife Australia

There are very few things more frustrating than being caught in torrential rain and wind in the field without the adequate gear. And when this happens, it's not because we underestimate how important being prepared is – we spend a lot of time planning our fieldwork! It is because our staff and volunteers don't always have a decent waterproof rain jacket or backpack. We receive funding from many grants and foundations to undertake research and fieldwork, but funding is usually not allocated to gear such as waterproof clothing, which we all know is a must on the beach. Who hasn't had a bad day on the beach because they weren't prepared for some wild weather?

We're lucky that Macpac came to our rescue. The Beach-nesting Birds Team has recently received a Macpac Fund for Good Grant to spend on Macpac gear. With these grants, Macpac seeks to support organisations that are committed to protecting our environment and wildlife. In our case, this grant has allowed us to get much needed high-quality and lightweight gear for our Corner Inlet surveys in Victoria, where we must walk long distances carrying heavy equipment, often camping overnight. From rain jackets and backpacks, to a light tent and sleeping gear. Our staff and volunteers now will have access to durable and lightweight equipment so they can carry out their tasks more effectively over years to come.

Huge thanks to Macpac and their amazing staff! If you want to know more about Macpac Fund for Good, head to <https://www.marpac.com.au/fund-for-good.html>



Photos: Grainne Maguire; a very small sample of the Macpac gear we got!

### **AVERSIVE CONDITIONING OF RAVENS TO REDUCE EGG PREDATION – WHAT’S NEXT?**



Kasun Ekanayake, Beach-nesting Birds Program Coordinator, BirdLife Australia

As most of you know already, Ravens whether it be Little, Australian, or Forest, are known egg predators of not only Hoodies but also other beach-nesting birds such as Pied Oystercatchers, Red-capped Plovers and Terns. We have had more and more reports of egg predation by Ravens and more footage of Ravens preying on eggs has been captured on motion-sensing cameras set up on nests in a number of regions. Because of this, we embarked on an ambitious project of managing this threat and the seeds were sown early this year to trial aversive conditioning of ravens which has been successfully used in North America. Friends of the Hooded Plover Mornington Peninsula Inc. joined hands with us in applying for a Coastcare grant to fund this project. We were successful in getting this funding, but the next step was the biggest hurdle.

We needed ethics approval to carry out this study and because we are using artificial quail eggs treated with a toxic chemical to induce aversion, we needed to make sure that all precautionary measures were in place to minimise non-target exposure and non-lethal exposure of the targets (safe dosage of the chemical). After months of toiling with refining the study design we finally managed to get ethics approval. As soon as we got ethics approval, we applied for a research permit from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and currently it is being reviewed by Parks Victoria. Approvals have now come through and the next phase of the project is that a working group will be formed. The option of incorporating this study as part of a student Honours project will be explored. We hope to carry out the trial first at Cheetham Wetlands where human access is restricted. Depending on the outcomes we will seek expansion of the trial to other sites. We look forward to carrying out this study and if successful we will hopefully be able to manage the threat imposed by this group of overabundant native species on beach-nesting birds.



Photos: Mark Lethlean; Little Raven with Pied Oystercatcher egg at Somers Beach, Mornington Peninsula (left); Australian Raven with Ibis egg at Coolart, Mornington Peninsula (right).

## HOODIES' FATAL SHORE

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

As in Robert Hughes' iconic book, the Australian shore continues to prove fatal in so many ways. The words of the doleful convict ballad of the early 1800s that inspired the book's title, could well describe the threats of a different kind on our coastline today.

As we have become only too aware, the impacts of human waste on shorebirds, seabirds and other animals are truly catastrophic. It is now a universal problem with plastic waste floating in the sea and washing up on beaches and microplastics ingested by sea birds and other wildlife, frequently killing them.

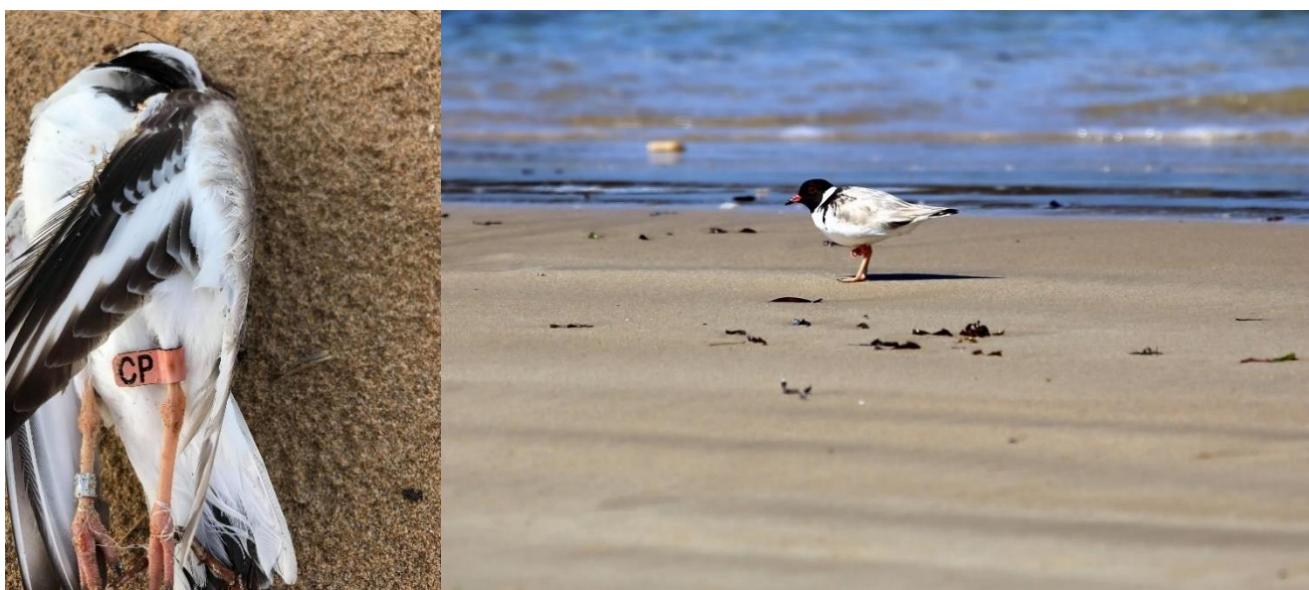
Of particular concern to those of us who monitor birds like the Hooded Plover as part of Birdlife Australia's Beach-nesting Birds Program, are fishers discarding their plastic waste and leaving fishing line strewn along our beaches that can trap an unwary bird. For shorebirds like the Hoodie, this waste just adds to their ever-increasing threats.

Tragedy struck again this month at Bancoora Beach, only six months after the loss of one of our resident Hooded Plovers, banded AY, to fishing line entanglement on the 28<sup>th</sup> December last year.

One of the other resident birds at Bancoora, CP – dubbed 'Calm Plover' by Andrea Dennett who was present at the banding – was found on territory on 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 lying lifeless on a bare foredune behind the pair's favourite permanent fence. We may never have known about the demise of this bird if it hadn't been for Point Lonsdale Hoodie volunteer, Robin Spry, visiting this beach in the company of her walking group. Her assistance, along with Andrea Dennett, was very much appreciated.

The bird's legs were bound together by what appeared to be fine cotton. However, closer inspection of the photo taken at the time of discovery, revealed that it could be braided fishing line, dental floss or perhaps strands from a beach towel or clothing.

Julie delivered the little body to Dan Lees from Birdlife Australia and it is hoped that Deakin University will do a necropsy to fully determine the cause of death.



Photos: Robin Spry; COP entanglement, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2020 (left); David Turner; CP at Bancoora Beach on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2019 (right).



Through Deakin University research, the Beach-nesting Birds Project and local knowledge, CP (at the time unbanded), and mate are known to have bred at this Bancoora site since 2002. The breeding territory stretches from Bancoora Rocks to 47W - 48W Breamlea beach and is managed by the City of Greater Geelong.

The original partner of CP was first banded in 1996 as a juvenile in Breamlea by Mike Weston from Deakin University. In 2011, the banded partner was also given an alpha alpha flag KE Orange and CP Orange was banded and flagged in 2013 KE disappeared in 2015, so she was 20 years old and CP then paired with an unbanded bird from 2016 until tragedy struck.

Between both partners, CP is known to have had six fledglings, substantially adding to the population of this threatened species in the region.

This loss has hit the Friends of the Hooded Plover, Breamlea very hard, as we have monitored the birds and their chicks over many years. However, the day after the loss, Julie had a consoling chat with a fisher near Black Rock. He was very knowledgeable and loved the birds he sees around him while he fishes. He says he makes it his business to pick up every bit of discarded line he sees - and he sees lots. If only this caring attitude was evident in all who use the beach.

Increased population from nearby housing developments brings more people onto Breamlea, Bancoora and other beaches along our coast for fishing, surfing and dog walking and this in turn means increased threats to our shorebirds. So, education is a key strategy to changing behaviour.

"This article was originally published in the August 2020 edition of the Geelong Field Naturalist Club's magazine, *Geelong Naturalist*".

## 'HOODWINKED' AUSTRALIAN BIRDLIFE PITCH

Carole Poustie, Volunteer, Friends of The Hooded Plover Bellarine Peninsula



At first, I don't see them. All at once I'm upon them, almost too close—and too late. I've been walking along the waterline, the tide on its way in, scanning the area around the high tide mark where they usually frequent, camera in hand. It's a photographer's dream shot. They are hunkered down behind a small mound of sand a little further up the beach, close to the dunes. They blend in with the flotsam of broken cuttlefish shells, dried out seaweed, driftwood fragments, perfectly camouflaged. Involuntarily I let out a little 'Oh!'. Five Hoodies snuggled together in a

perfect line, all with heads aligned in the same direction, tucked back into their wings. A quick look behind and further up the beach to ascertain the proximity of other walkers. No one close. Good. Heart in mouth I make a ninety degree turn and creep up towards the high tide mark, dog on a short lead. When I'm level with the Hoodies I crouch down low and pray they keep their eyes closed. Thank goodness for my new teleconverter which gives my 500mm lens more reach. I waddle closer. But not too close. I don't want to breach the birds'

comfort zone. These little Aussie battlers deserve to enjoy their afternoon siesta undisturbed. Aside from the fact that one step too close will wreck this once-in-a-million photo opportunity. Any sighting of the Hoodies is a highlight for me. I have fallen in love with them. So exquisite and oh so vulnerable. To keep an eye out for them and to produce a portfolio of affecting captures has become my mission. Maybe one of my photos can be used in the campaign to save these precious beach dwellers from extinction.

Continue reading this essay [here](#).

## BOHEMIAN AX

Mark Lethlean, President, Friends of the Hooded Plovers Mornington Peninsula Inc

Orange AX is a male HP that I have been following at St Andrews for 8 years.

Unlike most HP territorial pairs, he has had some very different romantic entanglements over the years with many referring to him as the Jack Thompson of the beach-nesters world.

He was flagged as an adult in December 2012 and at the time was particularly interesting because he had 2 female partners.

Of even more interest was that the 3 birds had a nest of 5 eggs - it was speculated by the scientists at BirdLife that this was a polygynous relationship, with the two female birds synchronising egg laying and the three birds then working together to incubate the clutch. The group had a few such nests which all failed close to the time of expected hatch. It may have been the difficulty of keeping such a large nest camouflaged against predation.



Photo: Mark Lethlean

A few years later one of the females disappeared only then to be replaced an old banded female Orange over metal left/red right. I give you this detail because in February of 2016 the pair fledged a chick, AX's only reproductive success that I have recorded in 8 years.

The following year AX hooked up with Orange MU and the pair hatched 3 chicks in December of 2016 which all failed after only 3 days. Since, 2018 AX has not had another nest on his territory.

AX's territory slowly became an area where many of the unattached birds came to feed and hang out; we call it flocking. MU moved on to the adjacent territory to nest with an unbanded male. For most of last year she would incubate her nests but as soon as it was her turn for a break, she would rush back to be with AX instead of feeding on her new territory.

It wouldn't have surprised me at all if this poor unsuspecting unbanded male was actually incubating eggs that actually belonged to AX.

So, this year AX continues his bohemian lifestyle. MU has moved further away to another territory with her unbanded male.

While AX, the old master, has once again taken up with a pair of juvenile birds. One unbanded, and one of our own- White EL- that fledged earlier in the year from a beach in Rye.

Now I don't know if both these young beauties are both female or not but knowing AX and his lifestyle choices, it wouldn't surprise me.



Photos: Mark Lethlean

## SHIPWRECK COAST

Kerry Vickers, Volunteer, Shipwreck Coast

The current season got off to a great start with the fledging of a pair of chicks at the Bay of Martyrs at the start of November. Many of the sites along here, including the Bay of Martyrs, are normally extremely popular with tourists. This year though, with COVID-19 restrictions in place, visitor numbers have, until recently been very low. So, at times, since being allowed back on the beaches, volunteers have had the rare privilege of being the lone visitor at a major tourist attraction. Less disturbance no doubt gave the local Hooded Plovers a better than usual chance of success. With restrictions easing things are now getting back to normal though.

Territories along here tend to be larger and more spread out than in the adjoining Far West region, meaning numbers of Hooded Plovers are considerably lower. Most of the sites are on open ocean beaches, and as in other regions, high Spring tides have a significant impact on breeding success. All the other usual threats are also in play of course. So, despite less direct impact than normal from people at the start of the season, we've only seen three nests across the whole region to date. Resident pairs tend to get busier here during the Summer, so hopefully we'll see more fledglings in the second half of the season.

Speaking of threats, in a sign of the times Lynda Avery, the local co-ordinator recently came across a unique combination at Crofts Bay; a discarded mask with a set of fox prints leading up to it. The straps on the mask were intact making it a potential hazard for all sorts of creatures both in the sea and on the beach, including Hooded Plovers. At the same time in the middle of a pandemic a used mask is not just any old piece of rubbish, and must be handled with care.

On a lighter note, I was observing the resident pair at Newfields Bay recently which were roosting peacefully together when all of a sudden, their heads shot up and they started running for their lives towards the water. I turned around expecting to see an off-lead dog or a group of runners racing towards us, but instead was confronted by the sight of a runaway beach ball bouncing along in the breeze from the direction of the main beach. The Hoodies kept a close eye on it till it was well past them then returned to roosting as if nothing had



happened. The ball meanwhile travelled the full length of the beach, eventually coming to rest among the rocks near what's left of the Crown of Thorns sandstone formation. I learnt that day that when confronted by a runaway beachball, Hoodies choose flight over fight, and who can blame them.



Photo: Lynda Avery



Photos: Kerry Vickers



The Biennial Count has been and gone once more. In a region with few regular volunteers, completion of the count along here relies on assistance from the wider community, in particular the *Friends of the Bay of Islands Coastal Park*, who deserve our thanks.

Finally, we must acknowledge the work of Parks Victoria staff based at Port Campbell who continue to give invaluable support to the project in this region, with special thanks to Amelia Handscombe.

## GREAT SOUTH WEST UPDATE

### Martin Boyer, Friends of the Hooded Plover Far West Victoria

The Surrey River mouth at Narrawong (approx. 100km from the SA border) is home to a pair of Hooded Plovers who have two fledglings that are now eight weeks old. We have been monitoring the birds at Narrawong since 2006. Until three years ago there were two pairs nesting within the mouth area and up until this year only one chick has survived to fledging age.

These little birds never have it easy with the dynamics of the environment in which they choose to nest: natural environmental impacts such as high tides, extreme weather pushing the sea to overtopping the sand bar, dry weather blowing sand that covers the nest, extremely hot days cooking eggs, and snakes; then to this we add the human-introduced elements such as foxes, dogs, horses, motor bikes, 4 wheelers and 4WD vehicles.

The eggs had not hatched on the Tuesday, then on the Friday we had localised heavy rain creating extreme flows that raised the river height. On inspecting the nest on the Friday night, we discovered half the fencing had been washed away and the nest was gone. However, after carefully looking around in the rain and windy conditions we saw a chick with its parent, they had narrowly survived nature's elements.



Photo: Martin Boyer; Hooded Plover sign nearly washed away

Possible reasons for their survival rate may have something to do with the Covid-19 virus and Victoria’s lockdown and restrictions, as the caravan park, which is only 100 meters away, was closed and then operating on a limited number of tenants. Also, there has been considerably fewer people traveling, and far fewer 4-wheel bikes and vehicles on the beach due to the late heavy river flow keeping the river mouth open thus preventing through traffic along the beach.



Photos: Martin Boyer; pair of chicks born at Narrawong this season.



Photo: Ben Boyer; looking north showing sand bar (spit) and caravan park in the rivers horseshoe then the township of Narrawong.



Photo: Ben Boyer; looking west towards Portland behind fog over the ocean and Narrawong township to the left, caravan park in the foreground.



## SLOW START FOR THE BASS COAST HOODIES

Stephen Johnson, Coordinator Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast

It appears the **Hoodies** along the Bass Coast mainland, unlike their cousins on Phillip Island, have failed to take up the opportunity for a good early season start on quiet beaches during the Covid-19 shut down. During November we are seeing way too many “failed since last visit” entries on the My Beach Bird portal. Up to 28<sup>th</sup> November, our 31 pairings had had 16 nests, 12 of which have failed (Tide 2, Fox 3, Bird predation 4, Unknown 3). Our first and only chick to date arrived as late as 26 November at Pea Creek Estuary, Cape Paterson. Hopefully this will improve as the season advances.



Photo: Barry Castle: 3 egg Hooded Plover clutch Cape Paterson

Our **Pied Oystercatcher** pair at Abbott St Inverloch have experienced three failed attempts, each was a two-egg clutch. A raven predated their first nest and high tides took the eggs on the other two occasions.

A similar pattern with the **Red-capped Plovers** also occurred at Abbott St Inverloch, with two Magpie-predated nests, a 3<sup>rd</sup> unknown failure, but our 4<sup>th</sup> nest yielding two little chicks found on 27 November. This pair emerged from a remarkable nest, hidden under a driftwood arch, rising out of the sand amongst a pool of dried beach wrack. This brings me to a debated issue on this beach-nesting bird site just inside the Western entrance to Anderson Inlet: beach teepees erected from washed up driftwood.



Photo: Peter Hudson. Female Red-cap Plover and chick.

Many people like beach teepees as they provide a fun activity for kids and adults alike during their beach visit. Some refer to them as icons of Inverloch beaches. Others consider them a potential fire hazard attracting the attention of irresponsible behaviour by New Year's Eve revellers. The local newspaper ran an ongoing debate among its readers after adults helped their children decorate them with colourful plastics and other inappropriate materials, which in time were blown off the teepees into the nearby ocean. They can also be a gathering point for underage alcohol consumption by teenagers and the subsequent mess of discarded cans and bottles. Then there is the negative impact on the beach-nesting birds. Removing any driftwood on a known beach-nesting site is fraught with danger, resulting in inadvertently destroying a Red-capped Plover nest. Creating a teepee structure within close proximity of a Pied Oystercatcher or Hooded Plover nest will result in increased disturbance of the bird from its incubation duties each time the teepee is revisited by unsuspecting children or beach-partying teenagers. The result being an abandoned nest due to over disturbance.



Teepees on Abbott St Beach Site Inverloch



The Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast took this very issue to the Bass Coast Shire who manage these beaches and were granted permission to dismantle any teepee construction that was considered too close and a threat to nearby beach-nesting birds. Several have since been dismantled by our dedicated volunteers, however, this has had no impact on the increasing number of beach tepees that continue to appear on this beach.



Photo: Stephen Johnson. Red-cap Plover nest under driftwood Inverloch.

## MALLACOOTA AND CROAJINGOLONG COAST HOODIES REPORT 2020

Leonie Daws, Friends of the Hooded Plover Mallacoota

The 2020-2021 season got underway early in September with nests on either side of the Betka River entrance and at Bastion Beach. Sadly, two nests were inundated early on, but one pair at the Betka benefited once again from the misadventures befalling the human population, whose movements were much restricted by the measures taken to control the pandemic. Having successfully raised two chicks in January-February, this feisty pair succeeded in raising another chick to fledging in September-October.



Photo: Leonie Daws; adult and juvenile at Betka Beach November 2020.

As part of the Biennial Beach-nesting Birds Count, our crew usually covers the coast from Wingan Inlet to the Mallacoota Inlet entrance. Bushfire damage meant the beach at Wingan Inlet and the Wilderness Coastal Walk remained closed, but the track to Shipwreck Creek opened just in time to allow us to survey there and at Seal Creek. It was an excited team that reported back that evening having found an adult pair with three

fledgling chicks at each site. Only November and already seven successful fledglings, more than we have recorded in any entire season prior to this year.

On a subsequent trip to Shipwreck Creek, we were dismayed to see an unleashed dog on the beach, just three days after the camping area had been reopened following the bushfires. The owner claimed to be unaware of being in a National Park or that dogs were not permitted. In her favour it must be admitted that burnt signs had only been replaced with laminated A4 sheets, but this remote location is not somewhere to be found by accident. Fortunately, the Hoodie family were safe on the far side of the creek.

While luck and good fortune must have contributed to the season's successes so far, it does feel as if the birds have profited greatly from the reduced human disturbance, with access limited by bushfire associated closures and pandemic restrictions on movement. With many well-intentioned people vowing to return to Mallacoota to assist in the town's recovery by spending money at the local businesses, we wonder whether nesting attempts in the remainder of the season will have a similar chance of success.

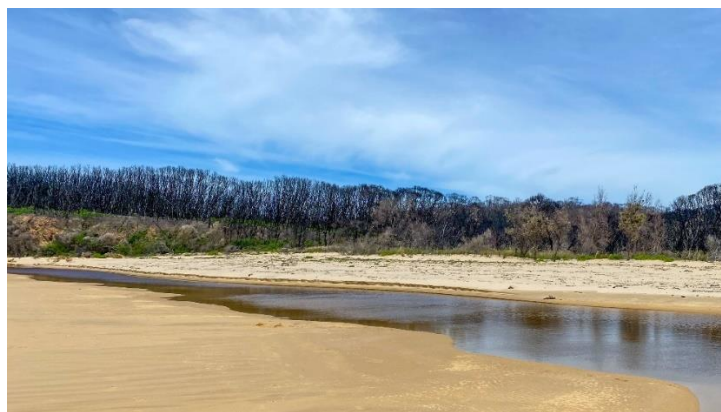


Photo: Leonie Daws; Shipwreck Creek post bushfire, November 2020.

We have been grateful for assistance from a variety of sources in replacing equipment lost during the fire:

- The Beach-nesting Birds Team at BirdLife Australia who arranged delivery of posts and rope, and assisted with replacing signs with funding from the National Landcare Program.
- The Paynesville Men's Shed and Mallacoota local, Richard Du Heaume, who made new chick shelters.
- East Gippsland Shire Council for erecting the replacement sign at Betka Beach.
- Bec Hayward and Jon Fallow, supporters of the Phillip Island Hoodies and welcome visitors to Mallacoota, for a significant donation.

We would like particularly to thank Grainne, Renee, Meghan and all the Beach-nesting Birds team at BirdLife Australia for their support and encouragement, and I would particularly like to thank each member of our Mallacoota crew who have fronted up bravely on behalf of the Hoodies, despite all that 2020 has thrown at us.



Photos: Leonie Daws; The Shipwreck Creek chicks, November 2020 (left); Camper with unleashed dog at Shipwreck Creek in Croajingolong National Park, November 2020 (right)



## ATTACK OF THE DRONES

Shani Blyth, Phillip Island Nature Parks

The Hooded Plover pair (Orange leg flags BR and UB) at Forrest Caves on Phillip Island had two four-day old chicks and were happily feeding on the seaweed line. I had left the territory for about ten minutes to check on another Hooded Plover pair around the corner and when I arrived back to Forrest Caves, I noticed a man flying a drone. I didn't think much of it at first but I had a chat with him and asked him to bring the drone down as on Phillip Island they are required to get a permit. While explaining this to the man, I noticed the Hooded Plover adults had flown out across the water a fair way and then noticed his drone was about 20 - 30m above where the chicks probably were. As the drone was coming back towards us to land, the Hooded Plovers landed on the water line and ran up and down the beach vigorously until the drone noise had stopped and was out of the sky.

## SOUTH GIPPSLAND – A QUICK UPDATE!

Kasun Ekanayake, Beach-nesting Birds Program Coordinator, BirdLife Australia



Photo: Kasun Ekanayake; John Hargreaves with one of his precious companions.

The region of South Gippsland welcomed experienced volunteer John Hargreaves just before the start of the Hoodie breeding season this year (perfect timing!). John kept an eye on beach-nesting birds between Warrnambool and Yambuk for many, many years when he lived in Far West Victoria, so he has a lot of experience monitoring Hoodies. John is now helping us monitor Hoodies at Venus Bay, Waratah Bay, Sandy Point and Wilsons Prom and hopefully by the end of this season we will have a better understanding of how the Hoodies fared thanks to regular monitoring throughout the season.

We also have Gerry and Valerie De Lang from Friends of the Prom group who joined as new Hoodie volunteers this season. Gerry and Valerie have started to monitor Hoodies down at the Prom already and are keen on helping monitor at other sites in the region.

We are also excited to welcome Tess Hoinville, Parks Victoria Ranger at the Prom, who will be helping us monitor the Hoodies down there. Tess is very excited and is eagerly waiting to find a

Hoodie nest so that she could fence to protect it from the big crowds you get on Prom beaches during the summer.

Welcome everyone! It's so good to have you on board.





VALE KENT TRELOAR (07.05.1952 – 24.07.2020)

Kasun Ekanayake, Beach-nesting Birds Program Coordinator, BirdLife Australia

It was with great sorrow that we heard the news of Kent's passing away in July this year. Sadly, due to the COVID situation at the time, we weren't able to attend his funeral, but I can guarantee that most of us were there in spirit. For those who didn't know him, Kent was in the truest sense of the word a "Legend", whose contributions to the conservation of nature and the environment on the Yorke Peninsula in South Australia have been enormous. He was instrumental in setting up the peninsula-wide Hooded Plover monitoring program with his guidance and insights that he gained from monitoring Hoodies for a long time before. I thought it's best that I share with you some of the words that were shared by people whose lives were touched by him.

Janet Moore - Landscape Officer at Northern and Yorke Landscape Board and Regional Coordinator of the Friends of the Hooded Plover Yorke Peninsula

*Working with Kent has been one of the highlights of my career. His passion and unwavering commitment to the birdlife and environment of Yorke Peninsula was a privilege to witness. He was quiet and humble to meet, but that quiet influence was very powerful, and the impact of the projects he drove and people he inspired, will continue to benefit the Yorke Peninsula environment for decades to come.*

*It is because of Kent that we know our Hoodies nest on inland salt lakes, and it is because of Kent that we were able to gain access to these lakes to survey them. It is because of Kent that we have a plan to help the Osprey. It is because of Kent, that I even know how to use binoculars correctly!*

*Kent was so generous with his time and expertise on field trips that it was easy to forget that this work wasn't his actual 'day job'. He was always one of our biggest supporters, regularly attending any events, be it community awareness days, manning stalls at the Minlaton show, attending our project launches, school student field trips, travelling to conferences and countless CAP meetings for both southern and upper YP. I am so grateful for the support he has provided me in my work over the last five years, I knew I could always rely on him for kind but honest feedback and the occasional gentle ribbing when it was earned.*

*I will miss being able to rely on his expertise and advice. I will miss his funny stories of happenings on the farm. I will miss his sense of humour and his kindness. Kent was truly one of a kind and I will carry the lessons I have learned from him with me for the rest of my life.*

Nanou Cabourdin – Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover Yorke Peninsula

*I knew Kent for a short time via our activities with Hooded Plover volunteering but I quickly recognised how knowledgeable he was on many subjects from birds to plants and the natural environment on the Yorke Peninsula and he was ready to share with anyone around him.*

*He had dedicated an area next to his farm to restore the original vegetation without invasive weeds and in the process attracted many, many birds. He also discovered a fairly rare bird living in Yorke when he was really young. But I realise now how active he was in many projects. He was a quiet achiever. His death is a great loss*

*to the advocacy of a better environment and world to live in but his curiosity and his passion will keep on inspiring me and others in many ways.*

Rest in peace my friend. You will be forever missed but we'll keep up the good fight in your honour and your memory!



Photo: Deb Furbank; Kent with Grainne and Celia Manning.



Photo: Kasun Ekanayake; Kent surveying Inneson Lake for Hoodies.

## HOODIE DAY

Angela Jones, Newbery Park Primary School

Our 5 YELP (Young Environmental Leaders Project) representatives hosted a Hoodie Day on Thursday July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020 at Newbery Park Primary School, Millicent, South Australia. They showed a slide show they had created to the two junior primary classes and then a short Birdlife film about Hoodies. They then broke into groups and with help from their classmates, they had students drawing pictures of Hoodies, colouring in the Hoodie habitat sheets, making the flick-flacks and playing the Hoodie chick board games. It was great seeing the 'big buddies' (year 5/6 class) working with the junior primary students. All students went home with a Hoodie mask and we have a wonderful Hoodie Day display up in our front office area of the student's artwork and Hoodie information.

We enjoyed sharing the Hoodie love.



Photos: Newbery Park Primary School; YELP group making and wearing masks.



## HELP THE HOODIE CHICK FLY!

Allira Taylor-Wilkins, Ranger, Department for Environment and Water, Kangaroo Island

Over the September School Holidays, rangers set up a Hooded Plover information stall at Hog Bay Beach. The stall included information and beach nesting bird handouts with a Hooded Plover game for the kids to play and learn about the difficulties our beach nesting birds face in order to fledge. The stall was set up on two occasions, with the second being more successful. Rangers had engaging conversations with tourists and locals alike and resulted in a new volunteer to assist with the Hooded Plover Biennial Count.

This activity helped to raise appreciation and awareness of Hooded Plovers and other beach nesting birds.



Photo: Renee Mead, 'Help the Hoodie chick fly' game.

## ONKAPARINGA REGION, NORTHERN FLEURIEU PENINSULA

Sue and Ash Read, Friends of the Hooded Plover Fleurieu Peninsula

This season has started out to be a difficult one for our Hoodies with frequent storms in August and September, foxes present almost daily on several beaches and an increasing presence of Ravens and Nankeen Kestrels, have all added to the usual hazards faced by our birds.

Once again, our season got off to an early start when the pair at Ochre Cove nested on 8<sup>th</sup> August. This pair is regularly the first pair in our region to nest. This nest was quickly followed by a nest at Moana six days later. Unfortunately, both nests were washed away by a storm surge on the 19<sup>th</sup> August. The Ochre Cove nested again on the 28<sup>th</sup> August and by mid-September all six of our monitored pairs had nests.



The stormy start to the season continued with four of the six nests being washed out by the same storm on 22<sup>nd</sup> September. The pair at Port Willunga South also had their nest washed out, but managed to somehow rescue two of the eggs. The only nest to survive intact was at Sellicks Beach where the nest was situated high on a pebble bank at the top of the beach (this nest was lost to Ravens in early October).

Despite the early start, our first hatching did not occur until 13<sup>th</sup> October when one of the rescued eggs at Port Willunga South hatched. The chick disappeared a few days later from unknown causes. A series of losses to storms and predators meant that pair at Ochre Cove were on their fourth nests by early October while the Moana pair started their fourth nest in early November. The nest at Ochre Cove hatched a single chick, but it disappeared almost immediately (a Nankeen Kestrel is strongly suspected of taking the chick).



Photo: Sue and Ash Read; 30-day-old Hooded Plover chick from Port Willunga

A new pair of unbanded birds were seen at several locations on Aldinga Beach and scrapes were found but no nests were located. During the Biennial Count survey, a nest with 3 eggs belonging to this pair was discovered at the far northern end of Aldinga Beach (unlike the rest of Aldinga Beach, vehicles are not allowed on this section). The nest was situated in the open not far above the high tide line and when volunteers went back to check the nest the next day, they found it had been washed away by an unusually high tide the night before. This pair then moved south and have recently nested again although this time in a section where vehicles are permitted on the beach.

Currently 3 of our pairs have chicks at various stages in their development as well as one nest due to hatch soon:

- At Port Willunga, our oldest couple have a chick that is now in its 5th week (it was the only 1 of 3 eggs to hatch).
- Foxes caused the Maslin Beach pair to move from their usual site further north into a section of the beach where dogs are allowed to be off-leash at all times. Despite this added hazard they hatched 2 chicks and they are now in their 3<sup>rd</sup> week.
- The second nest at Port Willunga South hatched 3 chicks on the 27<sup>th</sup> November, but had 2 disappear within a couple of days, leaving just a single chick.

Hopefully we will have some positive results from these pairs.

Rachael Kannussaar, Landscape Officer, Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board

## Hooded Plover territory monitoring informing local decision making

Hooded Plovers across Eyre Peninsula (EP) began nesting early this season, with the first nest confirmed by a BirdLife Australia volunteer on 2<sup>nd</sup> August near Port Neill on Eyre Peninsula's east coast.

Increased monitoring of 25 priority Hooded Plover nesting territories between Ceduna on the west coast and Cowell on the east coast continues as part of the Australian Government's National Landcare Program through a BirdLife Australia project, and our Saltmarsh Threat Abatement and Recovery project. A number of pairs are already on their third and fourth nesting attempts for the year, with many nests lost early. High tides have been a huge factor in many losses to date, as has the presence of foxes.

Foxes are a particular concern already this season, with fox tracks being recorded close to many failed nesting attempts and on remote sensing camera footage. As we have some control over this threat (unlike the tides!), monitoring this nesting season has been combined with threat abatement activities such as fox baiting and trapping at a number of locations to hopefully increase the chances of eggs reaching the hatching stage and chicks fledging. Remote sensing cameras are becoming a handy tool to help us monitor remote locations, and have been deployed at sites where multiple nests have already been lost prior to hatching.



Photo: Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board remote camera; high tide narrowly missing Hooded Plover nest.

Implementing active management to protect nests and chicks is not always logistically possible in our remote region. As a result, the wider community are often unaware they are visiting a Hooded Plover nesting beach. With a vision to communicate the possible presence of nesting Hoodies, Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board staff have worked with coastal communities and landholders to install permanent signs at beach access points to many known Hooded Plover nesting territories across Eyre Peninsula.



Photo: F. Pickett; Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board staff Rachael Kannussaar and Archie Saunders with permanent signage installed at Thuruna Beach



## The Count is on!

Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board and Department for Environment and Water staff joined BirdLife Australia volunteers across the Eyre Peninsula to survey all known Hooded Plover territories west of Ceduna to north of Cowell. With close to 100 survey routes to cover, the Hooded Plover Biennial Count provides us with a unique opportunity to visit remote places along Eyre Peninsula's vast coastline. Visiting an otherwise 'unmonitored' survey route always provides an element of surprise. You literally don't know what you're walking in to! Some highlights for staff and volunteers have included discovering nests for the first time, observing Hooded Plover and Pied Oystercatcher chicks on remote beaches, and confirming our first two Hooded Plover fledglings for the nesting season.



Photo: R. Kannussaar; Hooded Plover nest - Peake Bay.



Photo: Fran Solly; Hooded Plover, Point Boston.

On Eyre Peninsula we are lucky to have a number of offshore islands, and an effort was made this year to cover a number of islands not usually surveyed for the biennial count. A wish list was generated based on historical Hooded Plover observations and adhoc reports received over the years. So far, Hooded Plovers have been found on all islands surveyed, with more islands to be visited in the near future when favourable weather comes our way.



Photo: R Kannussaar; Eyre Peninsula Landscape officer Geraldine Turner scoping the shore for the Biennial Count.



Photo: Fox captured on remote sensing camera.



## MARNA BANGARRA: A HEALTHY COUNTRY FOR HOODIES?

Deb Furbank, Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover Yorke Peninsula

Marna Bangarra, is an ambitious project on the Southern Yorke Peninsula that aims to restore ecological processes through the reintroduction of locally extinct species. The first species to be reintroduced, in 2021, is the Brush-tailed Bettong.

The name Marna Bangarra honours the Narungga people, the traditional custodians of the Yorke Peninsula, translating to healthy (or prosperous) country.

Intensive fox baiting began 15 years ago, to prepare for the reintroduction of the Tammar Wallaby to Dhilba Guuranda-Innes National Park and has continued and expanded across Southern Yorke Peninsula.

As part of the Marna Bangarra project, a 25km predator proof fence has been erected to limit predator numbers entering the project area. Monitoring the vulnerable species that occur on the Yorke Peninsula helps provide important information, to aid with the success of the reintroductions. Remote sensor cameras have been installed on Hooded Plover nests on both sides of the fence. The data gathered helps to evaluate the success of feral animal control in the project area.

After many years of monitoring Hooded Plovers on the Yorke Peninsula, cameras on nests have provided some further insight into the threats Hooded Plovers are facing on Southern Yorke Peninsula. I have monitored my local Hoodie pair for ten years and in that time the chicks have hatched only once, surviving for one day. Sometimes fox prints were present, other times the cause of the nest failure was a mystery.

I had the opportunity to set up a camera at this location this year and the mystery was solved. Photos of a raven taking each egg from the nest were captured on the camera. Of the four cameras I have set up so far this year, two nests were predated on by ravens.

A third nest was taken out by the high tides and early spring storms. Another nest I was hoping to put a camera on was also washed away before I had the opportunity to set up the camera. Sea level rise and increased storm surges are a big concern for our Beach-nesting Birds.

One nest, in front of a coastal town succeeded with three chicks hatching. We did catch a fox on this camera, but it walked past the nest, showing no interest.

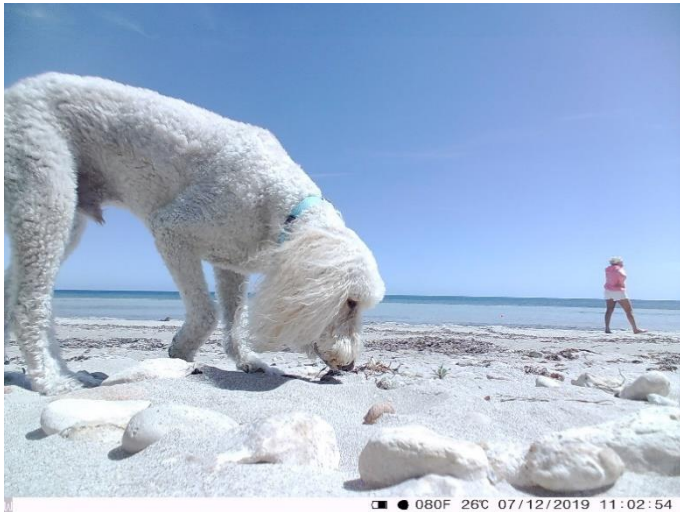
Dogs off lead are regularly showing up on cameras near coastal towns. There have been some extremely near misses and several repeat offenders. The other interesting find was the same cat walking past two different cameras that were located over 1 kilometre apart.



The cameras that have been installed outside the Marna Bangarra project area, where intensive fox baiting does not occur, have captured a greater number of foxes and cats around nests, than inside the fenced and baited area.

We have a few more cameras to install this season. The information gathered will help us better manage the breeding success of Hooded Plovers and provide valuable information to the Marna Bangarra project.

This project is supported by Northern and Yorke Landscape Board and BirdLife Australia, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.



Photos: Images from remote sensing cameras on Hooded Plover nests on the Yorke Peninsula for the Marna Bangarra project.

## PAR AND BIRDIE ... A PAIR OF HOODED PLOVER WITH A HANDICAP.

Mark and Leonie Venable, Volunteers, Friends of the Hooded Plover Yorke Peninsula

In early 2020, we found a “new” pair of Hooded Plovers whilst walking on the Yorke Peninsula Coastal Path in regional South Australia.

As we wandered along the beach, past the Port Vincent Golf Course, Leonie spotted a pair of Hoodies relaxing in the seaweed near the high-water mark, and due to their golf course location, we immediately named them Par and Birdie.

Over the ensuing weeks, we found Par and Birdie at the golf course and a little further south at Dowcer Bluff near a couple of beach shacks. Eventually Par and Birdie laid three eggs in a scrape near Dowcer Bluff in an extremely precarious position at the high-water mark. We were so excited but also very concerned.

The beach they chose had minimal visitation of walkers and dogs, however there was clear evidence of dogs and fox prints and we observed crows and a Peregrine Falcon in the area. But the main issue would be a major high tide due to a south easterly gale. Within a week our fears were realised when we did our daily walk to the nest, after an overnight storm and discovered the nest and eggs had been demolished and Par and Birdie had disappeared.

Days later we observed them on beaches to the north and south and two months later they re-nested just north of Port Vincent. As I type, we are ecstatic to report Par and Birdie have a new nest with three eggs BUT once again their nest is extremely close to the high-water mark and we are fearful of a repeat disaster.



However, in their favour, Par and Birdie have gone from being relaxed parents who allowed us to observe them from a relatively close distance to extremely alert parents who will “lead” and flee on sighting us from several hundred metres. So, whilst we believe predation is the least of their worries, another storm surge is the main issue here.

Our fingers are crossed.



Photos: Mark and Leonie Venable

## NEW SOUTH WALES UPDATES

### TWEED COAST, NSW

Linda Brannian, Convenor, BirdLife Northern Rivers

The outlook on the Tweed is much better than last breeding season. Currently we are monitoring 4 nesting pairs of Pied Oystercatchers and one nesting pair of Beach Stone-curlews. The Cudgera Creek estuary at Hastings Point continues to be the jewel in Tweed’s Crown with 2 Pied Oystercatcher chicks delighting residents and providing great photo opportunities. They are now in their juvenile plumage and fledged. At times we have had 4 Beach Stone-curlews using the estuary and the breeding pair are

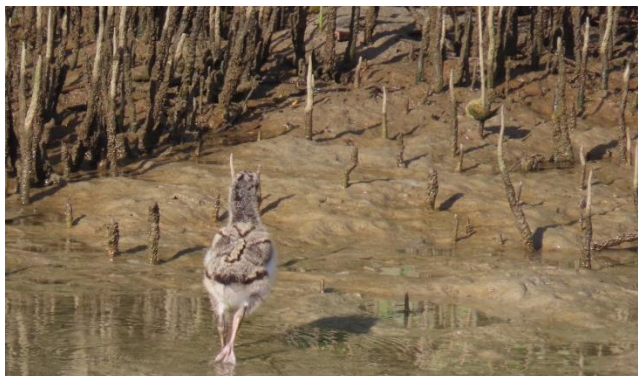


Photo: Frances Cummings. Pied Oystercatcher Chick



Photo: Frances Cummings. Beach Stone-curlew and chick

again with chick in their enclosure. Holiday park residents are enjoying their Bush Stone-curlews just across the street from the beach.

It is only through the commitment of residents working with our very responsive Council and National Parks staff that we have these successes. A ranger dedicated just to the coast is increasing public compliance for dogs on beaches. Council is committed to successful fledging on another important estuary with a larger fenced enclosure and a camera for the



second nesting attempt of the Pied Oystercatchers at Kingscliff on the Cudgen Creek estuary. Council owned holiday parks are planning educational opportunities for visitors to include appreciation and protection of our beach and foreshore nesting birds. They will be building on and using supplies developed by BirdLife Australia.

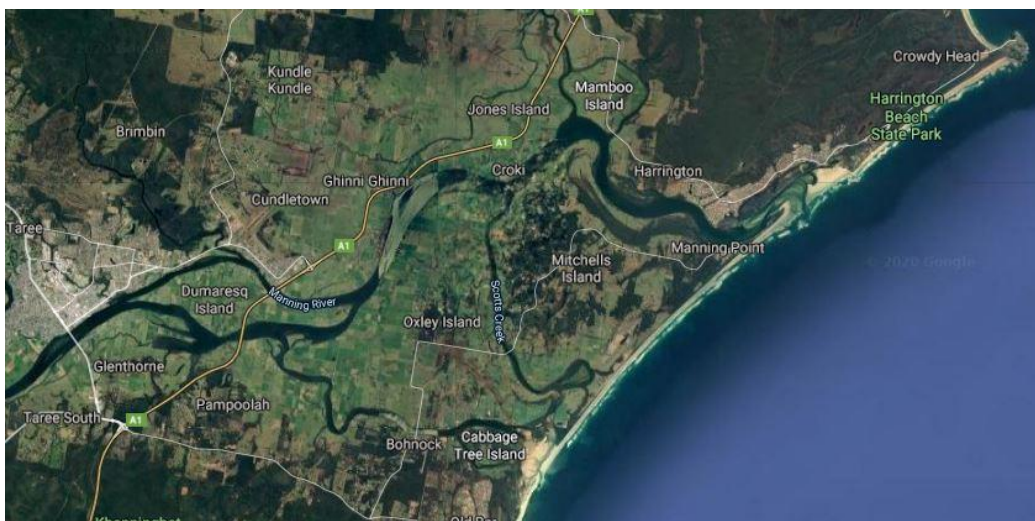


Photo: Frances Cummings. Bush Stone-curlew nest protection in Caravan Park

## UPDATE FROM THE MANNING VALLEY, NSW

Silas Darnell, Saving our Species Beach Warden contractor and University of Newcastle Honours student

As with most of South East Australia, the 2019-2020 summer was defined by crippling drought and disastrous bushfires. Here in the Manning Estuary on the Mid-North Coast of NSW, peak fire activity coincided with the beginning of the Little Tern breeding season and appeared to delay the bulk of nesting activity. The first nests were discovered just days before major fire activity bathed both Manning nest areas (Harrington and Farquhar Inlet) in smoke and rained burnt debris onto the beaches. Despite this shaky start, the Little Terns deposited 93 eggs in 60 nests, and fledged 28 chicks from the Harrington colony. No Little Tern nests were found at the Farquhar Inlet colony last season, possibly due to high levels of domestic dog activity in the nesting area. However, Pied Oystercatchers successfully fledged two chicks at Farquhar Inlet and three at Harrington over the season. The lone Beach Stone-curlew that used to be part of a pair was regularly seen, but once again failed to find a new mate and is now the only individual in the Manning Valley.



Credit Google Earth: Birds nest on the beaches and islands of both mouths of the Manning Estuary.

Heavy losses of eggs for the 2019-2020 season were attributed to avian predators, an ongoing problem in the Manning. The major avian predator was the Australian Gull-billed Tern (GBT) of which a maximum of 12 individuals were counted at Harrington on the 1st of January 2020. Local lore says that the Gull-billed Terns hang around on the coast in dry times then head out west to breed when the conditions are right. Well, it certainly was dry last summer, and GBT numbers are much lower this season with only one or two individuals being spotted intermittently so far. So perhaps the legends are right.

At present, the Manning Shorebirds Working Group member agencies are effectively managing 4WDs and foxes, but domestic dogs and avian predation are currently the largest unmanaged threats to beach-nesting birds in the Manning. I am conducting research into non-lethal methods for reducing avian predation, under the supervision of Dr Andrea Griffin and Professor Matthew Hayward at the University of Newcastle, with support from Hunter Local Land Services through funding from the National Landcare Program. We are using digital photography and computer aided image analysis to model avian predator vision and quantify the types and levels of camouflage Little Tern eggs have in their nests. Using these data, we hope to find nest manipulations or adornments that may aid in predator deception.

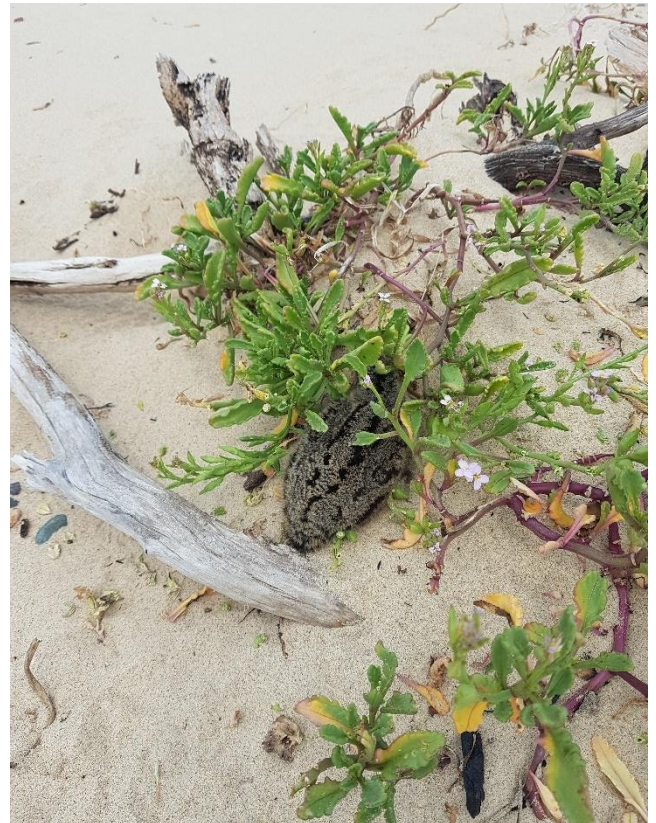


Photo: Silas Darnell. Hide and seek champion of 2019, Pied Oystercatcher Chick.



Photo: Katherine Howard. Multiagency group working on the Harrington Little Tern colony fence. Fencing and signage is usually effective at managing human and 4WD traffic, however it needs to be backed up with community engagement and enforcement.

Despite the more favourable conditions this year, the Little Terns have so far only established 24 nests between the two Manning sites. Some heavy losses were attributed to a free roaming dog at Harrington but at Farquhar Inlet the first chicks hatched on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2020. There are high numbers of nests at more southerly NSW sites so perhaps many of the breeding birds have gone elsewhere to breed this season.

While the breeding Little Terns may be elsewhere, the two Manning inlets remain great roosting spots for around 400 non-breeding Little Terns. Pied Oystercatchers have successfully fledged two chicks this season with more chicks soon to fledge and some eggs still to hatch.

The indirect support from long term management for beach-nesting birds has far reaching benefits for other resident and migratory birds including the Aleutian Terns that are once again using the Farquhar inlet as their summer home. Additionally, many migratory waders can be seen on any given day.



The Manning Beach-nesting Shorebirds Program is co-operatively managed by [MidCoast Council](#); the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment's [National Parks and Wildlife Service](#), [Biodiversity Conservation and Science Directorate](#) and [Crown Lands](#) divisions; the NSW Government's [Saving our Species](#) program; [Hunter Local Land Services](#); and [Taree Indigenous Development & Employment \(TIDE\)](#); with additional support from [Manning Coastcare](#) and the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.



Photo: Liam Murphy Aleutian Terns at Farquhar inlet.

## [SOUTH COAST NSW SHOREBIRD RECOVERY NEWSLETTER](#)

Jodie Dunn and Sophie Hall-Aspland, Shorebird Recovery Coordinators, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. *Originally Published in the South Coast NSW Shorebird Recovery Newsletter, October and November Issues.*

### [October Issue](#)

#### **#sharetheshore**

A set of new videos has been released by the Saving our Species program to support shorebird conservation. They will be shared via social media and other marketing platforms to increase the awareness of beach users. They are accompanied by very simple messages:

- Always leash your dog
- Walk on the wet sand
- Pay attention to shorebird nesting signs
- We live in one of the best parts of the world, lets work together to keep it that way

If you can, please share them on your social media channels, it is a great way to get the message out. Check them out here:

- [Saving our South Coast shorebirds](#)
- [How dog walkers can share the shore](#)
- [Saving our shorebirds with Starlo](#)
- [Four ways to share the shore with shorebirds](#)



## Local kids, our next generation of shorebird champions

We are lucky to have the [Bournda Environmental Education Centre](#) in our region. The team at Bournda run Creative and Talented workshops with Stage 3 students from Tathra Public School called “Helping our Hoodies”. The students are at the Centre for 4.5 hours, they learn about shorebirds and strategies on how to help them. The students then use iPads and iStop motion to make a short film. Check out [this](#) amazing effort from Brooke, Anya, Mia and Indee. This year’s students are working hard on their projects and we will be sure to share their efforts with you in the next newsletter.

## NEWS from the South Coast shorebirds team



Photo: Chris Ground; Moona Moona Creek endangered pied oystercatcher chick at just one week old, went on to be our first fledgling for the season.

Endangered Pied Oystercatchers are hatching out chicks everywhere! Volunteers are monitoring 37 nesting pairs between Gerroa and Batemans Bay, which is a record for our part of the shorebird program, and hopefully indicates recovery in the local population.

Across the region, we have 25 pied oystercatcher chicks at nesting sites on Seven Mile Beach, the Shoalhaven River, Comerong Island, Crookhaven River, Lake Wollumboola, Beecroft Peninsula, Bherwerre Beach, Sussex Inlet, Berrara Creek, Narrawallee Inlet, Durras Lake and Batemans Bay Marina. Our first chick has fledged for the season at Moona Moona Creek in Jervis Bay and we have another 13 nests to hatch along the coast!

We are hoping that the re-nesting is successful at Lake Conjola where the original nest disappeared on the busy October Long Weekend. The second pied pair have finally also nested at Conjola, after the female was lost to fishing line entanglement and the metal banded male now re-partnered.

On October Long Weekend at Durras, 2 eggs were stolen from 2 separate Pied Oystercatcher nests, with the perpetrator disconnecting the small electric fences to gain access to the nests. A calculated and very upsetting incident. Human interference was also the only visible cause of the Pied nest loss at Hole In The Wall (Booderee NP). The October school holidays were busier than ever with the border lockdowns and everyone stuck in NSW, consequently the birds suffered from the extra activity on our beaches and lakes. Foxes have taken several nests at Hammerhead (Jervis Bay NP), Burrill Lake (Meroo NP), Termeil (Meroo NP) and Island Beach (Murrumbidgee NP).

The critically endangered Hooded Plovers are starting to hatch out with 3 chicks on Narrawallee Spit (M0/D6). Additional nests are on Caves Beach (E6/unbanded), Conjola Spit (B8/J2), Rennies Beach (A8/N5) and Island Beach (M4/H7). The Flat Rock pair (N2/ub) at Bendalong sat on their eggs for 40 days, before I finally removed them (12 days hatching overdue). This is the first time we have had Hoodies continue to sit on undeveloped eggs (unknown why they did not develop), and hopefully this will stimulate the pair to re-nest. One of the Inyadda Hoodie pair (K9) is sighted solo on the beach, after losing its partner over winter. K9 has been sighted with unbanded Hoodies on Hammerhead Beach and Conjola Spit but no lasting relationships yet. The Conjola Spit (B8/J2) Hoodies abandoned a one egg nest in the October school holidays, perhaps due to disturbance from all the beach visitors. The pair have now re-nested. All three Rennies Beach (A8/N5) chicks were lost during October, the pair have re-nested this week but in a terrible spot on the beach between the two forks of the main access track.

The usual Racecourse Beach pair (J1/L9) appear to have split with J1 now sighted with an unbanded partner on Burrill Spit and L9 sighted alone at Berrara in October. There are nest scrapes on southern Racecourse Beach so hopefully the new pair (J1/ub) nest soon. Down at Wairo Beach the pair (M5/ub) lost their nest to Ravens, and are currently scraping, hopefully a new nest soon. The Termeil Beach (2ub) nest was lost to the fox in Meroo NP. On Meroo Beach (2ub) and Dawsons Beach (M4/H7) both nests had fox and goanna tracks nearby so hard to know which predator got the eggs. Fox baiting has now started in the coastal National Parks estate around Hooded Plover nesting sites, so hopefully this will help future re-nestings.

Little Terns have begun to arrive with around 8 sighted at Lake Wollumboola and about a dozen at Lake Conjola. The terns have started making nest scrapes inside the fenced area on the spit at Lake Conjola. Let's hope more join these colonies soon.



Photo: John Perkins; beautiful Pebbly Beach endangered pied oystercatcher nest.



Photo: Dion Maple and Sue Tolley; a precarious pied oystercatcher nests – innovation and persistence post East Coast Low beach erosion.

### EXCITING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY AHEAD



Daniel Lees, Beach-nesting Birds Project Officer, BirdLife Australia

BirdLife Southern Queensland and BirdLife Australia's Beach-nesting Birds team are excited to announce the success of a Queensland Citizen Science grant, to run over three years. As the pressure on Australia's coastline from urban and industrial development continues to grow, so too does the human-related disturbance placed on beach-nesting birds relying on the southern Queensland coastline. This project, the *Beach-nesting Birds Pilot Study* aims to establish a group of citizen scientists passionate about the monitoring and protection of their local resident shorebirds in southern Queensland.



Photo: Richard Stone; Beach Stone-curlew

Once the recruitment and training phase of the project begins (anticipated to start in mid-2021) interested citizen scientists will be trained in the differing ecology of each beach-nesting bird species, how to collect monitoring data, how to collect data on threats to breeding, and work with local land managers to deploy threat mitigation measures where needed.

Citizen scientists and the data they collect will contribute to a greater understanding of the threats facing breeding shorebirds in southern Queensland as a whole, how such threats

may vary by region and the advocacy and protection measures put in place will directly impact the breeding success of local pairs. The data collected will also contribute to a greater understanding of the ecology of these species, especially the little-known Beach Stone-curlew, the flagship species of the project.

As well as the Vulnerable Beach Stone-curlew, other species the project seeks to monitor include the Pied Oystercatcher, Sooty Oystercatcher and Red-capped Plover. We are excited to get this project off the ground in southern Queensland and look forward to engaging with interested participants. If you have any questions about the project please e-mail beach-nesting birds project officer Daniel Lees at [dan.lees@birdlife.org.au](mailto:dan.lees@birdlife.org.au).



## WESTERN AUSTRALIA UPDATES

### PLOVER PALE ALE SUPPORTS OUR LOCAL HOODIES

Caroline Hughes, Executive Officer, Nature Conservation.

*Article originally published in Margaret River Mail*

The Margaret River Brewhouse has made a generous donation to local conservation with their recent Plover Pale Ale campaign. The rebranding of Brewhouse's popular Pale Ale has raised \$2150 to assist local conservation groups improve signage about Hooded Plover conservation on local beaches.

Lovingly known as Hoodies, Hooded Plovers are small coastal birds that nest on our local beaches. Eleven pairs of Hoodies are known to nest and raise their young on beaches between Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin. Hoodies struggle to find a bit of undisturbed beach to breed and as a result their numbers are declining and the species is now listed as vulnerable.

During the month of September, the Margaret River Brewhouse donated \$1 per pint of Plover Pale to projects facilitated through Nature Conservation Margaret River Region on behalf of local conservation groups. Local groups together with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) are protecting Hooded Plovers by monitoring breeding beaches, protecting active nesting sites with fencing and signage, and raising community awareness about what people can do to help.

Brewhouse Director, Iliya Hastings, said 'our people are very keen to better understand and support local conservation. We all have a connection to the special values of our coast so helping the Hoodies was a great way to give back. The initiative and funds raise will help raise awareness and improve the chances of Hooded Plover pairs raising their young safely over the summer months. Our beaches wouldn't be the same without them.'



Photos: Steve Castan; Hooded Plovers (Western subspecies) mating (left); Hooded Plover (Western subspecies) chick and parent (right).



Photo: Jenny Kikeros

Nature Conservation Executive Officer, Caroline Hughes said, 'Hooded Plovers start to nest on Capes beaches during October every year. This coincides with increased numbers of people visiting the beaches because of the lovely spring weather.

'We are extremely grateful to the Brewhouse for raising much needed funds to improve signage on local beaches. We are also asking the community to do help out'.

'It would be great if people could keep a look out for Hoodie families and give them space to raise their young. Hoodies usually nest above the high-water mark so we ask that people walk below this area, keep their dogs to approved dog exercise areas, preferably on a lead, and report Hoodie sightings to our local Parks and Wildlife Service Office', she explained.

New volunteers are always welcome to sign up for the Capes Hooded Plover Monitoring Program. Please contact [Christine.Taylor@dbca.wa.gov.au](mailto:Christine.Taylor@dbca.wa.gov.au)

## BIRDLIFE WA'S CAPE TO CAPE BIRD GROUP, MARGARET RIVER

Christine Wilder, Convenor, Cape to Cape Bird Group

Here in the west, we have been totally locked away from the rest of the country for around nine months. This has meant West Australians have only been free to holiday in their own State, instead of travelling interstate or overseas. For a good percentage this may be the first time they have visited our tourist destinations and noticeably there has been more pressure on our local beaches and attractions here between Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin.

Despite initial restrictions, we have been able to continue our daily lives relatively normally. At first it was touch and go whether our school visits and annual student days at some Cape's beaches would go ahead, but we were able to join students from three schools before their main Christmas holiday break. Apart from sanitizing our equipment and using hand sanitizer, no other precautions were necessary, providing we were not on inter school excursions. These school field trips are intended to raise environmental awareness with the younger generation and working with the students is so much fun.



Photo: Natalie Bell; Christine Wilder with display, binoculars and spotting scope at the Margaret River-mouth.

Nicole Lincoln from Cowaramup Primary School organised their annual "Say G'day to the Bay Day" at Cowaramup Bay on 13 November. Years 1, 2 and 3 students (three classes each of around 25 students) participated in bird activities talking about Hooded Plovers and other beach-nesting birds and learning to use binoculars and spotting scopes to overlook the beach and bay.

Dunsborough Primary School's "Bay OK Day" was earlier cancelled due to 2020 covid unknowns. However, thanks to Louisa Chapman a day out at Old Dunsborough Beach was organised for 16 November, where students walked to the beach from the school grounds and Year 6 students (five sessions – a total of 90 students) participated in our birdwatching activities including discussing Hooded Plovers and other beach-nesting birds and using binoculars and spotting scopes to observe Oystercatchers, Terns and Gulls.

On 8 December Natalie Bell and I spent a full day at the Margaret River-mouth with around 100 students from St. Thomas More Catholic Primary School. There were ten groups of students – three groups of Years 1 and 2, four groups of Years 3 and 4 and three groups of Years 5 and 6 participating in activities in rotation. We talked about Hooded Plovers, other beach nesting birds, the many threats the birds faced, how to use the bird app and commented on the fenced off areas with signage on the northern side of the river (one an unsuccessful Hooded Plover breeding site and the second one active with the Margaret River pair, at the time of writing, having commenced breeding again). Students used binoculars and scopes looking from the shelter to check out some of the threats – mainly human activity and predators on the beach, as this is not a dog beach. Two other activities – planting pigface and brushing planted areas – were organised by Janet Dufall and Genevieve Broadhurst through the day. Tracy Muir identified the plentiful seaweed at the tide line and discussed with students the species using the wrack for shelter and food.



Photo: Christine Wilder; School group looking out over the Margaret River-mouth.

## **TERN UPDATE**

### MONITORING FAIRY TERNS IN THE BAYS

Dr Amy Adams, Coastal and Wetlands Birds Project Officer, BirdLife Australia

Fairy Terns are one of Australia's smallest, and most threatened, seabird species, and are currently experiencing major population declines in South-eastern Australia and large breeding colonies are now a rarity in Victoria. Historically, colonies in Western Port and Port Phillip Bay (Melbourne) contained over 100 individuals but in recent years this number has dropped. It is now thought that only 120-150 breeding pairs remain throughout Victoria.



Breeding pairs within a colony tend to nest at the same time to ensure that their eggs all hatch around the same time. Nest scrapes are generally made on shell grit or sand and are constructed above the high-tide mark on sandy beaches, at the base of dune and on sandy spits in areas typically clear of vegetation and within 2 km of resources (typically small bait-sized fish). Fairy Terns will vary in their selection of nesting sites, often moving between sites each year which is thought to be a predator avoidance strategy. Fairy Terns typically lay a clutch of 2 eggs and will re-attempt nesting if their clutch fails early in the season. If nesting failure occurs, they will often move sites before re-attempting to nest. However, there are still knowledge gaps relating to site selection and use in Western Port and Port Phillip Bay as there is across all of its range.

This year, the Melbourne-based BirdLife Australia Fairy Tern project has received funding from the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority (PPWCMA) to continue our monitoring of Fairy Terns in the bays. This will enable us to continue monitoring the breeding success (and threats) through observational surveys and remote cameras and help us examine the population dynamics of the species across Victoria as well as conduct remedial actions where appropriate. Excitingly, we already have three confirmed breeding sites within Western Port and Port Phillip Bay which is fantastic for this species. Fingers crossed for some more fledglings this year after the successful breeding on Phillip Island during the 2019/20 breeding season. Thank-you to all of our long-term volunteers, including Friends of French Island (FOFI) and Phillip Island Nature Parks (PINP), who help us maintain regular monitoring of breeding sites.

The project has also partnered with Western Port Biosphere and the PPWCMA to create a waterproof flip guide for recreational boat users and fishers. Engagement of this key stakeholder group in an effort to enhance awareness and education of this threatened species is important as this provides an opportunity for people who are out on the water regularly to provide us with Fairy Tern sightings, which may have been missed otherwise, potentially leading to knowledge of new breeding sites. This resource is expected to be printed and ready for distribution early in the new year.

We also have a new Fairy Tern induction now available on the BNB Hub. This is an extra resource for volunteers to complete during their training. Registered volunteers can now enter their data into Birddata's Colonial Nesting Birds Program which will help us track colonies throughout the breeding season. This program is restricted use and access is provided by your Fairy Tern coordinator. We currently only have three Fairy Tern projects occurring across Victoria and South Australia and the nature of the field sites make volunteer opportunities scarce. Please contact [beachnestingbirds@birdlife.org.au](mailto:beachnestingbirds@birdlife.org.au) and one of the Fairy Tern Coordinators will get back to you about opportunities in your local area. Other ways you can help include keeping an eye out for Fairy Terns along the coast and reporting these sightings to the BNB team, as well as raising awareness among the community about Fairy Terns by spreading the word about their plight.



Photos: Shane Tuffery

## PARTNERSHIPS ARE ESSENTIAL IN HELPING TO PROTECT ENDANGERED LITTLE TERNS NESTING ON CORRIE ISLAND NATURE RESERVE, NSW

Christophe Tourenq, Saving Our Species officer, NSW DPIE  
Biodiversity Conservation and Science Directorate

The Corrie Island Nature Reserve, and the nearby beach of Winda Woppa, in the Port Stephens Estuary, Mid-Coast NSW, are an important site for the nesting of threatened Little Terns, Australian Pied Oystercatchers and Beach Stone-curlews.

A combination of governmental agencies (NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, National Parks and Wildlife Service, MidCoast Council and Hunter Local Land Services) and community groups (Myall Koala & Environmental Group, Hunter Bird Observers Club) have been working together to monitor and protect the beach-nesting birds in the area under the NSW Government [Saving our Species](#) program. Volunteers have been essential in helping governmental authorities to gather data on shorebirds populations in the Port Stephens estuary: since 2004, the Hunter Bird Observers Club have conducted monthly summer surveys, and for the last four seasons, the volunteers from the Myall Koala & Environmental Group have been monitoring the nesting birds on Corrie Island.

Little Terns have been recorded breeding on and off on the Corrie Island Nature Reserve, and the nearby beach of Winda Woppa, since the 1950's, and probably much earlier. Australian Pied Oystercatcher and Beach Stone-curlew breeding was confirmed for the first time in 2017 in the area. This year, volunteers from the Myall Koala & Environmental Group have counted 60 Little Tern nests so far, which is already the double of the number reached last year at the peak of the breeding season.

Myall Koala & Environmental Group's Trish Blair said "It is a pleasure and a privilege for us to play a part in helping to collect data about the numbers and breeding success of endangered shorebird species, and to take any action, in conjunction with relevant government agencies to reduce the risk of destruction of eggs and chicks. Our usual mode of transport to the nesting site is by kayak and on foot in our beautiful natural coastal environment. So, our 'work' is not onerous at all," said Ms Blair.



Photo: Kit Streamer, Myall Koala Environment Group; Myall Koala Environment Group volunteer and SoS contractor monitoring the Little Tern colony on Corrie Island.



Photo: Kit Streamer, Myall Koala Environment Group; newly hatched Little Tern chicks, Corrie Island



Photo: Kit Streamer; Sign on Corrie Island

## PLOVER LOVERS

Andrea Gress, Ontario Piping Plover Conservation Program Coordinator, Birds Canada

The Piping Plover breeding season is never without its challenges. In Ontario, Piping Plovers breed along the shorelines of the Great Lakes on some of the world's largest fresh water beaches. These beaches attract tens of thousands of weekend warriors, all fleeing the nearby cities to claim a patch of sand for themselves. With the crowds, often comes poor beach management practices (like beach raking), along with the risk of nest trampling, and even an increase in aggressive gulls looking for their next french fry (or plover chick). Each year, staff and volunteers work diligently to protect plovers from these threats.



Photo: Andrea Gress, Birds Canada. Fenced habitat at Wasaga Beach with sign made by local kid

As you might expect, 2020 had a different set of challenges.

As the plovers arrived in April, they were probably pleasantly surprised to have the beaches entirely to themselves. Even biologists and volunteers were not there to welcome them, as we all hunkered down in our homes.



Phyllis Mahon: photo of an adult PIPL standing in front of a predator enclosure

Restrictions eased enough by mid-May that we were able to find nests at most of our regular breeding beaches. As usual, we fenced off a small protective area around the nests, and installed predator enclosures; a wire structure that allows plovers to come and go, but prevents predators from getting their eggs. We all breathed a sigh of relief as our recovery activities were able to continue, but we also released a sad sob as our volunteer program was cancelled.

The plovers had an unusually peaceful incubation period on mostly empty beaches. But as their nests began to hatch in mid-June, we suddenly had 2-3 times as many people on the beaches compared to 2019 numbers. Remarkably though, people appeared to respect the nest sites more than usual; reading more information signs, and having more positive interactions with staff. In particular, the local support at Tiny Township (a new breeding site) was immense.



Piping Plovers are absurdly cute and charismatic, they're an easy cause to support. Personally, I think we all needed a little of that in our lives this summer—a positive (and adorable) cause to get behind.

I'll be honest, Piping Plovers did not have an amazing breeding season in Ontario. Some factors, like chick predation, are largely out of our control. We had only 7 pairs across the province this year, the lowest we've seen since 2013. Only 8 fledglings left for the wintering grounds, which is also lower than we'd hope for. But we had some big wins too. Darlington Provincial Park (after several challenging seasons) fledged all 4 chicks! Toronto Island attracted 2 nesting pairs for the first time in recent history, indicating that the habitat has big potential. And one of my favorite plovers, Flash, finally fledged his first chick (yes, I'm a little biased!).



Photo: Neal Mutiger. Flash brooding his chicks

Overall, the breeding season went much more smoothly than we had initially anticipated. Our partners, volunteers, and beach goers were all incredibly patient and supportive as we worked through the challenges. We're looking forward to what 2021 might bring!



Photo: Neal Mutiger. Two chicks from Wasaga Beach

Follow the plovers at @ontarioplovers on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), and learn more at [birdscanada.org](#)

*For those who like a deeper dive: Wasaga Beach had 2 pairs, 3 nests, and 3 fledglings. Darlington Park had 1 pair, 4 fledglings. Toronto Island had 2 pairs with no hatch. Tiny Township had 1 pair, 1 fledgling. Sauble Beach had 1 pair but no hatch.*

## NEW ZEALAND DOTTEREL PROJECT

Ailsa McGilvary-Howard, Lead Researcher, Banded Dotterel Study

South Bay, Kaikoura, on the East Coast of New Zealand is a hotspot for breeding for Banded Dotterel (Australia's Double-Banded Plover). Kaikoura is a place of high marine biodiversity with a highly productive deep underwater ocean canyon right offshore, the mixing of warm and cold currents, many reefs, and also several river mouths which in storm events bring high nutrition to the coastal fringe.



Photo: Supplied by Ailsa McGilvary-Howard. Distraction display from human disturbance

Casual observations at South Bay around 2012 gave me cause for concern when all nests found failed before hatching, so I (then we) started a project to measure banded dotterel productivity, identify factors for failure and implement mitigations. Study began in the 2015-16 breeding season and we now have 6 years of data which we will analyse and publish at the end of this season.

It has taken several years to get an understanding of dotterels and nesting behaviour. However, in this short time the breeding results have been damning, and in just the past 2 years we have seen a 40% reduction of nesting pairs on the beach (a 2km stretch). In this year a total of 38 nests have failed from the 43 we have studied, and cat predation of eggs from the nest, and chicks at hatching (including adult birds) has been responsible for 80% of failure. We currently have 5 birds still sitting on eggs. Hedgehog predation, flooding and infertility make up the rest of failure. Nest cameras have shown a mix of feral and domestic cats.

Despite New Zealand wildlife having no natural defence to mammalian predators as mammals were not part of our endemic fauna, legislation to protect native species is only secondary to legislation to protect the rights of cats. Despite our results we are finding it difficult to gain traction for change even at the local level, and this is of deep concern because although we are measuring cat impact on Banded Dotterel, by inference we can expect similar results on other wildlife that shares the same place in the ecosystem. This is a grim situation. You can follow our updates on <https://www.facebook.com/BandeddotterelstudySBay>



Photo: Supplied by Ailsa McGilvary-Howard.  
Cat tracks to nest



Photo: Supplied by Ailsa McGilvary-Howard. Banded Dotterel Chick

## AN INSPIRATION OF WADERS

Rick Simpson, Wader Quest

Elis and I are often asked. ‘Why Waders?’ What is it that we see in them that engenders such passion for their welfare? Well, you just need to look at them to find the answer. There is such variety in waders that there is something for everyone to admire, enjoy and be inspired by; the seemingly indefatigable sanderling bombing up and down the beach, glorious entertainment; the northern lapwing, which inspired my birding career, with its wispy crest, British Racing Green back, wonderful flight displays and that enchantingly whimsical voice; the elegance of the larger waders - the upright godwits, the sweeping, rhythmic swish of avocets, the stateliness of curlews and above all else the incredible formation flying that some treat us to, if we are in the right place, at the right time.



Photo: Elis Simpson; Northern Lapwing



But what do *you* call these mixed or unidentified aggregations of wader species, swirling in flight over our mud flats, beaches or estuaries? What collective noun does justice to these spectacular formations of birds, tied together by invisible threads wheeling, swishing and pirouetting, in the endless horizon to horizon sky? Just witnessing this demonstration of power, grace and dexterity, is humbling.

Would you simply call it a flock of waders? Accurate enough, but I suggest that the feelings of awe and incredulity that they engender, render calling them a flock inadequate. Sheep, pigeons and people flock, waders do so much more than just gather together. Starlings too have an amazing display performed before going to roosting, the name for that is a murmuration, which is often used for waders. But waders do not murmur, they roar with the courage of a lion, they shear through the sky like a piercing arrow, they whiffle to earth like giant raindrops, they are starlings on steroids. We have collective nouns for many things, including many wader species, but somehow, one of the most striking and spectacular of life's experiences with waders has hitherto gone unrecognised in this way.



Photo: Elis Simpson; an inspiration of waders.

The idea of waders being inspirational came from a young friend of ours who wrote an article for the Wader Quest newsletter entitled *Inspired by Waders*. It caused me to consider how I had been inspired by those lapwings many years ago, giving rise to my passion for birds, waders and especially lapwings. I started looking for examples of where waders have inspired others, they were easy enough to find among our waderologist friends. I contacted some of them, including the late and great Clive Minton, who said it had been catching a sanderling with his coat that had inspired him. Others were inspired by the sheer numbers of birds they encountered, while, with others, it was the incredible distances these birds travelled.

I then widened my search to look at other aspects of human life and culture and found so much material that, in the end, we wrote a book on the subject *An Inspiration of Waders*. We found examples in art, music, literature and poetry. Some were inspired by the birds' dashing elegance and fine proportions and thus felt the need to paint them. Melodies and songs have been composed around them. Wordsmiths such as Shakespeare have used wader characteristics and traits to explain human behaviour, and others like Emily Brönte wove them into their text to set the scene for a story. John Clare, William B. Yeats and many others felt compelled to wax lyrical about them. All of these people were inspired by life experiences, their imaginations having been pierced by encounters with waders.

We found more examples of waders being inspirational in the fertile area of myth and legend. One such is that of the Egyptian plover, which, it is alleged, cleans the teeth of slumbering crocodiles; never proven but widely believed. The legend of the seven whistlers derives from the calls of whimbrels, curlews or plovers heard in the dead of night. There is the story of the Easter Bunny which came about as a result of a misunderstanding in European pagan times, where people mistakenly believed that the hares gave rise to the eggs the lapwings had laid.

The Guinness World Records collection of record breakers is known to us all. Bar-tailed Godwits are in there for their longest recorded flight from Alaska to New Zealand, inspiring enough in itself. But did you know the



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book was conceived by Sir Hugh Beaver after he marvelled at the speed of a golden plover and wondered if it was the fastest 'game bird'?

Back then to the subject of a collective noun for waders. Some species have their own collective nouns. That of lapwings, is the rather disingenuous *deceit*, other collective nouns have been rather inventive, like *an orchestra of avocets*, their feeding action perhaps resembling the famous fiddler's elbow. *A pack of knots*; who could deny that a roosting flock of these birds is tightly packed together? But I do wonder what induced anyone to come up with *an omniscience of godwits*? I find myself captivated by *a flurry of snowy plovers*, *a range of mountain plovers* and highly amused by the suggestion of *an incontinence of yellowlegs*.

We could find none however for the mixed or unidentified assemblages where thousands of waders come together putting on aerial displays second to none. So we are left scratching our heads as to how to best describe these spectacular displays in a single word.

Given all of the above examples, and many more we have found, of how human culture has been inspired by waders surely the answer is staring us in the face. What could be more fitting than *an inspiration of waders*?

Rick and Elis Simpson founded Wader Quest, a charity dedicated to wader conservation, in 2012. They travelled widely to find waders and wrote a book about their adventures called *A Quest for Waders* (£15 +p&p), which, along with *An Inspiration of Waders* (£8.50 +p&p), which enlarges on this essay, is available direct from Wader Quest (sales@waderquest.net). [www.waderquest.net](http://www.waderquest.net)

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FUNDERS**

Our program is funded by a diverse range of funding sources and each year we apply for new grants and opportunities to develop new resources, educational materials 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. In the second half of 2018, major funding sources included the Victorian Government's Icon Species fund, the Australian Government's National Landcare Program via the Glenelg Hopkins CMA, Yorke Peninsula NRM, SE SA NRM, Alinytjara Wilurara NRM and Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM. Several targeted projects were funded by Coastcare grants and works on Kangaroo Island by the Letcombe Foundation.