

Word about the Hoodie

Victoria Update

BASS COAST HAPPENINGS

Janine Thomas, Volunteer, Beach Team Leader, Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast

A once in a 10 year severe storm surge event producing a week of intense swells wreaked havoc on beaches on the Bass Coast and South Gippsland (along with a good portion of Victorian Coast). The damage included beach erosion, dune collapse and high cliffing of foredunes, often up to 5m, reducing the amount of nesting beach available for our Hoodies. This combined with the usual bout of erratic Spring weather and high tides caused a slow start to the nesting season. However, we did have a couple of our usual early starters in September being two pairs of Hoodies along the Powlett River - Williamsons Beach stretch and have each had two nesting attempts.

Our Kilcunda Trestle bridge pair cleverly nested high up on the dune and hatched 3 chicks but they sadly succumbed to the high swells sweeping the rocky platforms and beach. South Gippsland nesting season kicked off in October with a nest at Point Smythe. Flocking is still being witnessed across many of the sites and consequently some sites have yet to have their site faithful breeding pairs return. Examples of such sites include Screw Creek and Twin Reefs in Inverloch and the San Remo back beach. These sites not only have experienced dramatic changes to the beach morphology but are also high people pressure sites. With more stable warm weather and some natural beach repair, there will no doubt be a burst of nesting activity.



Beach erosion at Baxter's Beach caused by recent storms. Photo: Janine Thomas



Sea Spurge clean up, Cape Paterson Coast. Photo: David Hartney

We were excited to hear that BirdLife Australia has negotiated 4 years of fox control funding to be spread over the Bass Coast and South Gippsland. Funding came from the Government Natural Heritage Trust and has been contracted to The Bass Coast Landcare Network. More threat mitigation funding from the Federal Government was acquired by BirdLife Australia for sea spurge control. Three weeding bees were held at several Hoodie breeding locations along the Cape Paterson coast and brought many community groups together including the Hoodie Friends Groups, Cape Paterson Rate Payers Association and The South Gippsland Conservation Society.

Hoodie volunteers held popup scope session at Cape Paterson's Bay Beach supporting the Wonthaggi Lifesaving Club Kids School Holiday Beach Program. A site Protection Training Workshop was held in September giving our volunteers a wonderful opportunity to become trained nest site protectors. This training will no doubt be put to good use once the nesting season really hots up.



Site Protection Training Workshop, Cape Paterson. Photo: David Hartney

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SURF COAST

Kate Bulling, Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover Surf Coast

We hit the ground running early in the season on the Surf Coast with the hatching of three chicks on 26th September at Point Roadknight. Janice Carpenter, our local coordinator jumped into action, and we had site guardians out on the beach immediately to spread the good news and encourage beach goers to share the beach with the birds. The tip of Point Roadknight can be a cold and windy spot in September and October, sometimes challenging for volunteers but the birds were unperturbed. Two of the chicks survived and our surveillance was no longer needed after they fledged at the end of October. This pair, LM orange and partner, have reproduced successfully in the past in the same place with two fledglings last year from two nests. Our model parents and they have plenty of time to try again this season.



Pt Roadknight juveniles, Nov 24th. Photo: Bron Ives



A windy day! Photo: Bron Ives

Fewer visitors to the beach in the cooler weather meant that the birds were minimally disturbed. The fact that the tip is always a no dog area and that during high tide the point is cut off to walkers also helps. Most of the visitors to the area were as enthusiastic about the chicks as we are and we are seeing much more local awareness. Being out on the point with just the waves, the wind and the birds is a special experience and what a reward after 35 days!

On 16th October the Beach-nesting Bird team organised a volunteer training workshop in Anglesea. The morning session focussed on effective communication with members of the public. This was excellent timing as many of the participants were currently keeping an eye on the birds at Roadknight. This session gave us fresh ways of viewing the interactions we have with the public and some strategies to use in the future.

During the workshop we talked about what motivates volunteers. Some of the reasons participants gave for volunteering included: 'It warms my heart'; 'It's a supportive group'; 'It's making a positive difference to the future'; 'I've learnt a huge amount'; 'There's a lot of politics in the sky'; 'It's pretty zen out there on the beach'.

But not all the action is at Point Roadknight. After a record-breaking reproduction event at Lorne last year (first nest in 25 years of records and two fledglings) we have another nest there already this year and it's a different pair! Word has got around on the Hoodie network. This is the pair that had tried unsuccessfully for years at Moggs Creek where the nests were often washed away by high tides. It will be interesting to see if last year's pair try to return.

It's been a busy and successful start to the season with seven breeding pairs and currently three active nests. Let's hope it continues!

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BIENNIAL COUNT SURVEY IN REMOTE EAST GIPPSLAND

Joris Driessen, Senior Analyst, BirdLife Australia

In early November I solo-walked a remote section of the Wilderness Coast in Croajingolong NP between Bemm River and Wingan Inlet for the Hooded Plover biennial count. After some significant marine wind warnings and associated high winds and tides in the days prior to the walk the forecast for the survey window was looking pretty good.

Parked the car at Bemm River and headed along the gravel track for some easy walking towards Ocean Access No. 1. Once on the beach it was an hour or 2 to the Sydenham Inlet entrance across a steep beach profile with low-key sandy cliffs and incredibly loose sand deposits and an onshore wind-backed sea that kept rushing in, even on the slowly falling tide. Solace was to be found in the beautiful end-of-day light, the roar of the surf, White-bellied Sea-Eagles overhead and a sighting of a lone Pied Oystercatcher. Three hours after setting off I got to my camp site of choice: a sheltered spot in a dune blowhole, adorned with expansive views across Sydenham Inlet.

Readied myself at first light to pack up and cross the inlet when another marine wind warning was announced for the region. After some serious consideration – particularly taking into account that the warning was to coincide with me walking along a narrow stretch of coast line between Sydenham Inlet and Point Hicks with little to no options to get off the beach due to dense coastal scrub and the need to cross another inlet as well as navigate several large rocky outcrops – I reluctantly decided to turn around and change the plan entirely.

Instead of wandering along the coast towards Point Hicks as intended, and with every other 2WD access road into the NP temporarily closed, I found myself instead driving all the way to Wingan Inlet as an alternative access point to the coast. Wingan Inlet is a lovely place to camp (and was largely spared the brunt of the intense 2020 fires), but the new plan would involve once again aiming for Point Hicks (25km to the west) and to then return to the car the same way. Once I had set up camp I crossed Wingan Inlet and found a pair of Pied Oystercatchers near the river mouth.

Up and away early the next morning, slightly muggy under an overcast sky, with the first 5km along undulating dune ridges interspersed with dense coastal scrub and the imposing Rame Head dune in the background. Signs of the 2020 fires were everywhere, particularly striking in terms of the largely dead overstorey, although the vegetation otherwise seemed to be recovering at record pace. A few small creeks running well. Good to hear several singing Pilotbirds – a species not known for its extensive dispersal capacity - likely indicating the presence of fire refuges at the time.



Photo: Joris Driessen



Photo: Joris Driessen

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I popped onto a boulder-strewn beach after an hour and almost immediately had a Pied Oystercatcher exhibiting leading behaviour – a good start! Easy walking along the beach towards Petrel Point resulted in pairs of Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers as well as a mixed foraging flock of Pied Oystercatcher (4), Sooty Oystercatcher (1) and Hooded Plover (2). The fun stopped there for an hour as the temperature steadily increased due to warm offshore winds while I circumnavigated Petrel Point across rock slabs, boggy sections, boulders and swarms of tiny ‘in-your-face’ flies. Shortly after passing the remnants of a catamaran that wrecked on the point in 1984 in bad weather, local conditions changed dramatically: the sun appeared, the wind swung 180 degrees and immediately started blowing onshore. From calm, blue waters to whitecaps and an ‘elevated’ beach profile in the span of minutes. Managed to find a somewhat shady dune cliff to have a much-needed lunchbreak, the quality of which improved as wind and sand settled down to more appropriate levels.

Once refueled, I set off along the beach again which stretches for another 10km towards the intended campsite for the day at Mueller River. Plenty of target species present with Hooded Plover (9, in three groups, no evidence of breeding), Red-capped Plover (3, foraging with a pair of Hoodies), Sooty Oystercatcher (2 pairs) and Pied Oystercatcher (3), as well as a smattering of Masked Lapwing and Silver Gull and a plethora of Dingo tracks. Halfway along I unexpectedly bumped into two migratory shorebirds keeping each other company on the beach: a Pacific Golden Plover and a Grey-tailed Tattler (a scarce species in East Gippsland), which allowed extended views at close range.



Photo: Joris Driessen

After some three hours I reached the Mueller River entrance, fully expecting the need for a swim but huge, recent sand deposits had blocked off the mouth and allowed for a very easy traverse. A small mixed flock of Caspian Tern, Greater Crested Tern and Silver Gull were present here, as well as a pair of Pied Oystercatchers who were very vigilant and almost certainly had a nest nearby. One of these birds carried flag Yellow 36, originally banded at Barry Beach, Corner Inlet in April 2008 (age 1) and therefore 16 years of age by now!

Had the Mueller River campsite all to myself (currently closed for public other than hikers), resulting in a solid night’s sleep only briefly interrupted by howling Dingos before sunrise.

Unlike Wangan, the Mueller River area got hit badly by the 2020 bushfires – it will take a long time for that to recover. Headed out towards Point Hicks and was rewarded with another Pied Oystercatcher and a few Caspian Terns. The morning’s highlight was no doubt the encounter with an adolescent Dingo pup near Thurra River – we completely surprised each other at no more than 20 paces! After a brief moment of indecision it disappeared behind a dune, and it turned out it had a sibling as well. Both clambered up onto a steep dune, had a good look at me and after some comical attempts to climb further up the slope ultimately wandered off, presumably to join their parental unit.

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What with all the morning's excitement concluded it was time to turn around and walk the same 25km back to Wingan Inlet. Nearing the end I popped onto the top of Rame Head for some stunning coastal vistas – it really is one big dune!

No coastal walk at this time of year is of course complete without a snake. A huge Red-bellied Black Snake dutifully showed up in the last 1km of the whole walk. I got back to Wingan late afternoon, counting myself lucky I get to hang out in places like Croajingolong. My luck continued into the evening when some campers hailing from the same general area where I live, impromptu invited me over to share dinner!

In all an excellent walk / survey, even if it did not quite go to plan. Plenty of beach-nesting bird species present, though with the exception of several Pied Oystercatcher pairs, none of these appeared to be engaged in breeding attempts yet.



Photo: Joris Driessen

THE LUCKIEST HOODED PLOVER CHICK ALIVE?

Vivien Morris, Nesting Shorebird Officer, Phillip Island Nature Parks

Phillip Island (Mallowl) had a later start to the season than other nearby areas with the first nest being found on October 13th. A total of 7 nests have been found so far, 5 of which have failed, and the other two each have one surviving chick.



Two eggs. Photo: Vivien Morris

One of these chicks has got to be the luckiest Hooded plover chick alive! At Broadwater White ZT and UB laid one egg which failed after a couple days. They laid their next two eggs in a different spot not too far away. Early on the nest narrowly avoided tidal inundation where the wrack was now surrounding the nest. Then, right before the egg was due to hatch a huge tide, which claimed two other nests, hit this nest and one egg was lost but the other egg was pushed 10m up the beach.

The Hoodies found the egg and continued incubating it for the last day and it hatched on Tuesday morning (19/11/24)! We have recorded this happen once before at Cape Woolamai several years ago and the surviving chick fledged and was flagged yellow 85, who is one of the parents of the other chick at Anchorage Rd!



Now 1 egg. Photo: Vivien Morris

We were happy to count 38 Hoodies during the Biennial count, which was an increase from 33 counted during the past two Novembers. Charlotte Bond, a third year student at Deakin University, has started as the Threatened Coastal Bird Intern and she will assist in monitoring, creating refuges, as well as installing wildlife cameras on nests to continue determining the causes of nest failures.

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JOIN US TO SURVEY THE CORNER INLET BARRIER ISLANDS!

Dr Sonia Sanchez, Fairy Tern Project Coordinator, BirdLife Australia

The Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park is located east of the Wilsons Promontory National Park and within the Corner Inlet Ramsar Site. The Coastal Park covers approximately 30,000 ha between Port Welshpool and McLoughlins Beach and consists of a complex series of coastal habitats, islands, intertidal flats and subtidal marine environments. The ecological and conservation significance of the Corner Inlet Ramsar site is enormous! The area supports thousands of migratory shorebirds every year and provides key breeding habitat for over 20 species of wetland dependent birds. Of significant importance for beach-nesting birds is a series of barrier sand islands that protect the inner islands from the open coast, these are Snake Island, Clonmel Island, Boxbank Island and Dream Island.



Crested Tern colony on Boxbank Island. Photo: Glenn Ehmke

Since 2017, the Beach-nesting Birds staff and many volunteers have been surveying the ocean beaches of these islands to monitor the breeding success of Hooded Plovers, Pied Oystercatchers, Red-capped Plovers, and tern species, including Crested, Caspian, Little and Fairy Terns. Although these islands have very low human disturbance compared to most mainland sites, native predators like ravens, gulls and birds of prey are abundant, and some islands also have foxes. And many nests are not safe from tides either! Monitoring these islands provides a unique opportunity to compare the breeding outcomes of beach-nesting species in habitats with low human visitation compared to the well-monitored, mainland beaches that experience moderate to high levels of human disturbance.

We're looking for more volunteers interested in participating in these surveys! The surveys are usually a one- or two-night trip. We sleep at a local motel and survey the islands the day after, starting early in the morning and finishing by 5-6pm, except for Snake Island which requires an overnight hike. We will cover reasonable accommodation and travel costs! The day survey lengths vary from 8 to 15km, and the overnight survey on Snake Island is a total of 24km, split in 17 and 7 km. Expect to walk on hard and soft sand in a very exposed environment and carrying some heavy gear (5 to 7 kg for day packs and 15+ kg for overnight). You will also have the opportunity to see large flocks of migratory shorebirds, learn how beach-

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nesting birds not used to people behave. These birds will leave their nests way before you can see them and get back to incubating once you're miles away! Learn how to set nests cameras. You will also need to be a bit flexible with planning as the surveys are weather dependent and things can change at the last minute.

If this sounds like something you're keen to experience and learn what is like to monitor these deserted islands, please get in touch with Sonia at sonia.sanchez@birdlife.org.au or indicate your availability in this [online questionnaire](#).



Clonmel Island. Photo: Mark Lethlean

HABITAT ENHANCEMENT ALONG THE BASS COAST

Dr Daniel Lees and Renee Mead, BirdLife Australia

Over the winter and early spring, several sites on the Bass Coast and South Gippsland have had targeted weed removal undertaken. Some sites have had a contractor spray sea spurge, others have relied on the dedicated efforts of volunteers from Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast and South Gippsland, South Gippsland Conservation Society and the Cape Paterson Residents and Ratepayers Association, to hand pull weeds. The weeding works aims to increase the available breeding habitat for Hooded Plovers, as they prefer the open, sandy habitats.

This project received grant funding from the Australian Government Saving Native Species Program.



Weed spraying at Waratah Bay. Note: all permissions for having ATV on beach were undertaken and a trained 'spotter' was with the contractors to look out for Hooded Plovers. Photo: Kasun Ekanayake