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HOODIE PAIR SUCCEED AT NEW BUSY SITE IN PORT FAIRY

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

The highlight of the 2024-25 Hoodie breeding season in Far West Victorian Region came from a pair who took up residence at a brand-new site on the busiest beach in Port Fairy. Over the winter and spring of 2024, sand built up at the back of the beach making it a relatively favourable site compared to many others where nests had been regularly washed away with high tides early in the season.

The only problem with this site was that it was only a few hundred metres from the Surf Lifesaving Club on East Beach, which is the main beach used by locals and visitors alike over Summer. Apart from the usual beach and surf club activities, dogs are allowed on the beach before 9am and after 6pm. There was also a reasonable population of gulls and even a tiger snake at the back of the beach. There are also many access points from private residences all along the beach.



Nippers relay race in front of the Lydia Place Hoodie site on Australia Day. Photo: Andrew Patterson.

After an initial failure of three chicks in November the pair established a new nest in early December near Lydia Place. In their first stroke of luck, three chicks hatched a day before the nest would have been washed away in the first week of January. Our volunteer team got into top gear after that erecting a banner, more signage and shelters. We also embarked on a public awareness campaign talking directly to many beach users and nearby residents and broadly through social media. Our local DEECA and Moyne Shire Rangers also increased their presence on the beach.

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The birds themselves continued to zealously guard and protect the chicks as best they could and seemed to become quite used to the passing parade (for better or worse). It was with great relief when a feisty juvenile fledged on the 15th February.



Lydia Place Hoodie brooding 2 chicks on 23rd January. Photo: Andrew Patterson.



First witnessing of fledgling in flight between its parents. Photo: Andrew Patterson.

MALLACOOTA HOODED PLOVERS AND THE INTERTIDAL ZONE SIGN TRIAL

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

Over the years we have lost a number of signs that have been taken out by high tides. To avoid this our regular signs have been posted high on the beach, beyond the reach of the tide. This works well enough when their purpose is to alert people about nest sites. However, once chicks hatch, they spend much of their time feeding along the tide line. Our Chick Feeding Zone signs have not been able to be safely posted in places that reflect this. This has been an issue for Hooded Plover monitoring on beaches around southern Australia.

In a new initiative, Birdlife Australia selected Mallacoota to trial a design for posting signs between the low and high tide marks - the intertidal zone - to establish whether they could withstand the ebb and flow of the tides. Betka Beach was chosen as one of the trial



Digging in the posts. Photo: Martin Butterfield.

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sites as it is a regular nesting site and feeding area for Hooded Plover chicks.

In March, Melissa Sheedy (East Gippsland BNB Coordinator), and a group of our faithful Hoodie team placed three signs at Betka Beach. This involved carrying equipment the long way to the beach, the open river estuary preventing access from the car park. It also involved considerable digging.

The signs were intended to be in place for five weeks, the average time a chick takes from hatching to fledging. They stood strong for three weeks but flooding rain and high seas from an east coast low at the end of March brought the trial to an end. A couple of local supporters spotted the posts washing in and out on the tide and valiantly retrieved them. They then returned and rescued the remaining temporary fencing material and signs as well.

Our intertidal zone signage issue has not been resolved but we have once again seen the success of our monitoring efforts in engaging the interest and active support of our local community.



Intertidal Zone Trial Signs, March 2025. Photo: Leonie Daws.



The challenge of the high tide. Photo: Martin Butterfield.

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PHILIP ISLAND SEASON 2024/25

Vivien Morris, Research Officer, Philip Island Nature Parks



Banded juvenile. Photo: Harriet Fallaw.

Phillip Island (Milawul) had another successful breeding season this year with 13 fledged from 17 pairs giving a fledged per pair rate of 0.76! Twelve of these fledged birds were banded and given a yellow flag engraved with a number letter combo in numerical order from 4C through to 5D.

Excitingly we also had two pairs raise two successful clutches this season! White ZT and UB at Broadwater Ave raised one chick in our first nest of the season and then two more as our last fledged for the season! Yellow 85 and UB at Anchorage Rd raised one chick early in the season and then another at the end.

We had a bit of a mystery at Smiths Beach (far east) this season. Luckily, we had a camera on this nest, although that seemed to raise more questions than answers! Six days before the eggs were

due to hatch the camera caught a high tide which took 2 of the 3 eggs. The last egg hatched as expected but less than 24 hours later 2 eggs reappeared in the nest! The camera unfortunately caught no evidence of how this happened, there was one chick in an image and the next a chick and two eggs. The pair incubated them for a couple of days before stopping and the chick disappeared not long after. The eggs sat there for over 28 days somehow avoiding predation. At this stage, the best theory is that somehow the 2 eggs were buried in sand by the tide and uncovered, or moved and moved back, although we have photos of the immediate area with no eggs visible. For now, this one remains a mystery!

Nature Parks staff and volunteers were out spreading the word about protecting our local wildlife alongside the Woolamai Beach Surf Life Saving Club Nippers in January. More than 200 people attended the Sharing Our Shores pop-up education and awareness stall, learning how we can all enjoy our beaches safely and help look after our shorebirds.

Huge thanks to our volunteers who put in a tremendous effort again this season, monitoring pairs with us and Bass Coast Shire Council. Charlotte Bond and Annie Preston were our interns supporting our camera study this season, collecting invaluable evidence to identify the cause of nest failures. A big thank you to you both! We also thank the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation Rangers for their support during our Coastal Bird Surveys and monitoring this season.



Jon Fallaw (Ranger) and Peter Wagstaff (Volunteer) at the Sharing our Shore pop up. Photo: Phillip Island Nature Parks.

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RED-CAP REVIVAL

Julie Riley and Jennie Turner, Volunteers, 'Team Breamlea', Friends of the Hooded Plover Bellarine Peninsula

In the past, Red-capped Plovers have successfully nested at Thompsons Creek (Point Impossible) estuary formerly known as Bream Creek. According to several historically recorded observations, there was plenty of breeding activity in this area. However, at least since we have been observing the shorebirds in the area for the BNB project, we have seen no hard evidence of Red-cap nesting, until the past two seasons.

Thompsons Creek estuary intermittently closes and since 2023 has remained closed, with ever-increasing low water levels and low catchment inflows. In addition, unusually strong winds and currents have built a large sand spit around the estuary. Red-capped Plovers have been quick to exploit this occurrence and in the 2023/24 breeding season a nesting colony had extraordinary success, with at least 6 fledglings. They continued nesting again in the 2024/25 season with several chicks, but we were unable to determine whether they fledged.

As long-term Hooded Plover volunteers for Birdlife, we have focused on observations and data collection of this species at the estuary. Our recent interactions with Red-capped Plovers were at first incidental. Once we realised a colony had established itself, we became more deliberate in monitoring and liaising with land manager, Barwon Coast, in particular Brett Diehm, to protect the nests. We also became more conscientious about entering separate observations on the data portal.



*Red-capped Plover nest 25th Aug 2024, Thompsons Creek estuary.
Credit: Jennie Turner.*



Red-capped Plover and Red-necked Stint at Thompsons Creek estuary. Credit: David Turner.

Thompsons Creek Estuary is recognised as a highly significant environment that interconnects across Local Government Areas. It is listed as Endangered under the EPBC Act. It has a Shorebird Protection Zone on the Surf Coast Shire side of the estuary, which is managed by the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (GORCAPA). However, it does not extend to the eastern side of the estuary, which is part of the City of Greater Geelong, managed by Barwon Coast. Apart from Hooded Plovers, there is an all-year-round presence of significant numbers of migratory bird species such as Red-necked stints from Siberia, Ruddy Turnstones from Siberia and Alaska and large flocks of Double-banded Plovers which arrive from New

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Zealand. The re-establishment of Red-capped Plover nesting adds to the urgency of increasing the zone of protection over the whole of the estuary.

At present, conflicting dog regulations confuse the increasing numbers of dog walkers across the whole estuary, to the detriment of all the shorebirds feeding, roosting and nesting there. Protection therefore requires a wholistic approach to its management by all authorities, to preserve these natural assets.

SHIPWRECK COAST: HOODED PLOVERS FIND CREATIVE WAYS TO ATTEMPT TO BEAT THE ODDS

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

'Adversity is the mother of invention,' provides a good description of the resident Hooded Plover nesting attempts along the Shipwreck Coast in recent seasons. The Shipwreck Coast is a challenging region for Hooded Plovers characterized by limited nesting habitat, high seas with tides regularly reaching the base of the dunes and beyond, high visitation by people and the full range of threats. Persistent challenges and threats contribute to low rates of breeding success and a high mortality rate among adults. However, Hooded Plovers are brave, dogged and resilient by reputation. In response to the situation at the Shipwreck Coast they are also proving to be creative and willing to break with convention. Every so often a resident pair attempts something different in an effort to beat the odds.

Rock platform: one legendary local pair, BV & YT successfully raised two batches of chicks in 2020/21, five in total, after nesting on top of a rock platform, 3 or 4 metres above the sand. They inexplicably split up before the next season. Sadly, BV died, seemingly in the act of defending her nest against a predator at another site in January last year. However, YT remains at the original site and periodically makes another nesting attempt with his new partner on top of 'The Rock.' Unfortunately, predators are adaptable, and Magpies have been observed foraging up there, while Gulls, Ravens and Raptors also seem to pay closer attention to this spot these days.

Up the Creek: an unbanded pair successfully hatched two batches of eggs near the mouth of the Sherbrooke River during the 2021/22 season. As soon as the chicks hatched the parents directed them upstream, away from the busy beach during peak holiday season. They still had their work cut out as this was a popular spot with dog walkers. The parents got around this, at least twice, by swimming their chicks across the river to a less accessible location. At least three of the chicks (and as many as five) went on to fledge.



*YT and new partner nesting on a rock platform.
Photo: Kerry Vickers.*

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Hoodie nest up a creek! Photo: Kerry Vickers.

High Up Mount Everest: in late November 2024 an unbanded pair created a nest one third to halfway up a tall sand dune known locally as 'Mount Everest'. It was amazing to watch an adult Hooded Plover scaling the dune to reach the nest, and to observe it as a tiny white dot high up the face. The nest, in a precarious position between two 'runways' used by children for sand surfing,



Hoodie nest on "Mt Everest". Photo: Kerry Vickers.

was difficult to monitor. It appeared to have failed, but the later sighting of a mystery fledgling at this location gave us food for thought.



ZZ and partner's nest in a high traffic area. Photo: Kerry Vickers.

In peak traffic: in February 2025 a pair nested on the berm at the Curdies River Estuary, not far from the main beach access track. It is one of the busiest locations at Peterborough, so a large banner was put up in addition to the usual signs and fencing. Even so the consensus was that the nest would not last long. ZZ and unbanded partner defied the odds and hatched one chick, which survived for around two weeks. It was a remarkable feat considering all the human and dog traffic through that location.

Efforts like those described may be acts of sheer desperation but it's likely that the Hooded Plovers on the Shipwreck Coast and elsewhere will continue to seek new ways to tackle the challenges and threats they face and find ways to adapt.

FLOCKING AT SANDY POINT

Wendy Hayes, Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover South Gippsland

Flocking on Sandy Point sand spit usually occurs late March-April towards the end of the breeding season, when groups of 6-18 birds congregate on various parts of the spit. Most birds in the flocking groups and our 9 breeding pairs are unflagged, so it's always unclear how many of these birds arrive from elsewhere, unless our residents are observed on the same day at home in their own territories.

This season was very different. Large flocks of 20-50 adult unflagged birds appeared intermittently from mid-February onwards on all parts of the spit. Several times attention was drawn to presence of the milling flock as it took to the air by

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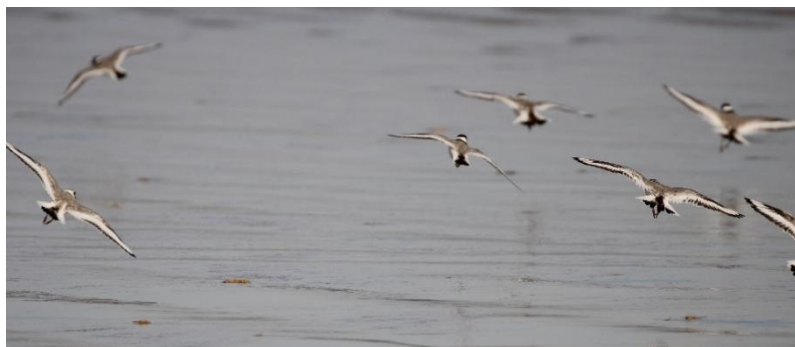
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the harsh staccato Hoodie battle cry from the resident pair, hostile to the intruders. Sandy Point resident pairs were still displaying breeding activity, behaved aggressively towards these flocking birds and remained behind when the flock moved on, so the visiting birds were assumed to be largely non-breeding adults from elsewhere.

Although a short distance as the Hoodie flies across the narrow entrance of Shallow Inlet from Sandy Point sandspit, observations of Hoodies along Cotters Beach on the West coast of Wilsons Promontory are limited. This is due to relative inaccessibility because of its remoteness, length, tides and rocky headlands. Birdlife Australia monitors the ongoing presence of at least 90 birds, sometimes in flocking groups of 40-50 adults, again with few or no flagged birds in the flocks, while resident Cotters pairs are still occupying their 16 recognised breeding territories.

Recent observations highlight factors contributing to formation of these large flocks being loss of breeding habitat and increase of predators including foxes, ravens and other birds of prey in this area:

- Dream Island had 3 breeding pairs earlier this season. A visit to retrieve field cameras showed evidence of extensive tidal inundation covering parts of the island, causing significant erosion of breeding territories. No birds or tracks seen. Erosion has similarly occurred on other Corner Inlet islands where known breeding pairs were recently absent.
- May 3rd at Cotters Beach: Group of 12 Hoodies including 3 juveniles observed when attacked by a pair of Whistling Kites which had been harassing an emu further along the beach (the emu doubled back to chase the raptors who then swooped nearby flocks of Hoodies and silver gulls). The Hoodies rose as one, flew towards us and skimmed low over the water in formation. Fortunately, all the young birds had fledged.



Hoodie flock fleeing pair of Raptors, Sandy Point. Photo: Greg Mattingly.



To view a video of the flocking of Hooded Plovers at Sandy Point in March 2025 flocking see the Sandy Point Community webpage here: <https://www.sandypoint.vic.au/news/hooded-plovers-flocking>



*Emu attacking raptors on Wilsons Promontory.
Photo: Greg Mattingly.*



*Dream Island tidal inundation and erosion as captured on the infield camera.
Photo: Infield Camera.*

BASS COAST NEWS

Janine Thomas, David Hartney and Warwick Mears, Volunteers, Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast

At the western end, the remote beaches on the Bass Coast again performed well this season. The stretch between Kilcunda and Cutlers Beach had an impressive 11 fledglings. The Kilcunda Trestle Bridge pair, having lost 3 chicks early in the season, bounced back in fine style with 3 fledglings. The persistent PY Orange & unbanded pair who had 7 failed attempts last season, were successful with 1 fledgling this season when placing their nest below the Powlett River A16 beach access track. Both the Cutlers Beach pair and the Williamsons Beach pair similarly adopted this apparent strategy of nesting below the beach access track and produced 2 fledglings and 3 fledglings respectively. An interesting parenting situation took place on the Williamsons Beach further east site. When the brood of 3 chicks were 4 weeks of age, an unknown event occurred resulting in the loss of two chicks and the death of the parent (07 Yellow). 75 Yellow, from the neighbouring Baxter's North site, moved in and teamed up with bereaved KL White to guard and protect the remaining chick through to fledge age. Then, after job done, 75 Yellow returned to Baxter's North and original partner XC Orange.

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Wilson Rd chick, day 30, used the shelter regularly. Photo: David Hartney.

At the eastern end toward Inverloch, unfortunately there were no Hooded Plover fledglings. Early season storm surges affected the viability of nesting sites in Inverloch to the extent that there were no nesting attempts at all at Screw Creek. There was a pair in Inverloch lagoon (VT Orange & YV Orange) that had a 3-egg nest which failed. A fox was sighted near the lagoon as well as a magpie family that has some beach front territory. The Oaks site (DZ White & unbanded) had a 2-egg nest high in the dunes well away from beach. Only one chick was ever seen. The pair abandoned the site and moved to Twin Reefs where they produced another chick which we had hopes for but unfortunately failed a couple of days before fledging.

All up a total of 13 fledglings, about the long-term average for the Bass Coast.

SEASON 2024/25 ON THE SURF COAST

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

The Surf Coast 24/25 season has been an exceptionally positive one. We had the highest number of fledglings since our FoHP - Surf Coast group began. With 10 successful fledglings on the beaches between Torquay and Lorne, our Hoodies doubled their previous record of 5 fledglings the season before.

Heading further east, two fledglings were both remarkable achievements. At Harmers Haven, resilient AP White (an 18-year-old that fledged from Phillip Island) and her unbanded partner had the first chick fledge since 2013/14 at Waterfall Creek on 14th April (talk about being late). The pair had 5 nests, laid 12 eggs, 2 chicks hatched. In total, over 110 days of incubation and protection duties. At Cape Paterson, there was 1 fledgling from a nest established right in the middle of the Wilson Road beach access track by AS White and XR White. By some miracle it survived all the disturbances. It is the first fledge from this location since 2010.



Wilson Rd juvenile, wing stretch, day 43. Photo: David Hartney.

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Fairhaven Fledglings. Photo: Bron Ives

At Aireys Inlet/Fairhaven we were thrilled to have 3 fledglings from the resident pair SH White and unbanded. This was a remarkable achievement given that SH and his previous partner lost multiple nests here over the last 4 years. This season SH paired up with a new female and despite losing 5 nests and 3 chicks (possibly to nankeen kestrels or foxes) this tenacious pair kept on trying. When 3 chicks hatched from their sixth nest high in

the dunes in mid-February, our volunteers were on the beach every day, all day, helping dog owners to understand why they needed to keep their dogs out of the Wildlife Protection Area/Dog Exclusion Zone set up by GORCAPA. It had been 5 years since there had been chicks here and surprisingly, we found people on the beach responded really well to the situation. We think public messaging and the large Hoodie mural at the Aireys Community Hall (aka Hoodie Hall) helped. The Site Guardians reported many people returning each day interested to check on the progress of the chicks.

One of the disappointments for the season was that there were no chicks at Lorne. Last season RA and partner moved from Moggs Creek to Lorne and produced 2 fledglings, a first for Lorne since our records began. These successful parents decided to leave Lorne, and EV and his partner took over this territory. Unfortunately, their nests failed and they have recently been seen investigating old territory back at Moggs Creek.

We were all a bit surprised to discover that NY Green and ZB White nested at Whites Beach in Torquay, unfortunately in a very busy off-leash dog area. They had 1 chick that didn't survive long. It was very difficult to manage this site as there were so many people and there weren't enough volunteers to cover shifts throughout the day.

The Point Roadknight birds had 3 fledglings from 2 nests and even tried for a third which hatched on a warm and busy long weekend, sadly no chicks survived. The Red Rocks and Pt Impossible pairs were their usual reliable selves and successfully fledged one chick each.

A successful and tiring season for all!



Dad and fledgeling, Red Rocks. Photo: Bron Ives.