

**EDITION 32 - AUTUMN 2025** 

#### **INTRODUCTION**

# Dr Grainne Maguire, Program Leader, Coastal and Wetland Birds, BirdLife Australia

This May edition is filled to the brim with updates and news from around Australia after a very busy 2024/2025 breeding season for beach-nesting birds! In particular, the Volunteer Spotlight could never have enough space to showcase the amazing individuals we work with. Personally, I've been lucky to spend time with each of these legendary humans! As Jenny highlights in the Volunteer Spotlight, volunteering can have its devastating moments but remaining positive and sharing are two essential ingredients towards achieving our goals. Further into the newsletter, insights from one of our volunteers on the communications training reveal some great tips on how to maintain positivity and deliver that critical role as coastal ambassadors. In this edition, we pay special tribute to Bev Wood who passed away. I'll never forget the years working with Bev and her passion and drive to care for the coast. The luckiest part of this program is the connections we make and the people who come together to share that journey toward positive change for our coastal birds.

You can also read about the exciting next steps by NRM North in Tassie and the Conservation Regulators in Victoria, as they progress their commitment to addressing key threats to Hooded Plovers and helping return resilience to the coastal environment. With so many organisations around Australia working towards recovery of some of our most threatened resident shorebirds and seabirds, one of the biggest challenges can be forming Recovery Teams that have representation across the issues, the geographic range and the expertise. Renee Mead and Meghan Cullen are currently coordinating the formation of the Eastern Hooded Plover Recovery Team, with an advisory committee to ensure we can advance the next stages of recovery for this species. BirdLife Australia's special interest group, the Australasian Seabird Group (ASG), has taken the lead in forming a Recovery Team for the Fairy Tern, and we look forward to what can be achieved for this species, particularly on the Eastern mainland where the diminishing population finds it more and more challenging to successfully breed. Thanks to some fantastic efforts this past breeding season however, several breeding sites in South Australia and one in Victoria, have had the best fledging results in many years! This is despite some of these sites still having high impact threats in situ such as vehicles, as you will read in one of our articles below.

### **STAFF MOVEMENTS**

# Dr Meghan Cullen, Beach-nesting Birds Project Manager, BirdLife Australia

This January the BNB team welcomes its newest team member, Finn Saurine, who many of you may have already met. Finn completed his honours degree at Deakin University in 2022 where he investigated the efficacy of an ultrasonic



Biannual newsletter of BirdLife Australia Beach-nesting Birds Program

acoustic deterrent (FoxWatch) in reducing fox predation of Hooded Plover nests. Finn presented his findings at the BNB conference in Anglesea last year.

In addition, Finn has worked with Parks Victoria in a number of locations across the state, including the Mornington Peninsula and Far West Vic. Finn's experience with both Hoodies and project management has meant he has hit the ground running, coordinating the Great South West and Far West Vic regions this season, as well as helping deliver the Saving Native Species grant in the east of the state – we are lucky to have him on board!!



New member, Finn Saurine. Photo: Finn Saurine.

### **VALE BEV WOOD**

# Andrea Dennett, Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover Bellarine Peninsula

We were saddened to hear of the passing of Bev Wood, one of the Bellarine Peninsula's original Hooded Plover friends and advocates. Bev was a passionate environmentalist, citizen scientist, teacher and mentor, photographer, activist and a powerful voice for the Hoodies. Her energy was boundless. She somehow seemed to volunteer more hours than her actual full-time employment with Barwon Coast!!

Bev was a natural at finding nests, then observing, monitoring, reporting and photographing her beloved Hoodies. She was never one for the limelight and was much happier behind the lens rather than being the subject of the camera, so we have precious few photos of her.



Bev Wood with Monty the dingo, Jirrahlinga. Photo: Unknown.

Her generosity of spirit and vast knowledge made her a treasured friend and mentor to many. Bev leaves behind a profound legacy, one of community, education, and environmental stewardship.



Bev's beloved Hoodies, Blue Rocks. Photo: Bev Wood.



# A LIFE WITH THE HOODIES: MY JOURNEY AS A HOODED PLOVER VOLUNTEER

### Jenny Kikeros, Volunteer, WA

I live in the most south-westerly corner of Western Australia, where Goorbilyup (Blackwood River) meets the ocean. It's known as the place of two oceans, an ancient, magical meeting place rich with beautiful flora and fauna. Surrounded by sea and sand, I walk the beaches often, captivated by the life that calls this rugged coast home.

Among all the creatures I encountered, one bird caught my eye, a small, quiet one with a black hood. Sometimes, it would turn its head and look right at me. That was it. I was hooked. I needed to know more. How could such a delicate bird survive the fierce winds, pelting rain, massive swells, and shifting sands? I wanted to learn everything I could and most importantly, help. My greatest hope now is that these little wonders will still be here for my grandchildren's children to see.

My journey truly began when Grainne Maguire came to WA. After hearing her speak, something clicked inside me. I was incredibly fortunate to have the support of people like Marcus Singor, Chris Taylor, and Christine Wilder, dedicated mentors who welcomed me into the world of shorebird conservation. This inspired me to continue to walk remote beaches along the SW Capes, spotting Hooded Plovers, their chicks, and the telltale signs of broken-wing displays.



Jenny Kikeros at Sarge Bay. Photo: Mike Kikeros.

Today, we have a strong and passionate team monitoring Hoodies from Cape Naturaliste in the north to Cape Leeuwin in the south. Much of this is thanks to the work of DBCA, BirdLife Australia and the efforts of Lisa Nicholas and Tegan Knowles. One of my greatest joys has been volunteering alongside Kirrily Hastings (PHD candidate) and Undalup Cultural Conservationists monitoring nests, sharing stories and learning together. I love it when others join in. Even my "Majjjjicald" bushwalking group, hiking together every Wednesday for 17 years, has been gently converted...they can't escape my Hoodie passion!



JK Right (Blue) at Hillview North. Photo: Jenny Kikeros

One of the highlights of my journey was when an 8km stretch of beach was finally closed to 4WDs. There was an uproar but I've seen the difference. Where once there were no birds, this year two pairs nested and raised chicks. It was extraordinary. A particularly emotional moment was seeing birds flagged along the capes and one even received my initials: JK and its partner NB (a fellow monitor Nat Bell). These flags have revealed a whole new layer of mystery and understanding. I once thought I was seeing the same birds return year after year, but the flags tell a different story. I still wonder, who chooses the nesting site? Why do some birds abandon their partners? Where do they disappear to? Are they falling victim to foxes, cats, gulls, or ravens?

As a volunteer, I monitor and report nests, alert DBCA when fencing is needed and play an active role in community education. I proudly wear my Hoodie hat and a t-shirt with one of my own photos printed on it. I help organise beach clean-ups with Tangaroa Blue for Friends of the Cape-to-Cape Track and the Augusta community. Every conversation is an opportunity to educate, to connect and to spread the love of these birds.

One of my most wondrous experiences was when, after nearly ten years, a pair of Hoodies nested on Deadfinish Beach. Sue Taylor from DBCA and I fenced the nest, monitored it and watched in awe as three little chicks hatched. It brought tears to our eyes. The local community rallied around with everyone invested. Then came heartbreak. A 4WD drove through the fenced area, parked...and after that, the chicks were gone. The parents lingered, looking lost. We cried that day.



South Beach Fledgeling. Photo: Jenny Kikeros

My hope for the future is simple but deep. I want people to realise there's no imaginary line between land and sea. What happens in one affects the other and ultimately, all of us. Mother Nature doesn't need us but we need her. The key is sharing, staying positive, and loving what we do.

# **JANICE CARPENTER**

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

In 2015, having recently sold my Ethical Investment business and moved to Aireys Inlet, I was ready to find new interests at the beach. When there was a general call for guardians on the beach at Moggs Creek, I was happy to be involved but I had no knowledge of Hooded Plovers or of what was needed to be a useful volunteer for the Birdlife BNB Project.

I registered with Birdlife Australia and attended a very interesting workshop to find out what was involved. At this stage we had no Dog Exclusion Zones and there seemed to be very little public knowledge about sharing the beach with Hooded Plovers, so our encounters on the beach with the public were often quite confrontational. My experience of being on a Local Council for eight years enabled me to work with members of the public who felt they had rights to the beach because they paid rates and were not interested in the plight of the Hooded Plovers.

Birdlife Australia provided us with great publications to hand out and educated us at conferences and workshops. Gradually we started to see an improvement in the public's perception of sharing the beach.

At the end of the 2018/2019 season the coordinator at that time, Sue Guinness, asked me if I could take over doing the rosters. I had no idea how this role would develop into something much greater than I thought I had agreed to.

Fortunately, two of the volunteers offered to help, Kaz Paton and Bron Ives. I would not have been able to be a Regional Coordinator for six seasons without their help. We set about trying to increase the number of volunteers through the 'Socials'. Kaz and Bron have really progressed the education of the public about the Hooded Plovers. Bron, an artist, has produced A-frame boards with beautiful illustrations and friendly messages. These A-frame boards send a positive message to people as they enter the Hooded Plover exclusion zones. Bron also set up the FoHP Facebook page. Kaz has produced many Facebook posts throughout the season to keep the public aware of good news about fledging of chicks and which beaches to avoid with dogs. Kaz has also kept the authorities informed about chicks and encouraged the shire rangers, the police, the regulator and the Coastal Managers to visit the Exclusion Zones.



Bron Ives, Janice Carpenter and Kaz Paton. Photo Bron Ives

My experience as a Regional Coordinator has been a pleasure as I have worked with and become friends with numerous people who love the environment and are passionate about the Hooded Plovers. I believe the 'team' approach has worked for me as there are many times when I have appreciated a discussion with Kaz and Bron and also the people who look after the various nesting sites; Jan Leirich at Torquay, Bronwyn Spark at Pt Addis and Penny Hawe at Lorne. The Birdlife Australia team has been wonderful as have the land managers.

### Dr Meghan Cullen, Beach-nesting Birds Project Manager, BirdLife Australia

After six amazing years, Janice is stepping down as the Regional Coordinator of the Friends of the Hooded Plover Surf Coast. Janice has done such a fabulous job, juggling so many tasks as the group grew in numbers and in geographic range! The Surf Coast have many busy beaches, particularly over the summer holidays, and the group focus on educating beach users through the Guardian program, which means coordinating daily rosters has also been on her to do list! And just to make sure Janice experienced the full BNB experience in her time as VRC, we also threw in the 2024 BNB conference into her region – Janice (and her team) were instrumental in helping with lots of local knowledge and



contacts. We are so appreciative of the many, many hours Janice has contributed to the project, and we are grateful that she is still saying as part of the team. I personally love working with Janice's, due to her dedication to practical outcomes and her ability to focus on what's important, which has kept the project and the group going strong!

# **JEAN TURNER AND DAVID POTTER, VOLUNTEER PROFILE**

## Jean Turner and David Potter, VOlunteer Regional Coordinator, Friends of the Hooded Plover Kangaroo Island

We started bird monitoring together about 20 years ago with woodland bird surveys in the Mid-North (SA). Dave was a keen bird watcher since his teens, after noticing a different bird in his suburban Adelaide yard, a New Holland Honeyeater! In 2004, Dave joined the Northern and Yorke (SA) woodland birds' recovery team and did volunteer bird surveys around his 'patch'. On weekends I tagged along to learn.



Jean Turner & David Potter at their local beach, where a pair of Hooded Plovers and Pied Oystercatchers nest in close proximity. Photo: Cheryl Casev.

When we retired to Kangaroo Island (KI) in 2017 we started volunteering in earnest. Our local site, Island Beach, has breeding pairs of Hooded Plovers, Red-capped Plovers and Pied Oystercatchers (POCs). From one beach in 2017-18, we now regularly monitor all around Dudley Peninsula and along the north coast to Kingscote and Cape Rouge on the Bay of Shoals. Occasionally we do a big day out along D'Estrees Bay, or 2-day camping trips monitoring south coast beaches from Bales Bay to Hanson Bay. We

I grew up in country Victoria, interested in nature but with no idea that birdwatching was a 'thing'. I studied botany and my interest in birds only developed years later when, as a bush management adviser Northern and Yorke region, I realised just how important birds are in natural ecosystems.

Before retiring, we both worked on bird-focused projects. Dave did surveys for conservation projects in the Mid North and southern Yorke Peninsula. He also started monitoring Oystercatchers along the Port River for our friend, Dr Keith Jones.

Meanwhile, I took a pivotal leap into an exciting shorebird conservation project in the 'Samphire Coast', north of Adelaide. Working with inspiring, knowledgeable people in BirdLife Australia and Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Coastal team (now Green Adelaide), I learned a lot about migratory and resident shorebirds. Dave volunteered on our shorebird surveys and we both were smitten by these extraordinary birds.



Jean's favourite Hoodies, CR White Left and MV White Right, at Brown's Beach, Crabby Jack's territory, are a canny and highly successful breeding pair. Photo: Jean Turner.



cover a lot of territories and breeding pairs, but don't monitor together very often. Dave focuses on POCs, recording any Hoodies he sees while I focus on Hoodies, recording any POCs I see.

Apart from monitoring, I do site protection and talk with beach users at 13 Hoodie sites. Currently I'm the volunteer coordinate for KI. I help our BirdLife program coordinator with workshops, banding trips and volunteer catchups. Volunteers contact me about issues with monitoring, site protection or data entry. I also liaise with Landscape KI staff, DEW Park Rangers and KI Council and respond to public queries. Our group occasionally does displays at events and we comment on coastal management plans and development proposals which may impact on beach-nesting birds.

In 2024-25, Dave monitored an impressive 84 POC territories! He has amassed information across 8 breeding seasons on breeding locations, nest habitats, breeding effort and overall success. Each season the results are published in the SA Team Oystercatcher Newsletter produced by Keith Jones. Last August we presented an analysis of the previous 7 seasons of POC monitoring at the Island Arks Symposium. Pulling that information together showed a clear trend of decline in POC breeding success on KI.



Pied Oystercatcher parent KX and juvenile KE, Island Beach. Photo David Potter

We are heartened by some of our small coastal communities taking more 'ownership' of their local Hoodie and POC pairs. Residents' observations, positive feedback and support are all instrumental to successful hatching, survival and fledging of chicks.

Bird banding has also been a highlight, providing valuable insights into bird movements, breeding site use and pair fidelity. Victorian Wader Study Group and Friends of Shorebirds SE volunteers have banded and flagged 21 POCs here, enabling us to follow movements of fledged juveniles into non-breeding flocking groups, and confirm site and pair fidelity of some adults. BirdLife Australia's banding of 37 Hooded Plovers has revealed interesting pair break-ups, disappearances, re-partnering and territory take-overs!

Monitoring beach-nesting birds has become a serious addiction we may never shake off! And why would we want to?

# Land manager spotlight



### **BUNURONG LAND COUNCIL ABORIGINAL CORPORATION**

# Caleb Kilgour, Balit Biik Ranger, Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Victoria

This year marked the Bunurong Land Councils Balit Biik Rangers first season contributing to beach nesting bird protection as part of a collaborative effort with the West Gippsland CMA, BirdLife Australia and dedicated community volunteers. Our team of three was allocated nine monitoring sites across Powlett River, Harmers Haven, Inverloch and Williamsons Beach along the beautiful Bass Coast.

Our work involves observing Hooded Plovers and their behaviour, setting up protective shelters, signs, and refuges to give these vulnerable birds a better chance at survival. The challenges faced by Hooded Plovers are significant rising tides, invasive weed species, coastal erosion, predators such as foxes, ravens and dogs off lead all pose serious threats.



Hoodie best, Bass Coast. Photo: Caleb Kilgour

Despite these challenges, we've found great reward in this work. Personally, it's been a privilege to walk along the coastline I grew up surfing and playing on, while deepening my



Caleb Kilgour monitoring Hoodies. Photo: Luke Phillips

understanding and passion for Hooded Plovers. One of the most inspiring parts of this experience has been witnessing the dedication of volunteers, whose hard work and care make an incredible difference. A big shout out to them!

Our proudest achievement this season has been witnessing the full life cycle of a Hooded Plover from chick to fully fledged bird. Seeing them grow and survive through such difficult conditions is both humbling and deeply fulfilling, especially with the extremes of busy beaches in what was a hot and long summer period.

The Balit Biik Ranger Team is looking forward to growing our knowledge over the coming seasons ahead and being out on country protecting these beautiful little birds.





### **VENTURING OUT TO THE FAR EAST!**

# Mel Sheedy, Beach-nesting Birds Project Officer, BirdLife Australia

Over the summer, I was able to venture out to Far East Gippsland to monitor remote breeding areas, deliver volunteer training workshops and hold community engagement events, thanks to funding from the Saving Native Species Grant. Our focus areas in this region included Lake Tyers, Cape Conran Coastal Park and Mallacoota.

One of our site visits in December was to Lake Tyers Beach. We met with Sam, Parks Victoria Chief Ranger of Lakes & Eastern Alps and while unfortunately no Hoodies were spotted this time round, we did have the pleasure of finding a Little Tern colony right on the spit of the estuary opening. Viewing from a safe distance, we witnessed their magnificent courting behaviour and became familiar with their unique calls. This was special for Sam, who was observing this for the first time. First or tenth time, I will always be amazed at this sight. Luckily when the estuary had opened up to the ocean months later, the terns had finished breeding!

At Salmon Rocks, we met up with veteran Hoodie enthusiasts, Jacquie and Len Axen as well as the Cape Conran Parks Victoria (PV) crew. Having scoped out the site earlier, Jacquie and Len led us to a one-egg incomplete clutch. For PV rangers Ben, Josh and Tracy, this was the first time they had seen a Hoodie nest and observed the leading behaviours from parents. It was a good



Mel Sheedy speaking to Parks Victoria on-ground crew about site protection. Photo: Josh Poole.

opportunity to talk about the site protection management that is needed to increase the chance of vulnerable nests surviving, particularly on this beach where off-leash dogs and foxes are known to occur.

In March this year, we were able to set up a stall at the Metung Market and held a scope-viewing session at the lookout at Marlo, overseeing the mouth of the Snowy River. These were great ways to connect with the community and share with them the plight of Hooded Plovers and other shorebirds. Thank you to all the PV crew and volunteers of the BNB project across the East Gippsland region for taking the time to meet with us and for all the work you do for Hoodies. We look forward to continuing to grow these relationships in future.



Metung Market Hoodie Stall. Photo: Mel Sheedy



Scope viewing session at Marlo. Photo: Mel Sheedy.



# STUDENTS STEP UP TO SHELTER VULNERABLE SHOREBIRDS

# Alex Comino and Deb Laver, Kangaroo Island Landscape Board

With tiny footprints in the sand and a future under threat, the Hooded Plover is getting a helping hand from a group of budding conservationists — local school students.

Last term, the Kangaroo Island Landscape Board joined forces with the Year 7/8 Environmental Technology class at Kangaroo Island Community Education's Kingscote campus to take action. Together, they constructed a set of chick shelters. These A-frame protective structures will be installed on the island's Hoodie nesting beaches during the next breeding season when chicks hatch.

The shelters, developed to specifications outlined by BirdLife Australia, are designed to give vulnerable chicks extra protection after hatching. Providing refuge from heat, wind, rain, and predators, the shelters mimic natural cover in an environment where shelter from coastal vegetation, driftwood and seaweed wrack may be limited.



Kangaroo Island Community Education students with their new shelters. Photo: Alex Comino.

Newly hatched Hooded Plover chicks are about the size of a 50-cent coin, and vulnerable to predation, trampling and starvation. With more extreme heat days, these temporary structures are an important tool to improve their chances of fledging or starting to fly. It takes five weeks to fledge, and chicks spend this time running between the shoreline where they feed, and the dunes where they escape predators, disturbance and seek shade.

The collaboration not only contributes to species conservation but also serves as a powerful learning experience for students.

"Working on the Hooded Plover chick shelters was incredibly rewarding," said Lemberry Koutlakis, Environmental Technology teacher at Kangaroo Island

Community Education. "It allowed students to see how their skills can directly support real-world environmental challenges. Their enthusiasm and dedication were inspiring."

# **COMMUNICATION WORKSHOP, CONFLICT MANAGEMENT FOR VOLUNTEERS, CAPE PATERSON FEB 2025**

# Paula Street, Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover Bass Coast

A group from the Bass Coast and South Gippsland Volunteers attended this professionally run workshop with a view to improving our communication skills while out on the beach.

As Hoodie Volunteers we spend a lot of time out on the beach. Whether they be remote, or very busy during peak times, the reality is that we simply cannot predict what situations we may come across. We do not know when someone may approach us, nor do we have any knowledge about a person's background. We do not know what may trigger someone else into a confrontation, nor indeed what may trigger us and we are usually on our own.





Workshop participants introducing themselves to the facilitator. Photo: Kasun Ekanayake.

Sharing this day with the other volunteers was so worthwhile. It felt important to hear that we are NOT ALONE in having experiences that may be frustrating, infuriating, difficult to deal with and can really affect mood and motivation. Knowing that others have possibly had similar experiences makes it a lot easier to call on another volunteer to talk about an incident that may have been upsetting. Alternatively, we might wish to share something that was quite exhilarating...we all need good news stories too!

The workshop involved some sitting and listening, time to share experiences, ask questions, put into practice some of the techniques we had learnt and we received a manual to take home for reference.

### What did I learn?

These are the strategies that resonated for me....

- keep my tone and demeanour always friendly/interested and be willing to make a connection rather than giving instructions or mentioning rules
- · stay calm and listen, NEVER raise my voice
- show some empathy, even when I don't feel it
- wait until they've had their say & calmed down before trying any explanations or offering education, if at all
- remember to stay in touch with my own feelings and walk away if the situation becomes threatening

#### Benefits/Usefulness in the field?

- I came away feeling more confident to negotiate whatever situations may arise with the public
- I felt more motivated to communicate with the team about any incidents that have had an impact

 I felt reassured knowing I could practice techniques that have been professionally developed by skilled and experienced educators

There are dog walkers, fishers, surfers, paragliders, families on holidays, photo enthusiasts, bike riders, horse riders, the "I've lived here all my life and I'm entitled" kind, the sign removers....and there are those who are genuinely curious and supportive of protecting our Hoodies. We share the beach with all of them, so learning how to respond appropriately to the public when we are representing Birdlife Australia was much appreciated.



Volunteer Mike Tesch (right) engaging in a roleplay scenario with one of the professional actors (left) Photo: Kasun Ekanayake.



### **HOODIE EDUCATION ON THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA**

# Chris Willocks, Vice President, Friends of the Hooded Plover Mornington Peninsula Inc.

Friends of the Hooded Plover, Mornington Peninsula, runs varied BNB education activities. The activities are enjoyed by kids, adults and volunteers and they connect us with the local community.

Educational activities are not always the same each year but some regular activities that occur on the Mornington Peninsula are:

- 1. Beach sessions with Surf Life Saving Clubs, usually Nippers
- 2. Classroom story and activity sessions using Hoodie Who? This resource kit was funded by a grant and written by PV rangers.
- 3. Chick shelter building with primary school students.
- 4. Beach excursions for VCE Environmental Science, year 12.
- 5. Stalls at community markets, fairs and shopping strips.
- 6. Beach and dune walk funded by Summer By The Sea Coastcare grant.

In particular, St Joseph's Primary School in Sorrento has developed a wonderful collaboration with Friends of the Hooded Plover and Nepean Men's Shed over the last 5 years. The Sustainability and Art teacher, Jane Byrne, has driven projects from art, classroom activities, chick shelter building, postcard swaps and inviting us to have a stall at the school fair. Her amazing creativity, passion for teaching and connecting the community are really valued by Friends of the Hooded Plover Mornington Peninsula.



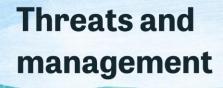
Jane Byrne assisting a grade 4 student with building a chick shelter. Photo: Chris Willocks.



Terry from Nepean Men's Shed supervising drilling with a grade 4 student. Wood is donated by Bunnings. Photo: Chris Willocks.



Karen performing at the fair in the Hoodie costume kindly loaned by Birdlife. Photo: Chris Willocks.





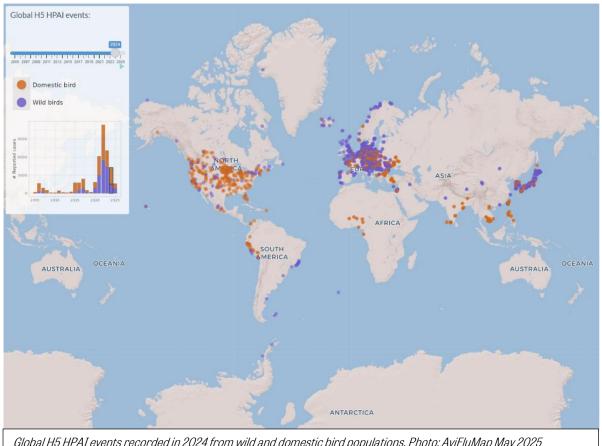
### **AVIAN INFLEUNZA UPDATE**

Thankfully H5 HPAI bird flu has not been detected in Australia over the past summer season. With H5 HPAI present on all other continents, experts are still on high alert for potential spread to Australia in the spring arrival of migratory shorebirds or through seabirds from Antarctica. Please whilst walking beaches over the cooler months and into next breeding season, keep in mind the symptoms of H5 HPAI and report any unusual illness or death in wild birds and other wildlife immediately via the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.

You can stay up to date about H5 HPAI on the Birdlife Australia Avian Infleunza website and the following online resources provide further information regarding H5 HPAI in Australia:

- Wildlife Health Australia
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Introducing AviFluMap, a modelling tool which displays H5 HPAI events across the globe and shows migratory pathways of species which could bring H5 HPAI to Australia. AviFluMap has been created Deakin University, Birdlife Australia and the Alfred Wegner Institute with support from the One Health Investigation Fund. For those interested AviFluMap can be accessed here: https://hpairisk.deakin.edu.au/



Global H5 HPAI events recorded in 2024 from wild and domestic bird populations. Photo: AviFluMap May 2025



# TINY BIRDS, BIG IMPACT: NRM NORTH'S ONGOING COMMITMENT TO HOODED PLOVER CONSERVATION

# Stephen Izzard, NRM North Biodiversity Program Manager, Tasmania

Tasmania is a stronghold for more than 60 per cent of the global Eastern Hooded Plover (*Thinornis rubricollis*) population, with at least 750 known breeding pairs (Woehler 2021). Sandy beaches backed by coastal dunes along Tasmania's coastline provide vital breeding habitat for Hooded Plover, but the species also feeds in saltmarshes, estuaries, coastal lagoons, and mudflats. Much of this breeding habitat remains under threat from marine debris, invasive weeds, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events, but the most significant threat to successful breeding is the destruction of nests or disturbance of breeding birds by people, dogs, and vehicles.

The "Defending the Hood" project (2018-2023), delivered by NRM North with Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service and Birdlife Australia and funded by the Australian Government's National Landcare Program, aimed to boost breeding success of the Eastern Hooded Plover in northern Tasmania. Key outcomes included protecting 25 nest sites, educating over 3300 community members, funding weed control across 60 kms of coastline, controlling illegal vehicle access on nesting beaches and surveying 88 per cent of the nesting habitat in northeast Tasmania and Flinders Island by coordinating the BirdLife Australia biennial shorebird population count. Volunteers played a crucial role in monitoring breeding sites, installing protective fencing, and raising public awareness.

Building on this project, NRM North has secured funding through the Australian Government's Saving Native Species program for a new project: "*Protecting the Hood: habitat conservation and beach-user awareness in north-eastern Tasmania*". Running from April 2025 until June 2026, it aims to work with land managers and community volunteers to address key breeding threats through priority conservation activities.

# Key activities will include:

- Beach access management: Vehicle access control barriers and signage will be constructed or updated at identified priority locations on the northeast coast and Flinders Island.
- **Weed management:** Control of invasive beach weeds such as sea spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*), along at least 35 km of coastline to improve nesting habitat suitability.
- **Predator control**: Strategic control of feral and stray cats near known breeding sites to reduce predation risks to the plovers and their eggs.
- Community engagement: A coordinated educational campaign about the importance of protecting nesting sites
  will be delivered to beachgoers in partnership with Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service's Discovery Ranger
  Program and the North-East Bioregional Network, to reinforce messaging around beach behaviour that
  threatens nesting success such as vehicle access and off-lead dogs.

This project will be delivered in partnership with Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service, North East Bioregional Network, BirdLife Australia, Break O'Day Council, and Wildcare Friends of the Larapuna Coast, to ensure the project achieves the shared desired outcomes and supports ongoing conservation of the species in the region.

For more information on how to get involved or support the conservation of the Hooded Plover, visit <u>NRM North's Hooded Plover Project page</u>.





Hooded Plover from Tasmania's East coast. Photo:
NRM North.

#### **DISCOVERING THE YORKE PENINSULA**

## Mel Sheedy, Beach-nesting Birds Project Officer, BirdLife Australia

Earlier this year, Kasun and I were fortunate enough to make a trip to Yorke Peninsula, thanks to funding from the National Heritage Trust through the Northern & Yorke Landscape Board. While the main purposes of this trip were to meet with volunteers, facilitate training workshops and assist with monitoring of Hooded Plovers, it was also an opportunity to introduce myself to volunteers, as I'll be slowly stepping into Kasun's shoes to coordinate the FoHP Yorke Peninsula volunteer group.

Over the years, Kasun has successfully guided conservation efforts for the Hooded Plover in this region, in collaboration with the FoHP Yorke Peninsula, Northen and Yorke Landscape Board (NYLB), National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS), and several councils. These are certainly big shoes to fill.

Having never visited Yorke Peninsula before, parts of the landscape were similar to Victoria. The land had been extensively cleared, with such vast flatness until you reach the coast or National Park. In contrast to Victoria, Hooded Plovers thrived in certain low energy bay areas such as Moonta and Port Vincent. It was such a special privilege to discover a nest on the Innes Salt Lake.

A busy week was planned, with the intention to visit at least 30 sites and meet with volunteers across the peninsula over five days. Some of these areas were open to 4WDs, an added threat to these already vulnerable birds. A few outstanding visits included our trip to Balgowan, where we found a nest tucked away within a cove of sorts. Our nest finding skills were certainly put to the task, with the camouflage level dialled up to 'high'. This is one where you definitely need to be careful of where you stepped!



Balgowan nest. Photo: Mel Sheedy





Salt lake Hoodie nest. Photo: Mel Sheedy.

Dhilba Guuranda-Innes National Park (NP) offered a lush comparison, appearing as untouched coastal wilderness. Accompanied by the NPWS, NYLB and volunteers, we visited several sites across the NP. These pristine coasts were lucky to be protected from vehicles on beaches. Knowing one of the pairs was known to frequent the Innes Salt Lake, our small group of surveyors investigated the outskirts of the lake. After some careful bush bashing and scoping out, we discovered a 3-egged nest amongst some dried salt marsh and pile of broken glass!

Throughout the week, we were able to resight a handful of flagged birds. YP White in particular was spotted at Kemp Bay, its original place of banding as an adult on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 2016! We can now confirm that YP White is over 8 years old, highlighting the importance of banding and what we can learn from it.

One final anecdote to share was our visit to Dowcer Bluff in Port Vincent. Volunteers Rachel and Graham were excited to show us their new Hoodie nest, laid just metres in view from their balcony overlooking the gulf. As the story goes, the high tide had come in that morning and washed away the nest. Graham was able to find the eggs washed up amongst the wrack and Kasun was able to inspect them. They were abnormally small and lightweight, indicating that they were unviable. Interestingly, the pair had already created new scrapes, ready to persevere as Hoodies do.

Of course, the main highlight of the trip was our volunteer catch up over lunch in Minlaton and training workshop in Hardwicke Bay. A great chance for volunteers and land managers across the peninsula to connect over the mammoth joint effort that goes into protecting



Unusual eggs, Dowcer Bluff. Photos: Mel Sheedy.

Hooded Plovers. I'm looking forward to returning to Yorke Peninsula in January 2026!

This project is funded by the Australian Government Natural Heritage Trust through the Northern and Yorke Landscape Board, a member of the Commonwealth Regional Delivery Partners panel, and delivered by BirdLife Australia.

# **ENDANGERED FAIRY TERN KILLED BY A VEHICLE AT THE MURRAY MOUTH**

# Kerri Bartley, Project Coordinator, Sharing our Shores with Coastal Wildlife, Birdlife Australia

Birdlife Australia volunteers made a heart-breaking discovery on one of their weekly Fairy Tern breeding monitoring surveys at the Murray Mouth in the Coorong National Park on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025. We were all completely devastated to discover a dead juvenile Fairy Tern lying on the sand amongst vehicle tracks just outside of the fenced area. The cause of death was soon after confirmed as 'vehicle strike' by a necropsy carried out by veterinary staff at Zoos SA.





Dead juvenile Fairy Tern, in tire tracks (confirmed vehicle strike), Murray Mouth, SA. Photo: Kerri Bartley.

This unfortunate and completely preventable death followed one of the most successful breeding events at the site since monitoring began. The 2024-25 Fairy Tern breeding season had a record 83 Fairy Tern chicks successfully fledge from the breeding colony, such a wonderful result for the birds!

So much effort went into protecting the 141 Fairy Tern nests in the colony this season, including a 1.2km exclusion fence installed around the perimeter of the breeding site by First Nations people, BirdLife volunteers and National Parks Staff. Several large banners and signs were installed asking visitors and fisherman who frequent the area to keep to the waters edge and not cut across the breeding site. Workshops were run to train new volunteers from the local Ngarrindjeri community. To have discovered one of these fledglings killed by a 4wd that absolutely shouldn't be there during the breeding season was just devastating!

Fairy Terns are Endangered in South Australia and are facing major declines across south-eastern Australia, with pressures from human activities, including vehicles on beaches, predation by introduced species, climate change and storm events all contributing to their decline.

Despite support from BirdLife Australia, Birds SA, the Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation and local land managers asking for seasonal vehicle beach closures, the SA Government are yet to implement the approach. We urgently need better regulations to protect our birds and their habitats.

If you haven't already, please visit the link to sign our petition: https://www.actforbirds.org/safebeachesforall



### **OPERATION SOHO: 2024 - 2025 UPDATE**

# Monique Cugliari, A/ Permissions Lead | Regulatory Operations - Barwon South West Conservation Regulator, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

In its fourth year of delivery, Operation Save Our Hoodies (SoHo) continues to get Officers out on beaches and offenders feeling the heat. The operation aims to help protect Hooded Plovers during their crucial breeding season, by educating beachgoers and enforcing regulations around nesting sites.

This last season looked a little different around the traps with a dedicated Operation SoHo position being stood up to support the Gippsland Region. Working directly with the BirdLife Beach Nesting Birds team, the position funding and support was secured through the federal Saving Native Species program. A significant uptake in beach patrols and stakeholder relationships assisted in understanding how we can continue to build resilience for the Hoodie population in the region.

The statewide end of season debrief has just been held with updates from all coastal regions. It was incredible to hear about the massive efforts put in by volunteers, Authorised Officers, Parks Victoria and local Land Managers. Hot off the press are our preliminary stats for the year! For the 2024 - 2025 breeding season, Operation SoHo achieved 320 patrols across the state with 21 infringements issued. These figures are positively promising, with patrol numbers increased from 260 and



Dogs breakfast event with attendees from Conservation Regulator, BirdLife Australia staff and volunteers, City of Greater Geelong and Barwon Coast Committee. Photo: Unknown.

infringement numbers down from 32 in the 2023 – 2024 season, beachgoers may finally be coming around to sharing our shores.

This season, anonymous tip off from a member of the public which resulted in a person being issued nearly \$3,000 in fines for offences under the *Wildlife Act 1975*. There were three separate offences identified in the Borough of Queenscliff for intentionally causing damage to a Hooded Plover nesting site. This shows how valuable any and all information that can

STREETS AND ADDRESS OF THE PARTY OF THE PART

Forest and Wildlife Officers on patrol at Undertow Bay in Cape Paterson. Photo credit: Brooke, DEECA.

be passed on to Authorised Officers is. Without the dedication of the local volunteer groups protecting and fighting for the Hoodies in this area, the culprit could have seriously jeopardised fledgling success.

There's a lot more where that came from when it comes to this Operation, but none of it would be possible without the continued support of local volunteers and our partner agencies! It truly takes a village to raise just one Hooded Plover chick and we are hoping that we continue to gain support to run SoHo for many seasons to come.



# MONITORING PIED OYSTERCATCHER BREEDING SUCCESS IN COORONG NATIONAL PARK, SA

# Ruth Cope, Research Assistant, The University of Adelaide



Pied Oystercatcher nest laid on the ridge between vehicle tracks on Coorong Ocean Beach. Photo: Kerri Bartley.

The first season of Pied Oystercatcher breeding monitoring has now been completed by the University of Adelaide waterbirds project team in collaboration with Birdlife Australia. This project, funded by the CLLMM (Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth) Research Centre, aims to quantify the impact of threatening processes on a model resident shorebird, the Pied Oystercatcher (or *Prukal* to the Ngarrindjeri people). This species breeds along Coorong Ocean Beach and throughout the CLLMM region, where it faces a range of threats including introduced predators (foxes and cats), abundant native predators (ravens and gulls) and human disturbances such as vehicle traffic and off-leash dogs. These threats may be exacerbated by climate change and rising sea levels, causing a reduction in suitable nesting habitat and increasing the risk of storm surge damage to nests.

Since September 2024, the project lead Dr Thomas Prowse, myself, and the BirdLife team (Dr Grainne Maguire, Kerri Bartley, Julia Roetman, and Dr Dan Lees) have made multiple trips to Coorong Ocean Beach and the Murray Mouth in search of Pied Oystercatcher nests. The season began

with beach-nesting bird training for University of Adelaide staff, where remote camera set-up scenarios on fake nests were practiced. We were reminded of the importance of nest monitoring when a Little Raven quickly took the fake egg we'd placed on the beach!

Thomas and I have since found and monitored nine Pied Oystercatcher nests along a 110km stretch of beach, from the Murray Mouth to 42 Mile Crossing. So far, the remote cameras have allowed us to monitor the successful hatching of six nests, with two nesting outcomes remaining unknown (due to camera failure) and one nest being predated by a feral fox.



Pied Oystercatcher nest on Coorong Ocean Beach, predated by a feral fox. The fox took one egg, then returned 15 minutes later for the second. Photo: Provided by Ruth Cope.





A remote camera set-up on an active nest. Photo: Ruth Cope.

Alongside nest monitoring, we've deployed 58 remote cameras to capture the presence of feral predators and track vehicle movement and behaviour along Ocean Beach. Vehicle impacts are particularly concerning in the Coorong as they limit suitable nesting areas, in one example a pair was forced to lay an egg clutch between tyre tracks. These remotely captured images will help us quantify the threats facing beach-nesting birds and have also helped me greatly improve my four-wheel driving skills!

We're looking forward to the 2025 breeding season, where we'll apply the lessons learned this year to deploy cameras on more active nests and aim to catch and attach GPS tracking devices to adult Pied Oystercatchers to better understand the link between hatching success and disturbance processes.



Pied Oystercatcher pair who successfully hatched chicks on Ocean Beach. If you look to the right of the parent sitting down, you can see a chick. Photo: Ruth Cope.



### **PUT TO THE TEST: INTERTIDAL ZONE SIGNS**

# Melissa Sheedy, Beach-nesting Birds Project Officer, Birdlife Australia

You may have noticed some new Hooded Plover signage out on the beach this past summer!

As a part of our Saving Native Species Grant, we've been trialling new timber tide-proof signs which were installed below the high tide mark at beaches across the coastline in eastern Victoria. We're looking to encourage beach users to walk below the signs, creating space for breeding Hooded Plovers and their chicks to forage!

Our intertidal zone signs are dug deep enough with the aim to test the posts' durability against the elements, especially the extreme wave and wind activity. We were also looking to measure public perception of these new signs. Each trial was installed for 4-5 weeks and there were mixed results, not all withstanding the extremes. These trials are still ongoing and will continue into the next breeding season where we will be testing steel reinforced plastic. Look out for them!



Signs installed at Mornington Peninsula. Photo: Mark Lethlean.

### **SNELLINGS BEACH - A CHANGING OF THE GUARD!**

# Caroline Paterson, Volunteer, Friends of the Hooded Plover Kangaroo Island

Snellings Beach is located on the North-west coast of beautiful Kangaroo Island (KI), set between rocky headlands, with an estuary tucked behind the dunes where Middle River meets the Investigator Strait. This was once a fairly remote beach on the island, mostly frequented by locals to swim, fish and launch small boats, which were then parked on the sand.



It has been one of my favourite local beaches since 2012, when my family bought land a few kilometres to the west. I have been monitoring the resident Hooded Plover pair at Snellings Beach most years, with varying success. One of the biggest challenges has been from local residents and their dogs, which are often unleashed and, in some cases, unattended by their owners!

Following Black Summer, KI Council changed by-laws to open up publicly accessible beaches to driving, including Snellings Beach. This has significantly increased visitor numbers and pressure on our beach-nesting birds and totally changed the visitor experience. Many people like to walk along beaches, enjoying nature and wildlife. Now on hot days and peak visitor times of Spring and Summer, vehicles drive and park along the length of the beach or along the estuary, well outside of the KI Council's management area.

In October 2024, our incredible Beach-Nesting birds team came to KI on a banding and training trip. My recent visits to the Snellings pair saw them vigilant and calling, indicating they had a family. VK Right (White) banded on a previous trip and its partner were sighted by the team with three chicks along the estuary. The parents sent them to hiding as soon as we approached the site and the decision was made to try banding the second adult. The incredible Kasun managed to snare the correct bird within minutes of the first attempt, AA Right (Green). On its release AA immediately reunited with VK and the chicks, and temporary chick signs were installed.

The banded pair were last sighted nine days later, displaying vigilant behaviours but the chicks stayed safely out of sight. That was the last recorded sighting of



Flagging VK Right (White) at Snellings Beach, KI. Photo: Caroline Paterson.

safely out of sight. That was the last recorded sighting of VK and AA with no Hoodies seen on October 24. I went back on October 28th and was surprised to see two unbanded adults and a scrape on the lumpy sand accumulation at the base of the dune. I was so confused, what had happened to Victor Kilo, Alpha Alpha and the chicks?

Expecting a nest from the newcomers, I returned a week later to find the mouth of the river closed and the water level had risen inundating the location of the scrape. The new pair of Hoodies were relaxed and foraging on the beach before returning to the estuary to preen when disturbed by beachgoers.

It was early December when one of the adults let me know they were nesting, leading, calling and distracting me away. As I carefully looked for the nest it performed the most dramatic broken wing display I have seen, throwing itself on the ground and spinning around. I carefully retreated, scanning my footprints to find a scrape with two eggs, within metres of where I had been. I set up a rope fence well back and temporary signs at all of the access points.

The new pair were hyper-vigilant on my subsequent beach visits, despite me staying well back with binoculars. They stayed well down the estuary, leading and calling as soon as they spotted me and no doubt anyone else. The fence was keeping the vehicles out and while there were human and dog prints inside the fence, they were mostly along the river's edge so it was the best I could offer them with the river receding in very dry conditions.



Snellings Beach fledged chick with parent. Photo: Caroline Paterson.

On Christmas Eve, the start of our busiest two weeks of the year, I saw two chicks. Their parents called them to hide on seeing me while they pretended to feed in the opposite direction and the chicks sheltered under the spinifex to hide. I retreated to the opposite side of the river and sat behind a coastal heath bush until the parents felt safe enough to return to their young ones and take them back to the samphire and sedge area, which provides a safer refuge.

The summer was hot and busy so I waited for quieter days, high tides or poor weather to check on the fence. I was happy to see the adults still very guarded on the estuary. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of January on the first day of South Australia's school term, I was rewarded in witnessing the fledging of a single chick!

#### **BAD DOG? THE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF OWNED DOGS**

# Finn Saurine, Beach-nesting Bird Project Officer, Birdlife Australia

The impact of human owned dogs on shorebirds species is a familiar story for our beach nesting shorebird volunteers across Australia. However other beach users including dog owners are often unaware of these impacts which has been highlighted in a new paper by Bateman PW and Gilson LN from Curtin University. The paper highlights the environmental impacts of human owned dogs are often discounted in comparison to feral dogs and are greater than cats!

The authors refer to examples of environmental damage from owned dogs around the world, including on shorebirds such as Hooded Plovers. The study highlights the need for greater conversation to educate often ignorant owners of both direct dog attacks on animals and less known indirect impacts such as urine and scent traces left in the environment from their companion animals.

The paper is freely available to read online and can be found here: <a href="https://www.publish.csiro.au/pc/pc24071">https://www.publish.csiro.au/pc/pc24071</a>



Dog on leash on a Victorian beach. Photo: Renee Mead

# **DESPERATE TIMES DEMAND DESPERATE NESTING**

# Mark Lethlean, President, Friends of the Hooded Plover, Monington Peninsula Inc.

In March I was visiting my daughter who works in Kununurra and we travelled out onto the floodplains west of Wyndham to do a little birding. As luck would have it, I came across a very unusual Red-Capped Plover nest.

Being in an area that could obviously flood, the birds has laid their clutch of 2 eggs on the only elevated piece of ground, a cow pat! It reminded me of the other infamous Hoodie nest we found on the Mornington Peninsula many years ago, the beer bottle nest.

For the Red-Capped Plover's, the ambient temperature was close to 40 degrees and so they were shading rather than incubating the eggs. Compared to down south where the female does most of the daytime nest duties, this pair was changing over often. Cooling off in the water at a nearby billabong and then likely transferring that lowered temperature back to the nest.



Unusual Red-Capped Plover Nest, Kununurra, WA. Photo: Mark Lethlean.



Close up of the nest. Photo: Mark Lethlean.

According to HANZAB (Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds) there are no subspecies of Red-Capped Plovers in Australia although they do note subtle differences in bill, head and wing length between birds in the north of the state compared to those in the south.

However, I was struck by just how different the male bird was to the male birds I study in southern Victoria. I can only separate my birds when they have an engraved flag, but this bird was a standout. Apart from being a lot leaner than my birds due to his harsher environment, he was generally a lot darker and seemed to have a much finer bill.



A very hot bird, shading his nest in Kununurra, WA! Photo: Mark Lethlean.



A local Victorian Red-Capped Plover, demonstrating the differences between him and his Northern WA cousin. Photo: Mark Lethlean.

### A REFLECTION OF THE SOUTHWEST WA 2024-25 SEASON

# Tegan Knowles, Beach-nesting Bird Project Officer WA, Birdlife Australia

The conservation of any threatened species can present a complex array of both successes and challenges. Regrettably, the 2024-25 beach-nesting bird breeding season proved particularly arduous in the southwest of Western Australia. Many nests succumbed to elevated tidal patterns and substantial oceanic swells. Tourism to the southwest region,

particularly to our pristine coastal environments, continued to increase imposing and intensifying pressure on the Hooded Plovers that have established these shorelines as their habitat. Nevertheless, amid these adversities, Western Australia has had several positive outcomes that are to be celebrated.

November 2024 marked Western Australia's inaugural participation in the biennial Beach-nesting Bird Population Count. The initiative engaged dedicated volunteers, land managers and project participants who collectively surveyed more than 120 km of coastline. We are looking forward to building on this data and expanding the geographical coverage in the 2026 Population Count. Given the considerable gaps in our understanding of the Western Hooded Plover, this population data is essential moving forward.



'KA' banded and flagged at Ocean Beach, Denmark. Photo: Dan Lees



Part of Denmark's banding team after banding 'JA' and 'LN' at Lights Beach. From left to right: Lindall Kidd, Milly Formby, Tegan Knowles, Glenda Rufus and Jen Fraser. Photo: Dan Lees.

BirdLife Australia has had the privilege of conducting two substantial banding expeditions in Western Australia during the 2024-25 season. In November 2024, we were joined by Dr. Grainne Maguire (Director of Coastal and Wetland Birds), Dr. Dan Lees (Migratory Shorebirds Coordinator), and Lindall Kidd (National Migratory Shorebirds Coordinator) to focus banding efforts primarily on the Cape-to-Cape coastline between Dunsborough and Augusta. Subsequently, in March 2025, Dan and Lindall returned for an expanded effort in the Denmark-Walpole region to capture and band Hooded Plovers.

Both banding trips proved successful, with the valuable support of local volunteers and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA). The combined efforts resulted in 21 Hooded Plovers successfully banded. When integrated with our previous banding from 2023, we have a total of 37 Hooded Plovers banded

across the southwest from Dunsborough to Denmark. This growing population of banded Hoodies represents a significant advancement in our research capabilities, providing a great opportunity to enhance our understanding of the Western Australian sub-species.

While the 2024-25 breeding season in Western Australia did not yield significant numbers of observed fledged Hooded Plovers, the positive outcomes attained through our banding efforts and Population Count represent substantial progress in conservation. These achievements coupled with the immense efforts and support from dedicated volunteer citizen scientists, land managers and project participants are season highlights. A special shout out to the passionate Cultural Rangers from the Undalup Association who have been regularly monitoring an exceedingly difficult to access beach in the Margaret River region.

With a growing collaborative network of volunteers and stakeholders, new temporary signage and 37 banded Hoodies, I am looking forward to the 2025-26 season!



Dr Dan Lees and Tegan Knowles very happy after banding 'ZK' at the Djerrt Mia Bird Sanctuary in Denmark. Photo: Lindall Kidd.

We would like to acknowledge that this Project is supported by funding from the Western Australian Government's State Natural Resource Management Program.

# DOES PREDATOR REGIME AFFECT THE ESCAPE BEHAVIOUR OF GROUND-NESTING BIRDS?

### Lachie Cooke, Honours Student, Deakin University

Several weeks ago, I submitted my final thesis as part of my Environmental Science Honours degree at Deakin University which was very exciting and a huge relief. From September 2024 to February 2025, I spent countless hours out in the field with the help of volunteers along the Gippsland mainland (Venus Bay, Waratah Bay, Sandy Point and McLoughlins Beach), and on five islands in the Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park (Snake, Earthquake, Clonmel, Box Bank and Dream). Several nights of camping was involved when conducting research on each of these spectacular islands.



Lachie collecting FID's on Clonmel Island. Photo: Anita Thamm

My study aimed to find out whether predator regime (specifically the presence of the red fox) influences the escape behaviour of ground-nesting bird species inhabiting island and mainland environments across Gippsland. One measure of escape is flight-initiation distance (FID), which measures the distance an animal commences escape from an approaching threat. An individual with a longer FID/escape response is seen to be more fearful and 'flighty', while an individual with a shorter FID/escape response is regarded as bolder and more relaxed. Usually, the presence of predators in an environment increases FID.

Predator regimes describe different conditions relating to predators across ecosystems, including distribution, diversity, abundance, and predator-prey interactions all of which vary across landscapes and environments. Key attributes of

predator regimes include the presence or absence of particular predators and variation in predator density. In this study, sampling was conducted across three treatments (predator regimes) each with replicate sites (mainland sites with foxes, island sites with foxes present, and island sites without foxes). Previous BirdLife reports highlight that only Box Bank Island and Clonmel Island are free from foxes.

In total I collected over 300 FIDs from 21 shorebird species, including from Hooded and Red-capped plovers, pied oystercatchers, gulls, terns and many migratory species. After analysis, the overall results from the study suggested that predator regime does not strongly shape escape behaviour in ground-nesting shorebirds across the Gippsland study system. The findings suggest that predator presence alone may not be the primary driver of FID variation. This project however could open opportunities to continue researching escape behaviour and predator regimes in Australia for similar species across similar island and mainland sites. Further research could also be conducted on mapping fox distribution and discovering what their abundance across coastal sites is, especially on islands and barrier islands which could aid in conservation efforts to eradicate foxes and protect ground-nesting bird species.



Godwit flock takes flight. Photo: Anita Thamm

If you'd like to find out more about my research or a copy of my thesis, feel free to reach out to me at: <a href="mailto:lacooke1023@outlook.com">lacooke1023@outlook.com</a>



### **REGIONAL ROUND UP**

Click on the links below to read more from each of the regions about their Beach-nesting Bird Project activities and updates from the 2024-2025 breeding season:

Victorian Beach-nesting Bird updates

South Australian Beach-nesting Bird updates

# **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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

Thank you to all of our wonderful authors who have contributed to this edition of Word about the Hood, and especially an incredible thank you to Felicity Hoff who volunteered her time to assist in the production of this edition.