



EDITION 25 – WINTER 2021

Another beach-nesting bird breeding season ends and we find ourselves living in a changed world, but slowly entering a new sense of 'normal'. Being a 'La Nina' year, our coastal birds certainly experienced the brunt of extreme weather events, particularly the large April 2021 swells that brought a sudden and drastic end to the south-eastern coast's breeding season. Unfortunately, we lost a number of unfledged Hooded Plover chicks in those swells, with the flightless young having no refuge from the high seas. In some areas, large boulders even washed on to nearby coastal roads.

Our team of scientists are currently reviewing the 13,980 My Beach Bird portal records we have for the 2020-2021 season for a range of beach-nesting species (12,229 Hooded Plover, 723 Red-capped Plover, 855 Pied Oystercatcher, 173 Sooty Oystercatcher) plus over 100 targeted beach and tern surveys from Birdata, not to mention the 615 biennial count surveys submitted! Recently at a workshop around the 'Future of Citizen Science in Victoria' (run by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning), it was highlighted that one of the greatest contributions citizen scientists can make are to projects where the volume and coverage of data required to make informed conservation decisions could never be achieved by just a few scientists. This program is one that recognizes this and embraces its citizen scientists, providing training through multiple avenues, reinforcing and expanding this learning, and coupling this with access to support and mentorship to ensure quality data as a result. Of course, the data is then vetted (often in real time by our astute coordinators) and then it is ready to be used in our research and to direct investment in on-ground threat mitigation, changes to localized bylaws, and other key recovery actions.

We are also making a move to analyse the wealth of flagged Hooded Plover sightings we have received since we began flagging in 2010. We are so excited to work with all the data you have collected, to tell some amazing stories about these birds and gain further insight into their lifespan, movements and site fidelity. Our qualified banders have been particularly busy this year, capturing Hooded Plovers in specific areas of the Australian coastline for the next phase of our analysis into genetic variation among and between populations.

The team has also had a busy year embracing opportunities to comment on statewide legislation (current reviews in to the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act and Wildlife Act), Regional Catchment Strategies, and to be part of parliamentary enquiries in to Ramsar and Ecosystem decline. Our program has been operational for 15 years and can clearly recognise where policy and legislation needs to change to support and improve future recovery and coastal ecosystem preservation.



'BL Orange' Hooded Plover Pt Roadknight. Photo Grainne Maguire

The newsletter is taking a new approach to sharing information about beach-nesting birds as it has grown so big over the years that it is perhaps an overwhelming read. We welcome any suggestions or feedback you have on further improvements.





## CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF THE BNB PROGRAM



Dr Grainne Maguire, Coastal and Wetland Birds Program Leader, reflects on 15 years of the Beach-nesting Birds program

We started with Hooded Plovers and at a small scale, 65 sites in Victoria, but now we have over 280 Hooded Plover focal sites across multiple states, and projects on red-capped plovers, beach stone-curlews, pied oystercatchers and fairy terns around Australia. A major outcome of the program is to bring groups together across Australia as a network who regularly communicate with one another - so that we learn from one another and benefit from the sharing of knowledge and resources. Our conference is part of facilitating the sharing of research and practical conservation advice to make this an adaptive management program. Another key part of the evolution of the program was the formation of 12 Friends of the Hooded Plover groups who deliver the program across the regions and have become diverse, active and highly-respected groups in their local communities.

The wealth of data that this program produces is another powerful achievement – we get over 13,000 observations of nesting pairs each season from a range of sites and species – we also carry out a coordinated simultaneous survey of over 2,500 kilometres of coast every two years to track population change. Knowledge empowers this program and gives us the tools to make decisions that we have confidence in.

Another highlight is that we continue to be active researchers and to collaborate with other researchers, in particular the students we have co-supervised. The connection to research enables us to keep progressing beach-nesting bird conservation – just a few examples are the chick shelters that offer refuge for chicks; interviews of hundreds of dog walkers to find out more about barriers to leashing; use of cameras on nests to identify major egg predators; conditioned taste aversion to train foxes not to eat eggs, and many more!



15 year celebration event at Point Nepean, 2021, Photos Dan Lees



## CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF THE BNB PROGRAM



Fifteen years ago there were more breeding sites designated as off leash areas than there were leash restricted or no dog sites. Today we have had major wins with councils who have strengthened bylaws to protect the birds or created flexible bylaws with dogs to be leashed within 50 or 100 metres of a breeding zone. The prohibition of dogs in Mornington Peninsula National Park was another major win. Each of these changes has involved years of community consultation, data collection, and step by step implementation; leading to genuine improvements in helping mitigate this major threat.

The level of public awareness is astoundingly different from 2006! Hooded Plovers have been on the Adelaide news for example, and it is rare to talk to someone who hasn't seen one of the signs around a protected nesting area. Members of the public now intervene if you even go close to a fenced area! And with awareness comes greater compliance – compliance levels are not where we want them to be and there's lots of work to do, but they are definitely improved from 2006 and the large number of community members who adapt their beach use to help the birds gives us hope that coexistence is possible.

Lastly, we have altered the Hooded Plover population trajectory! Together with Deakin Uni, we've been analysing the biennial count data collected over all these years – the data shows that there has been a genuine halting of decline and in one part of the coast (central Vic coastline), the trajectory is starting the long journey to recovery.

### *Where to in the next five to ten years?*

- Working locally but nationally connected! We aim to keep developing well-supported and active networks of community volunteers and land managers that work at a local level but are connected by national goals to protect flagship beach-nesting bird species across Australia
- Advocating for supportive legislation at the state levels to ensure greater protection and consistency in managing key threats
- Researching critical knowledge gaps, including conservation needs of the relatively unstudied Beach Stone-curlew and the widespread Pied Oystercatcher, developing solutions to address the impacts of superabundant native predators (e.g. silver gulls, ravens), and understanding factors that influence nesting site choice by fairy terns.
- Achieving sustainable coexistence between beach-nesting birds and beach users through effective behaviour change of the public and improving compliance with dog and vehicle restrictions around breeding sites.

Dr Mike Weston, Associate Professor from Deakin University, helps us celebrate 15 years with a special thanks:

Firstly, a quick historical context. The late, great Mark Barter of the Australasian Wader Study Group was a great supporter of resident shorebird conservation and the biennial counts conducted by that group since 1980 demonstrate the vision for scientific conservation of these unique, often endemic beach-nesting bird species. These counts also reflected concern over decline, and became a focus for conservation efforts. In 1992 Mark appointed me as the National Hooded Plover Count Coordinator, and by 1994 I was hooked, knee deep in a PhD on the species. My basic, clunky study revealed a critical ongoing failure in reproductive success. Demographic failure and declining populations were a huge worry. A new job as Research and Conservation Manager at BirdLife Australia, meant I could finally push a proposal through the Research and Conservation Committee to establish a beach-nesting bird conservation program. A successful grant application to the Natural Heritage Trust meant we finally had capacity to have some dedicated efforts directed at beach-nesting birds, with hooded plover as the flagship.



## CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF THE BNB PROGRAM



We had the capacity to employ a coordinator. I interviewed Grainne Maguire and knew immediately we had found our champion. My first thank you is to Dr Grainne Maguire. What an amazing leader, she has taken the program to amazing places, her immense skills – scientific, administrative, ambassadorial, strategic – she has led, funded, managed and put her heart and soul into the program. We are all blessed to have her. She has built a dedicated, effective team, who also go above and beyond to conserve these amazing creatures. A heartfelt congratulations to Grainne and her team.

My second thank you goes to the citizen scientists who have made this all possible - you have always been there, since 1980 and even before that. However, in recent times you have become a powerhouse of conservation action and support. I remember the growing engagement, commitment, love and care that grew. A few years ago I revisited one of the hooded plover breeding territories I used to monitor, with a view to checking it and reporting back to BirdLife. I had monitored this territory for years – at best I had been ignored by the public – however, I now found myself being moved on by a person on the beach “Birds breed there and you might damage their nest”. I had been told, how lovely! Things were changing for the better. And, although it may not always feel like it, and some damage can’t be undone, the future is brighter thanks to the hard work and commitment volunteers deliver. So, to all of you, thank you!

In some ways, things are slowly improving, but there is no room for complacency. Trends against single-species recovery efforts were prominent for a time, but we have weathered that storm, at least for the time being. Some population trends in some areas are showing some positive signs, but 1980 levels remain elusive, and decline started well before 1980. The program you contribute to has tangibly, directly, and intentionally added birds to the population – you have celebrated your local chicks when they start to fly – having survived a barrage of deadly threats. The species is rightly recognised as Nationally threatened, and has become a national priority. The program has sought - and in many places achieved - coexistence between people and birds, it has connected community with scientific conservation, and benefits birds and people. It is now a flagship of threatened species recovery in Australia. It is to be celebrated. Well done!

This program is about a bunch of special, tenacious, wonderful birds, but it is also about so much more. It is about people; it is about beaches as ecosystems rather than their role as substrates for recreation. It provides a model for successful recovery, one which delivers for people and biodiversity.



### CONFERENCE POSTPONEMENT



As many of you know, every two years, we host the Beach-nesting Birds National Conference. The next conference was scheduled for May 2021 on the Yorke Peninsula in South Australia. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the speed at which lockdowns and restrictions can be put in place, we decided the risk of holding the conference this year was too great. This is why we have postponed the next [#bnbconference](#) until May 2022 so that there will have been more time for the vaccination roll out. The location is not changing though! See you all on the Yorke Peninsula next year!

Special thanks to Australian Government’s National Landcare Program via the [Northern and Yorke Landscape Board](#) and [Birdlife Australia](#)’s Australian Bird Environment Foundation for their funding and support for the conference.





## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



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

I've been a lover of wild open places all of my life with a particular interest in mountaineering, sailing and birding. After migrating to Australia and settling in Adelaide for all sorts of practical reasons, but not mountaineering, the nearest wild open space was the ocean and its environs, namely the coast and its resident and migratory shorebirds. With time and the inevitable "collecting" of species for my "life list", I developed greater interest in bird intelligence, behaviour and conservation and joining the BNB program ten years ago presented an opportunity to follow my interests on my doorstep.

Additionally, travelling throughout Australia and experiencing the climatic, environmental and habitat variations as well as the sheer number of species, makes birding here very special.



*'Doing something useful'. Photo Ligita Bligzna*

I had limited involvement in monitoring BNB along the Fleurieu Peninsula coast until five years ago when the Hoodies moved into the Adelaide Metropolitan area, breeding firstly at Seacliff, later Hallett Cove, and more recently West Beach and Henley. Winter flocking is occurring at other sites and birds from further south are becoming attracted to the area with breeding sites predicted to move further north as numbers increase.

The role of VRC, shared with Ligita Bligzna, only involves three nesting sites at the moment but presents challenges mainly because we interact with staff across three council areas; help recruit, train and support a substantial group of volunteers, and engage with large numbers of people who use the beaches for recreational purposes. Council staff are proactive with the installation and maintenance of site management and there is a developing commitment towards site protection and compliance, but the high level of competing demands on Metro beaches can become overwhelming at times and certainly challenges the concept of "Sharing our Shores with coastal Wildlife".

The many highlights of my role, predictably, involves breeding successes, sometimes against all odds, but probably the most important contribution I've made has been in the area of communications and advocacy. The up-side of Hoodies breeding on busy Metro beaches and the BNB program is the opportunities this presents to educate and raise awareness with the public through direct conversations as well as the media – local radio, print and social. Far from being a news story relevant only to local residents, information about the birds is being routinely communicated to a State-wide audience.

Additionally, liaison and advocacy with the Minister for the Environment and local councillors resulted in the strengthening of by-laws relating to dogs on beaches and at Seacliff, the deployment of seasonal contract compliance officers at nesting sites.



*'Seacliff pair at Marino Rocks 2007, they've always enjoyed hanging on the rocks'. Photo John Cobb.*

Out of interest, my favourite bird is the Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), cousin to our Eastern Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*), which nests on upland pastures in the Yorkshire Dales and has a wonderful evocative call; it reminds me of my youth! Sorry Hoodies, I like you as well.....!



## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



### THE FALL AND RISE OF A HOODIE VOLUNTEER

John Hargreaves, Friends of the Hooded Plover Far West Victoria (and more recently South Gippsland)

It all seems so long ago. I moved down to Killarney on Victoria's Southwest Coast, jaded by the artificial constructs of city life, offended by the overcrowding and din, excited by the prospect of living in this Big Country's country. That was back in 2008. When my friends asked me why I moved so far from town, I would reply with zeal; "To find the real Australia." A flight in an old Russian biplane from Port Fairy to Hamilton revealed the extent of a radically denuded landscape, stretching as far as the eye could see from five thousand feet. I experienced first-hand the bitter community divisions wrought by bad attitudes to our environmental responsibilities. Alas, all too soon, I would add with melodramatic angst; "And I don't like what I've found!"



*In the Antonov biplane that changed my perspective of Southwest Victoria; Photo Grouse Graffix*

Except for the precious few wetlands and woodlands, native creatures and plants. These were the prizes for living in a sad and sorry Southwest Vic. I was desperate to find out more about them, so I researched, wrote and published a guide to nature reserves where the last remnants of native flora are found in the district. I familiarised myself with weeds of national significance and contributed to several management manuals. I involved myself in a portfolio of conservation activities; Coastcare, ReefWatch, Redmap, Middle Island Maremma Penguin Project, Summer by the Sea; Basalt to Bay, and most significantly, the Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) Recovery Program. I just loved lurking in swamps looking for ground parrots. I was committed.

It was through the Coastcare group that I met our Hoodie Coordinator, Toni Ryan, who inducted me into the Beach-nesting Birds project, introduced me to my first breeding pair of Hooded Plovers, 'AB Orange' and partner, taught me the basics of monitoring and managing nesting territories, then let me loose on the beaches and estuaries of Far West Victoria. Instantly, the way I perceived beaches changed forever.

At first, I found the going tough, just monitoring one breeding pair. They were hard to spot, their behaviours cryptic. Lugging signs and fencing gear through dunes and along the beach was a pain. The irresponsible behaviour of some people on the beach, who seemed unaware and unconcerned about the damage they were doing to Hoodies and habitat, was brought into shocking relief. I took on more, monitoring and managing a whole stretch with five Hoodie pairs. I barely saw a chick in the first season and was disturbed by the high failure rate. I regularly ran out of puff, missed a week or two's monitoring, and struggled to make it to season's end. So it was that I patrolled the fine line between the joys of engaging with these intriguing birds, the reward of getting to know their behaviours intimately, and dealing with the psychological and physical challenges. I did not do a very good job of monitoring in those early seasons.

One day, it all became too much after I reported a pair of vehicles parked on the beach adjacent to an abandoned nesting site (now active once again; hooray hoorah!). The drivers sought and gained ministerial dispensation to park on the beach while fishing, the only such case in Victoria to my knowledge. I was appalled at the outcome, which brought home the lack of support from legislation and authorities for our wild animals. I became very frustrated. Combined with a plethora of other negative incidents, the group's morale was shot and I left to focus on my other environmental commitments. Little did I realise that I was becoming gravely ill and would be hospitalised for two very serious operations in the coming years.

As I lay immobilised and recuperating, I madly craved three things; a splash in the sea snorkelling with my fishy friends, a squelch through the swamps chasing OBPs, and a long amble along the beach monitoring our beloved Hoodies. So as soon as I was able, I threw myself into the sea and returned to the bird projects with a vengeance. Soon I was sea, beach and swamp fit, speeding my recovery.



## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



That first season back, I started monitoring Hoodie sites outside my home range and recorded 250ish observations. I have a background in research and understand the importance of scientific data driving evidence-based practice, so I put in an extra effort to improve the quality, quantity, consistency and timeliness of my portal entries, hoping also to set a shining example for my peers. Over the following seasons, my totals climbed to 700, then 800, and finally I recorded over 1,600 observations in the 2019-20 season. To achieve this required familiarity with about 60 breeding pairs in a diverse range of habitats along 65 kms of coast, about half of whom I visited on a weekly basis. This was only possible because Far West Victoria enjoys one of the highest Hoodie densities in Victoria, with about 12.5% of the population resident. At the same time, there were not enough volunteers to cover them. I also monitored over the winter months, something that was unusual at that time. I enjoyed immensely the opportunity to develop my local knowledge of the natural world and derived great satisfaction from being able to contribute to the science and conservation of *Thinornis cucullatus*. As you can well imagine, I saw some wonderful sights on those long, arduous days.



Recovering from illness, protesting racehorse training, Killarney beach; Photo Toni Ryan

Getting to know the colourful names of coastal locales was a treat; *Deadmans* named for a boating fatality, *Oigles* for a terracotta gargoyle adorning a nearby roof, *Old Log* for a waterlogged log long ago washed away, *Nuns Beach* where the Sisters used to bathe away from prying eyes, *Poverty Point* and *Pelicans*.

One season, a big chick was due to fledge on a popular town beach as the Christmas holidays approached. Not sure when it hatched, I estimated the days and sent it urgent 'get airborne' vibes as Christmas Eve then Christmas Day came and went. I visited twice a day keeping a nervous, distant eye through bird scope, impressed by the parents' ability to confidently lead passing groups of people and dogs in one direction, while the chick went high across the dune face headed the opposite way. Not once was it spotted. Finally, on Boxing Day, Big Chick started stretching its wings and by the 28th, when the beach was filled with holiday makers, it was a competent flyer. Phew! That was a tense week.

Now, I would not want to resort to competitive volunteer behaviour, but... I was lucky enough to find the first eggs recorded on the Victorian coast one season, then the first chicks and unfortunately the first chick fail. Every silver lining has a cloud! In consecutive seasons, I sighted flagged juveniles that had been processed on the Bellarine - Surf Coast beaches where they hatched, at least 250 kms on the wing around the rugged Otways coast. Perhaps the biggest buzz of all was one quiet afternoon in May 2019, when I found myself among 102 adult and juvenile Hoodies foraging and preening together in an end-of-season junket at a local saltmarsh. I was stoked, easily tolerating a damp bum sitting behind a scope on the mudflats for hours. Later, I was told this was the highest number of Hoodies ever recorded in one flock in Victoria. Wow!

There are those among us who maintain that the relationship between researcher and subject should remain without emotion and attachment in the interests of objective observations. I cannot agree with this approach for either professional or citizen scientist. I value my attachment to the birds and personalise it. Perhaps this is because some of my research background is qualitative data gathering. The trick is not to overdo it, to make a conscious effort to maintain objectivity and strictly follow research protocols. Of course, in our work there is a penalty for this attachment. When a Hoodie is discovered injured and bleeding, like I found VU one day, the impact is all the more distressing. That large gathering of Hoodies was the last time I saw AB. I still mourn his loss. At the beginning of most seasons there is sadness to deal with as we discover pairs with missing partners. It is just how it is; it is because we care.

It certainly has not been all beer and skittles in other ways. During this time, racehorse training on beaches and in dunes became a pressing issue and I found myself campaigning for better management of this, other beach activities and the future of Belfast Coastal Reserve. It was a hard grind and not at all what I envisaged being a shorebird monitor would entail. Needs must, I suppose. There were lots of meetings and documents to prepare. Combined with fieldwork, a sixty-hour week was not unknown. One of the more exciting experiences was demonstrating on the beach and having a





## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



racehorse run past at arm's length while the strapper yelled abuse. Not for the faint hearted this environmental activism, I thought. I teamed up with a local character called Phantom to monitor beach training activities at first light. We sipped steaming thermos coffee while witnessing glorious dawns, established a strong camaraderie and had a lot of fun.

I was very pleased to show Bob Brown his first shorebird nest, a delightful little Red-capped Plover hen incubating two eggs adjacent to where he gave a speech supporting our campaign. Later, at a Green's dinner, he auctioned me for \$75, grossly overvalued according to one wit. This was in fact for a Short-tailed Shearwater tour of Griffiths Island.



*Left: Dressed for the occasion, Yambuk estuary; Photo Toni Ryan. Centre: Artwork inspired by AB, passed away winter 2019; Photo Grouse Graffix. Right: Bob Brown with Red-capped Plover nest, Rutledges Cutting; Photo Grouse Graffix*

All this beach time switched me onto migratory shorebirds and I made a real effort to identify our international visitors. This enabled me to competently participate in some spectacular shorebird count expeditions to the Coorong and around Corangamite Lakes. I was amazed to quickly identify (for I am no real birder) a most unusual visitor to the Southwest Coast one day when I stumbled across an Oriental Pratincole at Yambuk, the first such sighting recorded in the district.

This last season saw me relocate to South Gippsland, where I once again got stuck into monitoring Hoodies, a very different prospect to Far West Victoria. Lower population densities and long, arduous access walks make monitoring Hoodies much more difficult. Some of the beaches feature spectacular geological formations with little streams trickling across the sand. There are seascapes dominated by the plutonic intrusions of Wilsons Promontory, its tumble of granite islands spread along the horizon. I was privileged to be asked along to help monitor Pied Oystercatchers, Caspian Terns and Hoodies on the barrier islands at the Ramsar listed Corner Inlet. I was almost overcome with delight by clouds of Red and Great Knots settling in the shallows as we went ashore. Elsewhere, Eastern Curlews and Bar-tailed Godwits had me gazing skyward awestruck. What wonderful creatures. What a fantastic and varied journey this has been. But what rotter said; "All good things must come to an end"?

Whomever it was, life has delivered another curly circumstance that has me moving away from the coast. In these strange and challenging times, a return to the big city looks increasingly attractive (bucking the trend, I know). Full circle. For the moment, it means abandoning my extraordinary Hoodie cohabitants in their wild, semi-wild but ever deteriorating environs. Whatever the case, I will endeavour to remain involved in this vitally important project or find new birds, plants and habitats with which to work.

"Hasta la vista, Hoodies. I'll be back!"



*Dawn patrol for racehorse training at Rutledge's Cutting; Photo R. Maguire*





## LAND MANAGER SPOTLIGHT



### CITY OF GREATER GEELONG



*Plover Appreciation Day with volunteers, Jennie, John and Andrea, BirdLife's Sean Dooley and City of Greater Geelong's Rebecca Kootstra. Photo COGG*

Jeanette Spittle (Coordinator), Rebecca Kootstra (Project Officer), Steve Smithyman (Nature Reserves Officer) and Aldrin Woods (Ranger) from the City of Greater Geelong are a small team of four dedicated to Hooded Plover conservation. "We run the Hooded Plover Protection Program on beaches that we manage between Point Lonsdale and Collendina, and Breamlea."

"The City has been in the Hooded Plover space since around 2006. We ramped things up around 2013 when we formed the working party of local land managers and management agencies, began working much more closely with BirdLife Australia and the volunteers. Jeanette oversees the program, Bec looks after the education and engagement side of things and is the key contact, Steve is our on-ground man putting up signs and fencing, and Aldrin patrols our beaches speaking with locals around the dog control orders.

Probably quite similar to other major regional centres, we are a growth municipality and have some of the best beaches within an hour of Melbourne.

The City also has one of the highest rates of dog ownership in the state, that combined with the growth, is putting a lot of pressure on what use to be fairly quiet beaches."

City of Greater Geelong have been incredibly active in contributing to recovery of Hooded Plovers in their region from the very get go. In the early days, the focus was on on-ground works including fencing projects for major dune systems with a long history of significance as breeding sites. This then evolved to reviewing and improving dog access to breeding beaches, and over a number of years, consultation and adaptation of regulations and signage to mitigate the threat of off leash dogs. With a growing community base and partnerships between multiple land managers and organisations, City of Greater Geelong took the lead in hosting regular stakeholder meetings. "We were very proud to have unanimous council support for our Hooded Plover Action Plan that was formally approved in 2018. It cemented the program as being important and strengthened the work we do as a team for the future of the Hoodie program."

BirdLife Australia has worked closely with City of Greater Geelong from the early days of the program and often showcase the wonderful work of this council. Rebecca from City of Greater Geelong reflects "We view BirdLife Australia's Beach-nesting Birds team as the experts in the field. We rely on them to provide us with the best and most up to date management options available, so we know we are doing all that we can to help our Hoodies survive. Likewise, we simply couldn't run our program without our volunteers, they are often our eyes and ears on the beach. They know every pair, each nest attempt, which chick is now paired up with which individual in this location from 15 years ago. They warden the beaches and sometimes install signs and fences. Teamwork makes the dream work!"

When asked about the highlights of working in Hooded Plover conservation, Rebecca Kootstra responded "Oh, so many! Being a part of the Mountain to Mouth extreme arts walk "Hoodlums". Presenting at the Beach-nesting Birds Conference.

Sharing in the excitement of getting three chicks to fledge at the estuary of Thompsons creek, Breamlea. Winning a Highly Commended at the Keep Australia Beautiful Awards night."



*Left: Hooded Plover buses Right: Keep Australia Beautiful awards night. Photos COGG.*



## Science and research

### FILLING THE GAPS: GENETIC SAMPLING IN EAST GIPPSLAND

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

We were fortunate to receive some additional funding from the Victorian Government's Biodiversity On-ground Action Icon Species grants program, to expand our genetic sampling of Hooded Plovers in Victoria. The reason for this expansion stemmed from the recent genetic analyses conducted in collaboration with Museums Victoria, which revealed significant patterns in genetics within the eastern Australian subspecies. An isolation by geographical distance pattern was evident particularly in the Victorian population and one of the key recommendations to come out of that study was the collection of genetic samples from gap areas such as East Gippsland, Otways, Shipwreck Coast and Discovery Bay. This would lead to gaining a better understanding of genetic variation within the Victorian Hooded Plover population which would guide the identification of priority sub-populations important for future conservation.

We targeted the East Gippsland region with a four-day banding trip to Marlo and Mallacoota earlier this year. At Marlo, we focused our efforts around Point Ricardo on the east side of Snowy River mouth and around Salmon Rocks just west of the Cape Conran Coastal Park, where thanks to the amazing monitoring work of local volunteers, we had knowledge of where the birds were and what nesting stage they were at. We were able to collect genetic samples from five adult Hooded Plovers belonging to four different pairs. One of the birds we caught was originally from New South Wales as it had already been flagged black "W0" on its left leg by the banding program run by New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. Interestingly we were told by a Hooded Plover volunteer on the far south coast of NSW that it had been sighted nesting in NSW in the early part of the breeding season and that it disappeared after a couple of failed attempts. We managed to catch and flag its partner as well (CK White) so it will be interesting to see what "W0" and its partner's movements are in the coming breeding season.

In Mallacoota, again thanks to the amazing work of volunteers from the Friends of Mallacoota group, we knew exactly where to go to collect genetic samples. We managed to catch four adult and three juvenile Hooded Plovers at sites near Betka River Mouth and Seal Creek. The adult pair to whom two of the juveniles we caught belonged, were nesting while the juveniles were still present in the territory but interestingly, the adult pair was happy for one juvenile to hang out near them while the other juvenile was aggressively chased out from the territory whenever it tried to get near them. It will be interesting to see what the sex of each of the juveniles is to find out if that had a role to play in the targeted aggression.



*Grainne, volunteer Leonie Daws and Meg releasing CE Left (White) and LK Right White at Betka River mouth.*

Thanks to the funding we received, we also targeted the Shipwreck Coast, Otways and Discovery Bay for genetic sampling, but it was much harder because the birds were sparsely distributed and access involved tricky walks into distant territories, often to find the birds absent! We were lucky however to end up with four from remote beaches on the Otways, 3 from the Shipwreck Coast and two from Discovery Bay!





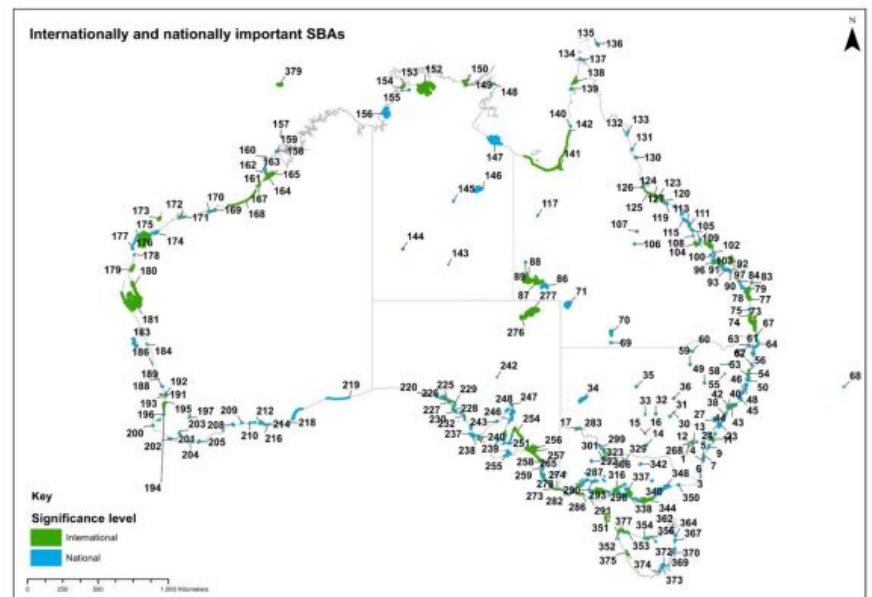
## NOW AVAILABLE - AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DIRECTORY OF IMPORTANT MIGRATORY SHOREBIRD HABITAT

Steve Klose, Migratory Shorebirds Program Manager

It's finally out! On 21 April, World Curlew Day, the Australian National Directory of Important Migratory Shorebird Habitat ('Directory') was officially launched.

A milestone of research, based on tens of thousands of shorebird surveys done in the years 2005-2017, the Directory identifies key sites for shorebirds right around the country — from Darwin to the Derwent, and from Shark Bay to the Hunter Estuary — and provides vital information for local communities, land managers and scientists who are working to protect the long-distance travellers amongst our shorebirds.

It uses rigorous methodology to identify the sites, thus providing useful and objective guidance for investment into the protection and restoration of important migratory shorebird habitat around Australia. In addition, the Directory builds community awareness and indigenous knowledge, helps achieve the goals of the Australian Government's Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds and contributes to the implementation of Australia's international obligations to the conservation and management of migratory shorebirds. It also constitutes an important step in the implementation of Australia's Conservation Action Plan for Migratory Shorebirds, which BirdLife Australia is coordinating.



Habitat is key: Populations of many species of migratory shorebirds have undergone substantial decline over recent and extended periods of time. Halting this decline and reversing the current trend is without alternative if threatened species are to avoid extinction and continue to contribute as an integral component of our nation's biodiversity to the functioning of Australia's ecosystems. Actions and processes threatening migratory shorebird habitat have to be effectively recognized and mitigated. In order to achieve this, decision-makers and stakeholders around Australia need to be able to easily access information on the importance of sites for migratory shorebirds. The directory provides this.

The Directory also provides a starting point for a more comprehensive assessment of the current state of the habitat listed, a prioritization of sites according to current or future threats experienced and more targeted conservation action. This directly addresses and supports some of the priority actions in the Australian Government's Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds across the main objectives: protection of important habitat, anthropogenic threat minimization or elimination and knowledge gap identification. While a number of high priority projects are already in the process of being implemented, the Directory makes those more effective and targeted.

While the Directory is an important step towards effective migratory shorebird habitat protection around Australia, revision of conservation and management plans for many sites may now be necessary to reflect their importance. Specific site action plans detailing conservation measures to be taken for migratory shorebirds at a single site can be developed

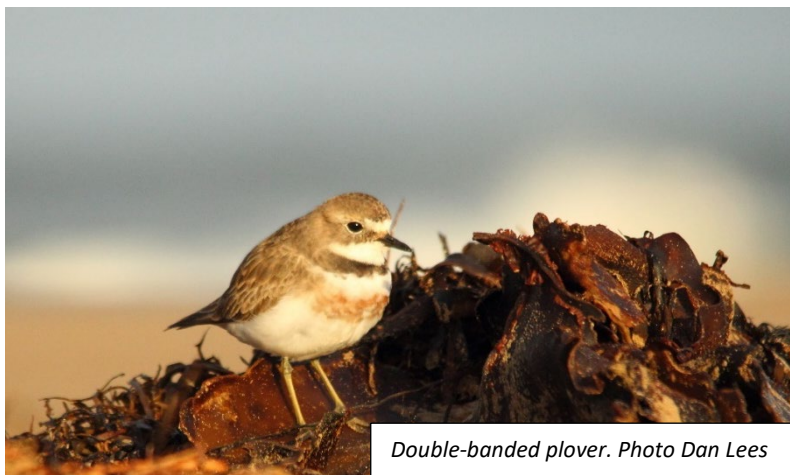


as a follow-up action. The directory thus also represents a key resource underpinning further conservation measures under Australia's migratory shorebird conservation frameworks. It is intended to review the Directory every 5-10 years to reflect changes in shorebird flyway populations but also in area use.

The contributions of thousands of volunteers who undertook a vast number of surveys over two decades, making this effort possible, by committees and experts from all States and Territories and by the Australian Government, which provided funding for this scientific project, are gratefully acknowledged. The document is available for download only in PDF format from [www.birdlife.org.au/directory](http://www.birdlife.org.au/directory). Due to the large size of the document (1,287 pages), there are *no paper copies* available. Feedback on the Directory is very welcome, and if you have additional data to contribute to a potential future revision, please write to [directory.feedback@birdlife.org.au](mailto:directory.feedback@birdlife.org.au)

## DOUBLE-BANDED PLOVERS NOW HAVE SOME EXTRA BANDS!

Renee Mead, Beach-nesting Birds Program Coordinator, BirdLife Australia, adapted from Luke Eberhart-Phillips



*Double-banded plover. Photo Dan Lees*

Yes, it's true! Luke Eberhart-Phillips from New Zealand has been capturing and banding Double-banded Plovers (DBP) in NZ to learn more about their domestic movements, as well as their movements across The Ditch, to Australia. DBPs breed in New Zealand during the summer, and then they come across to Australia's coastline and mudflats to feed during the winter.

The DBPs have been banded at Kaitorete Spit, Kaikoura, Lake Tekapo, and Tiwai Point. There were 54 adults and 45 chicks banded during the breeding season. Birds banded at Kaitorete Spit have an orange (O) darvic/ring on their upper left tarsus, Kaikoura have red (R), Lake Tekapo have yellow (Y), and Tiwai Point have white (W). Adults have a unique combination of four colour bands (two on each tarsus/below 'knee'), and a metal band on their left tibia (above 'knee'). The chicks have a single colour on their right tarsus and metal on their left tibia.

We're asking all of you, if you're out on the beaches this winter to keep an eye out for Double-banded Plovers, and to check their legs for any of the colour bands mentioned above. If you do sight a DBP with colourful legs, please take note of the colours, and the legs they were on, the date, time, location and send it direct to Luke: [luke.eberhart@orn.mpg.de](mailto:luke.eberhart@orn.mpg.de)

If you're keen to see a short video of a courting pair assessing a potential scrape, click [here](#) to have a look at Luke Eberharts-Phillips's footage!





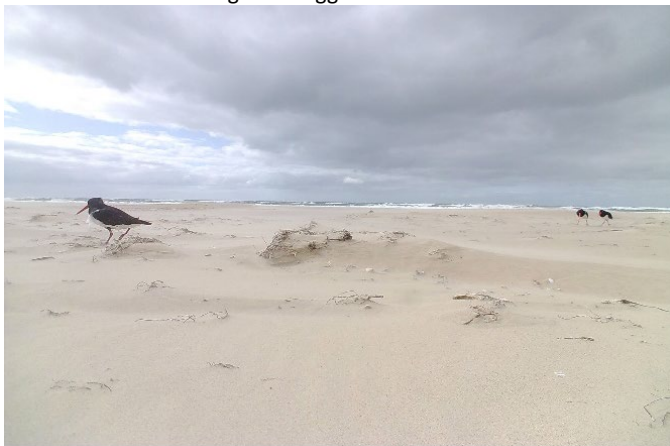
## Science and research

### PIED OYSTERCATCHER GUARDIAN ANGEL!

The remote cameras that we have been using sparingly on nests within Corner Inlet to learn more about nest fates and also to quantify fox activity on the islands, provide fascinating insights into the birds' behaviours too! Below is a sequence of photos (not complete) that reveals the amazing benefits to hoodies of nesting near Pied Oystercatchers!



Hooded Plover checking on its eggs



Lots of Pied Oystercatcher activity in area



Swamp Harrier lands at nest



Pied Oystercatcher visiting nest



Hooded Plover makes another nest check



Swamp Harrier predares egg





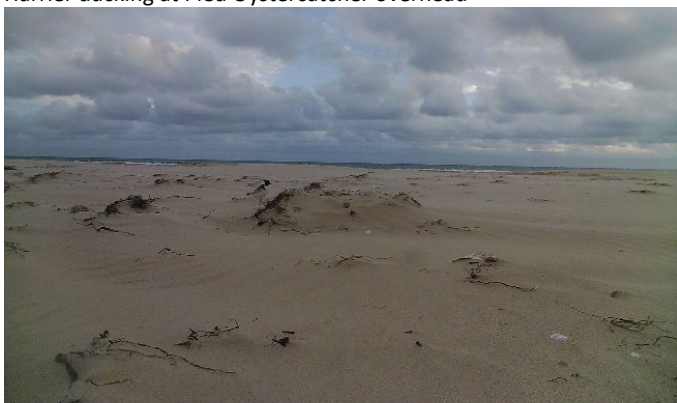
056F 13°C 25/12/2020 20:05:10

Harrier ducking at Pied Oystercatcher overhead



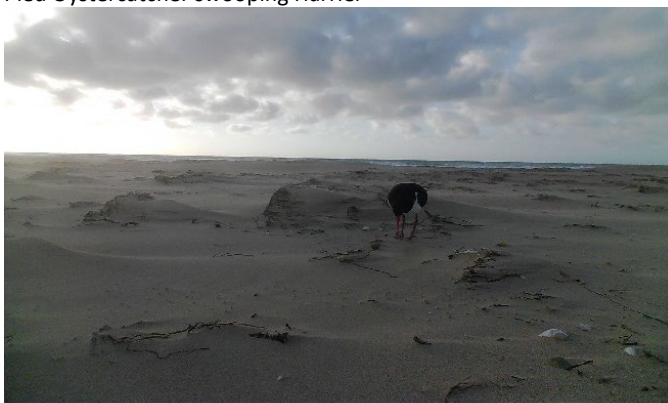
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Pied Oystercatcher swooping Harrier



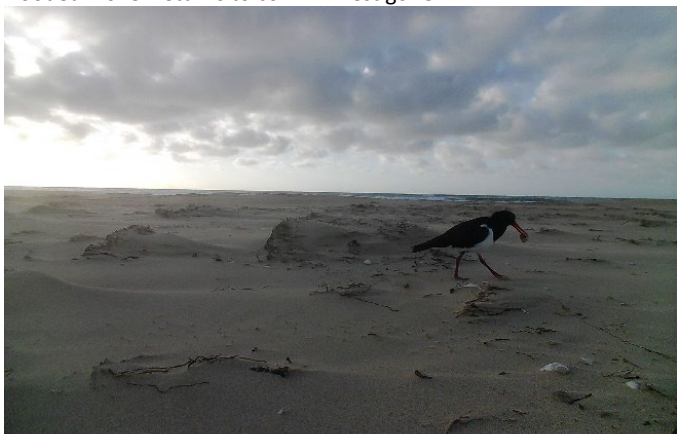
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Hooded Plover returns to confirm nest gone



055F 12°C 26/12/2020 06:53:56

Pied Oystercatcher picks up egg shell



055F 12°C 26/12/2020 06:54:06

Pied Oystercatcher removes first egg shell



055F 12°C 26/12/2020 06:58:14

Pied Oystercatcher removes second egg shell





## THE OVERWINTERING PROJECT: WESTERNPORT

By Bec Westlund, Volunteer Friends of the Hooded Plover Mornington Peninsula Inc, and Kate Gorringer-Smith, Artist and Coordinator of The Overwintering Project

Both migratory and resident shorebird populations in Australia have been declining over the last three decades. Western Port Bay, as part of the *East Asian-Australasian Flyway* and an internationally significant RAMSAR wetland, is of particular importance to our migratory shorebirds. This includes the critically endangered Eastern Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*) along with dozens of other species. Western Port Bay and the Mornington Peninsula are also home to Victoria's most threatened resident shorebird, the Hooded Plover.

Since its beginning in 2017, Kate Gorringer-Smith's *The Overwintering Project* has aimed to raise awareness on the plight of migratory shorebirds as well as their irreplaceable habitats. It has been exhibited more than 20 times in a wide range of forms and locations, echoing its subject by carving a migratory path of its own across Australia. Each exhibition, including *The Overwintering Project: Westernport*, has been developed with the principal intention of fostering connection between the Australian community and the eco-systems that surround and support us.

This latest iteration of the project strikes a careful balance between the ecological light and the dark, cultivating hope for the future while conveying the very real threat of habitat destruction. Every one of the 20 curated artists featured in the exhibition has represented their chosen subject matter with tenderness and honesty, either the birds themselves or the biodiverse habitats that nurture them, with 13 of these artists responding directly to Western Port through their artwork.

One of these works is the *Hoodie Empathy Suit* by local artist Dominic White. Situated in a corner of the gallery, the *Suit* uses a wicker form made from local wattle saplings, cotton thread, kelp and epoxy resins to create a wearable sculpture. The sculpture sits alongside a set of photos of the artist in the suit on the one side, and on the other a life-sized backdrop of Flinders Beach, with a Hooded Plover nestled in its centre. Intentionally, the sculpture is frail. But Hoodie lovers will recognize the hooded head immediately – it is a sensitive and accurate portrait.



Dominic White, 2021, *Hoodie Empathy Suit*, wattle saplings, cotton thread, kelp, epoxy resin. Photo Andrew Kopp



Dominic White, 2021, *Hoodie Empathy Suit*. Photo Andrew Kopp

Dominic describes the work: 'On a blustery afternoon, in speedos and cray kelp I donned the Suit and mimicked the movement and positions of a Hooded Plover on a Flinders back beach. This was captured by Melbourne photographer Andrew Kopp...The photos show me trying to understand the space a plover occupies, to get into its movement and head in an absurd ritual and performance. The concept of building a physical object to encase a body to try and understand another being is both comical and generous. There is a vague absurdity trying to understand a bird's physicality, movement, and life experience through a wicker construction. Yet the endeavour is about valuing something else for its own beautiful sake. Wearing the empathy suit is vulnerable, exposed, constraining and humbling. An effort to understand the other is a valuable human trait. It is hoped we all have the courage to see the world through another animals/ beings with empathy, understanding and deep respect at their miracle of life. To form a connection with all entities and their environment we share.'





The exhibition also includes poetry, hand-carved wooden sculptures, etchings, linocuts, monoprint, chromogenic print, collage, embroidery, installation pieces, video works, live plants, maps, digital artworks, drawing, animation and photography.

It is more important now than ever to use art as a means of relating ecological causes to the public in a way that can reach them on an empathetic (not just scientific) level. This exhibition does exactly that. The intention of the exhibition is to engage people with a local environment they may already know and love, sparking recognition and wonder for this unique place that we share with such amazing creatures. *The Overwintering Project: Westernport* also celebrates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and is dedicated to the memory of Dr Clive Minton OAM, father of Australian shorebird research.

<https://www.theoverwinteringproject.com/>

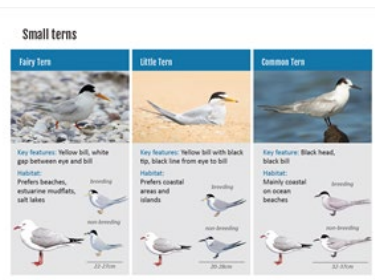


Performance stills by Andrew Kopp. Digitally printed on Gilford textured cotton rag, 310 gsm, 500 micron with archival inks. Photo: Kate Gorrings-Smith.

## FLIPPIN' AWESOME! A FAIRY TERN FLIP GUIDE FOR BOAT USERS

Dr Amy Adams, Coastal Birds Project Officer, BirdLife Australia

As part of the funding received in 2020 from the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority (PPWCMA), BirdLife Australia in partnership with PPWCMA and Western Port Biosphere has been able to develop a user-friendly waterproof flip guide for recreational boat users and fishers. While this guide is targeted at enhancing awareness, identification and reporting of Fairy Tern sightings, it also provides information to help boat users in identifying other seabird and shorebird species that they may come across when out on the water. Information is also provided on why it is important to report sightings, especially of threatened species, and how to do so. Boat users represent a key community group which can greatly aide conservation efforts in real-time through the regularity of being out on the water and their potential reports of sightings and nesting behaviours may correspond to events that would otherwise be missed by project staff and volunteers.



A limited number of Victorian-specific flip guides have been printed and will be distributed through stalls at marine festivals throughout Melbourne and East Gippsland as well as through partnerships with select local fishing businesses. We will also have a generic version available for printing for use around Australia. If your group is interested in obtaining a copy of the template to re-print, please contact us.





## BRIGHTON PRIMARY SCHOOL PLOVER LOVERS

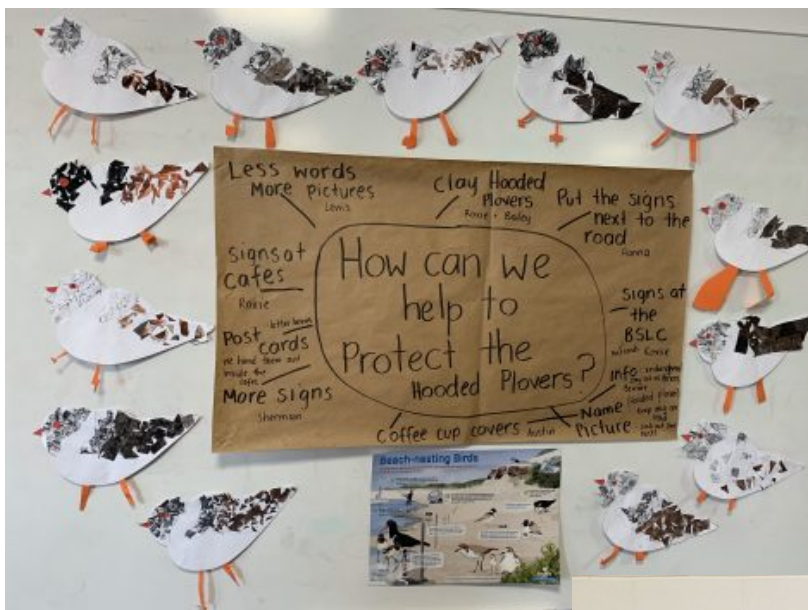
Ligita Blizna, Volunteer Regional Coordinator, Friends of the Hooded Plover Fleurieu Peninsula - Adelaide Metro Beaches

Foundation students at Brighton Primary School became aware of the Hooded Plovers nesting at the local Seacliff Beach and decided that more should be done to educate the community about the birds. Rather than an environmental project, this was to be an investigation into community.

A visit to the school and a beach visit with volunteers, Holdfast Council Bay staff and Green Adelaide staff had the students very well informed about the Hooded Plovers. The students were lucky enough to see one of the adults fly to the water's edge which generated a lot of excitement from all (including the volunteers).

Of all the many ideas the students came up with, a final Top 4 were decided upon:

- Digital signage on electronic school sign on the main road and on school blog
- Create books that could be displayed at the local library (1 narrative and 1 informative)
- Create postcards that local businesses and the surf club could give out
- Create coffee cup covers that local cafes could wrap around take out coffees



Students worked with the teachers to finalise the projects and undertook a presentation to Hooded Plover volunteers, Holdfast Bay Council staff, Birdlife Australia, local businesses and the local MP David Spiers. We were all astounded at the students' ability to present their solutions, their creative outcomes along with their passionate interest in the Hooded Plovers.



Above: Brainstorming ideas! Photo: Brighton Primary School. Right: Library books created through the project. Photo: Ligita Blizna.





## EXTRA LARGE HOODED PLOVER SIGHTED AROUND THE VICTORIAN COAST!

Renee Mead, Beach-nesting Birds Project Coordinator, BirdLife Australia

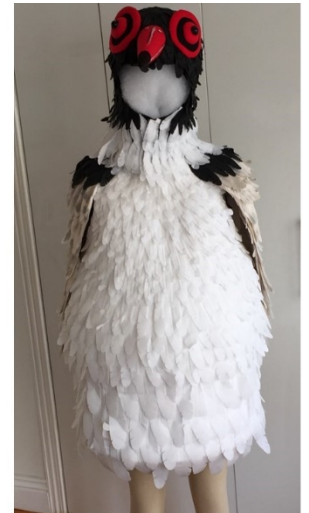
The Friends of Hooded Plover Bass Coast were successful in being awarded an Australia Bird Environment Foundation (ABEF) grant in 2020, and were able to fund a new costume for the Beach-nesting Birds Community to use!

Lara Barwick, who has worked at the Melbourne Theatre Company as a costume designer took on the challenge. She hand cut and painted each feather on the costume. She worked to specifications such as being lightweight, keeping its shape, durable, user-friendly in the warmer months, able to be cleaned between uses, and of course, looking like a Hooded Plover!

She's included some tricks, like the head is made around a bicycle helmet. So, you just pop the helmet on your head and you turn into a Hooded Plover!

We think she delivered! We now have this amazing costume that can be used for groups with awareness raising events along the coast. Due to COVID19, we weren't able to use it at many of the events we had intended to hold, but it has taken a trip to Port Fairy, where Dan Lees dressed up for a Dogs Breakfast. We're happy to say, no dogs chased him while in costume.

If your group wish to look into borrowing it for any events, please contact [renee.mead@birdlife.org.au](mailto:renee.mead@birdlife.org.au). We also have some guidelines and instructions for use, as we want this costume to last as long as possible. The costume is based in Victoria. It is possible to send it interstate but this would incur a freight cost.



Hooded Plover Costume.  
Photo: Lara Barwick



Left: Hooded Plover Costume. Photo: Lara Barwick. Right: Dan Lees at dressed fabulously at a Dogs Breakfast. Photo: Sonia Sanchez





# Threats and management

## MOWN DOWN

John Peter, Content Creator, BirdLife Australia

A band of weary travellers resting on the beach is run down by a vehicle speeding along the sand. Twenty of them were killed. It's not a plot-line for the next Mad Max movie — it really happened, on Brownlow Beach on Kangaroo Island. The travellers were Red-necked Stints, resting up before their imminent migration back to their breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere. According to BirdLife Australia, they were conserving valuable energy in preparation for their long-haul flight.

“It's certainly not illegal to drive vehicles along many South Australian beaches, but there are strict rules surrounding the activity and encounters with wildlife,” said Dr Grainne Maguire, BirdLife Australia's Coastal Birds Program Leader. “However, the incident occurred in an area where vehicles are prohibited, but where signage is inadequate.”

“The regulations are meaningless unless drivers are made aware of them through clear and obvious signage and they are properly enforced.”

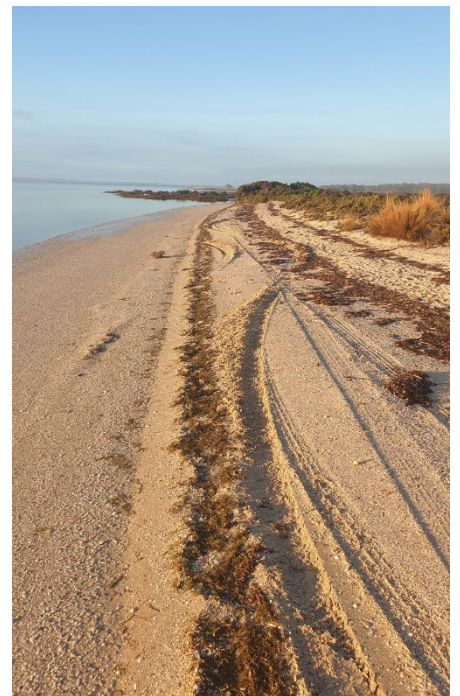
The dead birds were Red-necked Stints, one of about 35 species of migratory shorebirds that occur in Australia each summer.

“These tiny birds fly up to 10,000 kilometres from Australia to return to their breeding grounds in Siberia, and they expend an enormous amount of energy to get there,” Dr Maguire said. “To be mown down like this, just as they were ready to go, is a real tragedy.”

Unfortunately, it's a scenario that is regularly played out on beaches along South Australia's coastline, where many of Australia's migratory shorebirds occur over the summer months. Even if birds on the beach are not run down like the stints were, the levels of disturbance they experience have dire consequences for their survival. If these birds fall short of the energy required to fly tens of thousands of kilometres to the Northern hemisphere, they won't breed that year, or worse — die en route.

“Drivers need better awareness of the impacts of beach driving to make informed decisions. Flushing a bird may seem minor, but how many times has that bird already been flushed when trying to feed? Will it make the critical weight for its migration? It's really a matter of life and death for these birds living on the beach.”

“And it's not just migratory shorebirds that experience this disruption,” Dr Maguire continued. “There are resident shorebirds such as Hooded Plovers, oystercatchers, Fairy Terns and Red-capped Plovers — which live on our beaches year-round and also need to breed there. Their highly camouflaged eggs and chicks are even more vulnerable to being driven over, as they cannot fly from harm's way.”



Photos supplied by BirdLife Kangaroo Island





Disturbance on the beach is the number one reason several of South Australia's coastal birds are classified as threatened species.

Although the situation with the stints on Brownlow Beach cannot be undone, BirdLife Australia believes better education and enforcement of the regulations would make it less likely to happen again. After all, beaches are not merely our playground but are unique and invaluable habitats for some of Australia's most threatened birds.

### VESTS TO HELP US HIGHLIGHT THE NESTS!

Aleisa Lamanna, Sharing our Shores with Coastal Wildlife, Project Coordinator

The Friends of HP Fleurieu Peninsula were pleased to receive their new vests this summer. The Friends group had strong input into the design which arose from a desire to have something prominent to wear on the beach to be identifiable as a volunteer alongside a hope of also being more approachable to beach users.

The vests were funded through Green Adelaide and have received positive attention, including from the South Australian Minister for Environment and Water, photographed here at a volunteer meeting.



Vest design, front and back



Left: MP David Speirs and several Hooded Plover Volunteers. Photo: Ligita Bligzna. Right: New vests in action on West Beach. Volunteers Mary James and Jim Moore. Photo: T. Flaherty



# Threats and management



## THINK BEFORE YOU PULL IT OUT: HABITAT VALUE OF WEEDS!

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

Weeds cause damage to natural landscapes, waterways, and coastal areas and have major economic, environmental, and social impacts worldwide. In coastal areas, weeds can out-compete native vegetation covering large areas with dense infestations leading to habitat loss for native animals. They can also disrupt natural processes causing changes to the geomorphology of coastal areas. In Australia, weeds are a major focus of land managers along the coast and projects to control and manage weeds are undertaken regularly.

The negative environmental impacts of weeds are well documented and controlling them is well justified however, the habitat value some weeds can provide need to be considered, too. One of my friends, Dr Emma Carlos studied the value of weeds and its implications for management for her postgraduate research, and she found that the native Singing Honeyeater *Lichenostomus virescens* commonly used the weed African Boxthorn *Lycium ferocissimum* as habitat especially during the fruiting and flowering seasons. There are similar positive interactions between native wildlife and weeds reported from around the world and they need to be considered when decisions are made on appropriate weed management techniques.

So, how does this apply to our beloved beach-nesting shorebirds? As you know, weeds are a common feature on much of the coast. The most common ones are Sea Spurge *Euphorbia paralias*, Marram Grass *Ammophila arenaria*, Sea Wheat-grass *Thinopyrum junceiforme*, and Sea Rocket *Cakile maritima*. Weeds like Marram Grass form tall dense stands in the dune and foredune making it unsuitable for nesting however, the other weed species do not form as dense stands as Marram Grass does. On beaches, where some of these weeds have been present for quite some time, we have observed birds nesting in and amongst these weeds using them as vegetative cover.

When it comes to nest site selection, vegetative cover plays an important role and birds may use whatever cover (regardless of whether it is a weed or native) is available at the site. They may choose to nest in among cover instead of nesting out in the open to benefit from added camouflage and shelter from the elements. Nesting in among cover can increase the nest's chances of survival (depending on the site) and the fate of the nest along with the choices they made in selecting the nest site contribute to the learning process and decision-making in future nesting attempts.

So, what should we do if we find a beach-nesting shorebird nest located in amongst or next to weeds? Just leave it be! The urge to remove the weeds because they are bad for the environment in the long term is understandable. But think of its habitat value and the negative impacts the removal of it is going to have on that nest. The microhabitat around the nest will be modified exposing the nest and incubating bird to predators and the elements which might even lead to abandonment of the nest. So, think hard before you pull it out! Longer term control of weeds at these sites will need to be considered, but this is best done outside the breeding season.

Red-capped Plover nest in Sea Wheat-grass.  
Photo by Kasun Ekanayake



Hooded Plover nest in Sea Spurge.  
Photo by Kasun Ekanayake





## 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 2020-2021 breeding season just gone.

[Victorian Beach-nesting Bird updates](#)

[South Australian Beach-nesting Bird updates](#)

[QLD, NSW, WA and Tassie 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. This newsletter is jointly funded through BirdLife Australia and the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.