

Word about the Hood

Victoria Update

Mornington Peninsula Hoodie and Chimpanzee Story

Karen Wooton, Secretary, Friends of the Hooded Plover Mornington Peninsula Inc.

Chimpanzees and Hoodies. An unusual combination it's true, and two species that would rarely (if ever) be brought together for an article. But here we are so let me explain. When I began volunteering with Friends of the Hooded Plover (Mornington Peninsula) I got into a bit of mischief, naming our flagged Hoodies - Sweet Pea, Phoenix, Monty, Johnny Farnsworth, George and Miami Dude are just a few that come to mind. I was told it wasn't very scientific, not quite the done thing. Naming them helped to further connect me, and this protective feeling extended to the birds without flags. Names were often ascribed for a particular reason - associated with territory, history, flags or circumstance. Or just because the name seemed to suit.

I'm not a scientist, but I know of someone who was, and who named the individuals she studied. Are you with me yet? Chimpanzees and Hoodies. Of course it was the late, and quite wonderful, Dr Jane Goodall and her David Greybeard, Flo, Flint and Goliath...and yes, I hear you say 'Chimpanzees are very different to Hoodies'. Indeed, they are, and no they're not. Both species, along with so many others, are facing the challenges of climate change, environmental degradation and increasing human demand on dwindling resources. If we can engage other folk who are more peripheral to our conservation efforts, and help them see these creatures as individuals, who make up groups who are interdependent and all occupy a pivotal place on this fragile web of life, then maybe, just maybe, we can encourage them to care. Instead of blandly referring to TT, KY, 44, TN and the rest, if we can speak of TT 'Tippy Toe', KY 'Jelly', 44 'Our Wandering Bachelor' and TN 'Tanya', what's the harm and what's the potential upside?



44 'Our Wandering Bachelor'. Photo: Teresa Madgwick.



TT 'Tippy Toe'. Photo: Teresa Madgwick.



KY 'Jelly'. Photo: Teresa Madgwick.

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So, on our FoHP (MP) Facebook page we are trying to tell stories. About how Tippy Toe lost her toes, and what we can all do to minimise the risk of entanglement leading to catastrophic consequences. How Jelly and her unflagged partner struggle to find space to safely make a nest and raise their offspring on one of the peninsulas busiest beaches, and what we can all do to help. Stories that engage people, personalise the Hoodies and perhaps extend that thread of protective connection.

Jane Goodall gave many lectures over her storied career and wonderful life. Do you know what she carried with her to illustrate not only the perils for threatened and endangered species but also for inspiration? She carried a feather. One of the world's largest feathers, that of a California condor. The famous Chimpanzee scientist who named her chimps, carried a feather. To remind us all that, through the collective efforts of experts, activists, enthusiasts and local communities, species on the brink can make a comeback. So, you see, Chimpanzees and Hoodies are not that different at all.

Vale Dr Jane Goodall.



Hoodie territory at Gunnamatta. For Jane Goodall. Photo: Teresa Madgwick.

Bass Coast article for Autumn Word About the Hood

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

Our Kilcunda Trestle Bridge pair kicked off the Bass Coast nesting season, choosing a precarious spot on the steep dune face below the rail trail (similar position to last season which proved successful with 3 fledges). Despite a valiant incubating effort for over 3 weeks the nest succumbed most likely to the wild weather. No nests yet on the Wonthaggi Back Beaches which is hardly surprising as there has been a long stint of rough weather and nesting didn't start until November last season. We have an update to the parent swap story in the last newsletter. To recap, KL White on the Williamsons Beach Further East site lost its partner when their 3 chicks were 4 weeks old. 75 Yellow (partner of XC Orange) from neighbouring site stepped into help KL guard the chicks. 75 Yellow then seemed to return to XC Orange. This season, early days, but KL has partnered with 75 Yellow and XC Orange is solo so far.



*Kilcunda Trestle Bridge East nest site.
Photo: Paula Street.*

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Severe erosion on Baxters Beach, Wonthaggi Back Beaches. Photo: Janine Thomas.

Moving east, the Cape Paterson-Harmers area is a late starter traditionally in the breeding season and with strong spring winds and high tides, this year is no different. Beach erosion and shifting sands are causing nesting habitats to change and delay breeding with only a couple of scrapes discovered to date. Most of the eight breeding pairs are back on their territories. Highlights include the Pea Creek/Undertow site which has two established pairs carrying on from last season, and 'Stumpy' (Orange KK) looking for another new partner.

A similar pattern is evident on the Inverloch/Bunurong Coast beaches. The weather is playing a role in disrupting nesting. In fact, there have been very few sightings in this area. One optimistic note has been the appearance of DZ and unbanded mate at Twin Reefs, where they have taken up residence before. Most of the time they seem to be roosting or foraging. The Oaks, seems to have lost its appeal to Hoodies. There was a failed brood last season and since then there has been no sightings. High tides and foxes could be discouraging the birds.

Very few Hoodies are being seen on the Abbott St. Point Norman area in Inverloch. Red-capped Plovers also nest in this area but sightings of them have not been consistent this season. Pied Oystercatchers looked promising early on.

Screw Creek West was, up until last year, a consistent nesting area for Hoodies but was abandoned last season. Good news is a pair have been seen in the area.

The teams have been busy over winter recruiting and training new volunteers, refurbishing the equipment stashes, removing Sea Spurge under the Saving Native Species Program, and hosting the Bass Coast Start of Season Briefing held at the Wonthaggi Life Saving Club in September.



FOHP, SGCS and CPRRA volunteers at Sea Spurge removal working bee. Photo: Finn Saurine



Start of Season Briefing at WLSC with volunteers and land managers. Image: David Hartney.

On a sad note one of our team leaders, David Hartney, is

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leaving. David has been tireless contributor to this program. He set up our Facebook page which has been huge success as a source of information. He has also been instrumental in recruiting many volunteers and engaging the Cape Patterson eco village in the plight of the Hoodies.

Good luck in the future David and Jeannie!

Phillip Island Season Update

Vivien Morris, Research Officer, Phillip Island Nature Parks

The start of the season on Phillip Island (Milawul) feels very slow with high winds and tides making it difficult to see any scrapes and we are still seeing some minor flocking activity in a couple areas. We have had 6 nests so far which is on par for this time of year.

One of those nests was a very exciting 4 egg nest! When volunteer Harriet checked on the nest and found 3 eggs not yet being incubated we were a bit concerned, but when she went back and found a fourth egg it suddenly made sense! We have only every recorded a 4-egg nest on Phillip Island (Milawul) once before in 2006 which failed before hatching. That's two out of 984 nests since 1992/93! Unpublished Australia wide data shows 4 egg nests happen approximately one in every 1000 nests, thank you Jasmin (Deakin Honours student) for looking that up for us! Unfortunately, on October 11th with only a week left until hatching the eggs were found gone due some extremely high tides.



Rare 4 egg nest. Photo: Harriet Fallaw.



Broadwater, Hoodie incubating eggs in new location in the dunes. Photo: Peter Wagstaff.

That same weekend the eggs at Broadwater were found strewn along the beach having also been impacted by the tides. Under guidance from our Hoodie expert, Jon, volunteer Mitch carefully relocated the eggs into a new spot higher on the beach, where the Hoodies continued to incubate them before they unfortunately went missing a week later (*Phillip Island Nature Parks operate under separate permits to the BirdLife Australia program whose permit does not allow human intervention of nests). The latest nest was found in the dunes which means we have at least one nest we don't have to worry about every time the tides are high!

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Our volunteers are doing some truly excellent work navigating the weather and checking on Hoodies in the small windows of time when the wind isn't too strong! As usual we will have two interns over the season who will join us for two days a week, for three months each and will be working on our nest camera project to investigate causes of egg failure.

East Gippsland Hoodie Surveys

Sally Leonard, Volunteer, Sth NSW - Bermagui to Jervis Bay

On 11th and 12th September under the instruction of Mel Sheedy, I was privileged to undertake a Hoodie survey on some remote beautiful East Gippsland Beaches. I travelled from my home at Shoalhaven Heads on the NSW south coast and camped at Orbost. Two things I love doing, finding birds and beach walking!

I set off for Lake Bungo, Redbluff, Lake Tyres and Point Ricardo west for my first day.

Lake Bungo east had suffered a huge amount of coastal erosion. There were no Hoodies and nowhere for them to nest. After returning to base, I walked 2km west, finding a pair. These birds were acting very "nesty" but unfortunately a dog had been romping through their area. There was no nest. I then travelled on to Redbluff and walked to Lake Tyres. It was very windy, and I found no birds.



Flagged Pied Oystercatchers Yellow V2 and Red 78. Photo:
Sally Leonard.



Flagged Pied Oystercatcher yellow NV. Photo: Sally
Leonard.

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Midafternoon I arrived at Point Ricardo. I walked east finding a pair of unbanded Hoodies. By now I needed some R&R and went to the Marlo Estuary looking for flagged Oystercatchers. This pair Yellow V2 and Red 78 are a pair. The Yellow banded at Corner Inlet and the Red Stockyard Point in Westernport Bay.

Got up early on the 12th and headed out to Point Ricardo East. It was a beautiful morning. I came across this very handsome flagged POC, Yellow NV, banded in 2013 by VWSG at Corner Inlet. This was the first resighting. At about 2.5km I came across a pair of Hoodies, one flagged DP. I then went on to another very eroded beach, Salmon Rocks, walking very fast to avoid the incoming tide to get to Conran Creek. Conran Creek is a little haven where another pair including banded CK were sheltering. The last beach to survey was East Cape Beach and although I walked a few kilometres I found no Hoodies.

It was a tiring but very interesting couple of days.

Most beaches had dogs off leash even though they were supposed to be leashed. This trip has fuelled my interest in this area, especially Corringle Beach.

Mel kindly put me in contact with a local and on my next trip to Victoria I stopped in at Corringle. The day was magnificent, and I found a pair of nesting Hoodies on the spit and 2 flagged Oystercatchers. The Oystercatchers were scaping like crazy.

Over 200 Stint and 16 Pacific Golden Plovers. I want to thank Mel for all the maps and information she gave me and I look forward to returning.



Hoodie CK. Photo: Sally Leonard.

Limpy, a Tough Bird

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

Very few Hooded Plovers are flagged in our remote part of South Gippsland, so most adult birds are identified only by the location in which they are observed. It's noteworthy when a Hoodie has either a flag or some unusual feature. Limpy was such a bird, obvious from a distance on the 12 kilometres of sandy Cotters Beach lining the west coast of Wilsons Promontory from Shallow Inlet to Darby River. A pronounced limp and dislocated left foot dragging behind were cause for alarm the first time we observed Limpy as it foraged with a mate, also identifiable via a white flag, engraved PV.

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Urgent messages and photographs with videos from a subsequent visit were forwarded to BLA Melbourne office for expert advice. We were reassured when told that, despite the appearance of a significant disability possibly resulting from an injury, Limpy had been logged in the Biennial Count 5 years earlier with the same injury! This bird of indeterminate age, which we had assumed was old for no particular reason, had not only survived and adapted to its disability, but it was also now cohabiting with a regular partner.

We always searched keenly for Limpy and PV on regular 2 to 4 weekly (tide and weather permitting) monitoring visits to the 27 breeding sites on Cotters Beach, identified on the BLA portal, and often found Limpy with PV somewhere around Tinpot. Despite knowing that Limpy had been around for years we weren't 100% sure that Limpy was really okay as it became increasingly lop-sided, its left leg dragging behind, more difficulty keeping up with PV, and scruffy appearance.



*Limpy with his obvious dislocated left foot.
Photo: Wendy Hayes.*



Limpy's distinctive tracks (left) alongside partners tracks. Photo: Wendy Hayes.

In the middle of winter at the end of a long walk monitoring along Cotters Beach we noted a single Hoodie standing alone on part of the beach where we don't usually see Hooded Plovers, adjacent to a steep rock cliff north of Darby River. The tide was rising rapidly and would soon cover this thin stretch of sand below the cliff so we needed to hurry past. As we neared the solitary bird, we realised this was Limpy but it was even slower than before and looked tired and dishevelled. We anticipated this might be the last time we saw Limpy, alone on this isolated beach with a worsening limp from a long-past injury. Over the next months we saw no sign of Limpy anywhere along the whole length of Cotters Beach and became resigned to the likelihood Limpy was probably gone.

PV, Limpy's ex-partner, who was banded as a fledgling several years before on the Prom, was meanwhile noted to have a new partner and took up residence on another part of Cotters Beach. We rejoiced for PV but felt sad for Limpy.

Last week in mid-October, at the Northern end of Cotters Beach and more than 10km away from the lonely beach where it was last seen, Limpy turned up. This time with a new partner, a young bird with some salt and pepper remaining on its black head. Limpy didn't look good, even more dishevelled, then it tripped and stumbled as we watched.

We didn't expect Limpy to survive the rest of winter, let alone re-partner, although judging by appearances it's not thriving. Regardless, this scruffy-looking Hoodie forages now with a new mate and has flown 10 km from last sighting. When I started writing about Limpy I thought I'd finish up by expressing empathy with a noble old bird having lived a full

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Hoodie life despite its disability and in the face of extremely harsh conditions. Now I have no idea, just hope I can continue as Limpy has done for as long as possible.