

WORD ABOUT THE HOOD.

By Grainne Maguire, Birds Australia



Juvenile Hooded Plover Anglesea (G Ehmke)



Adult Hooded Plover (banded) with chick, Anglesea (G Ehmke)

Welcome to the first edition of the tri-annual newsletter, Word about the Hood. For those of you who are not aware, the 'Promoting coexistence between recreationists and beach-nesting birds' project is now in its second phase after receiving a two-year grant through the Australian Government's Caring for our Country, Community Coastcare grants. This will mean we can achieve a lot more after building momentum for conservation of beach-nesters in Phase 1 of the project (Jan 2006-Dec 2008). Not only will monitoring and management continue to grow and improve in Victoria, but we will be carrying out workshops in the other eastern states to network and share our management experiences so we can further improve the outlook for these birds. The issue of hooded plover (and other BNB) conservation is not just about saving a threatened species. It extends to respecting and preserving the coastal environment. By managing the problems facing these birds, this acts to protect other species that rely on beach habitats and to address broader issues such as climate change and recreational management.

There are still large gaps in our knowledge of BNB management, particularly as to why compliance with management is low. A recent analysis of the threat data volunteers have been collecting for the past three years, revealed that only a third of people respect the signs and fences at managed nesting sites, and that this figure is only 8% for dog owners. This varied considerably with the type of management put in place, the lowest compliance coming from signs at access points only; fences having very high compliance, and; wardens having the greatest success (a more detailed analysis and report will follow). We can't however hope to have people guarding every set of chicks during the season but what we may learn is that one or two weekend days spent in an area should result in the majority of beach visitors being educated (with the exception of areas with high numbers of day trip visitors from Melbourne). I have been exploring more of the psychological literature about human behaviour change, and this season will be using some new styles of signage and language to see whether we can improve understanding and compliance.

Student projects

There will also be more student research projects this year and next, supervised by Dr Mike Weston at Deakin University. These include: genetic variation among Australia's shorebirds; breeding ecology of red-capped plovers; nesting habitat choice and predation risk in red-capped plovers; attitudes of Australian's to beaches; and determining optimal disturbance buffer distances for Australian shorebirds. In future issues of this newsletter, students will feature their results as they become available.

Student projects continued

Two recent publications to arise from research in Phase 1 are listed below (if you would like a copy, please let me know):

Williams, Kathryn J. H., Weston, Michael A., Henry, Stacey and Maguire, Grainne S. (2009) 'Birds and Beaches, Dogs and Leashes: Dog Owners' Sense of Obligation to Leash Dogs on Beaches in Victoria, Australia', *Human Dimensions of Wildlife*, 14:2, 89-101.

Stojanovic, D., Maguire, G., Weston, M. A., Dickman, C. R. and Crowther, M. S. (2009) Attempted incubation and nest-maintenance behaviour of artificially deployed quail egg clutches by Hooded Plovers *Thinornis rubricollis*. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* latest issue (awaiting pdf from publisher for full reference details)

2008/2009 Breeding Season summary

Disappointingly many of the hoodie pairs monitored this season did not attempt to breed or if they did, their nests were so short-lived that they were missed. This is because for most of Gippsland's beaches, the tides were so high that there was little to no beach available for nesting. On Venus Bay peninsula, the dunes covered with the South African Marram grass eroded at the base and became steep cliffs so that not a single nest was recorded here, and fewer hoodie pairs inhabited these beaches this season. At the mouth of the snowy and on surrounding Croajingalong beaches where breeding success is usually high (which relates to less human and dog activity, and mutual protection from the sturdy fencing of little tern breeding colonies), no hoodie nests were recorded nor juveniles sighted. Furthermore, the little terns here has nil success due to storms and floods. This may well be a sign of things to come with rising sea levels predicted due to climate change. One solution could be freeing dune habitat from Marram Grass invasion so that Hooded Plovers can retreat further inland to breed, rather than being confined to narrow strips of shrinking beach. Another more palatable solution for most land managers will be to look closely at which beaches were successful this season, as these may be key sites that are viable in the future. These could be targeted as priority management sites.

While it was looking like disaster for the Victorian population this season, due to the hard work of volunteers on some of the state's busiest beaches, fledging numbers were boosted. For over ten years there has been no successful breeding at a back beach in Rye, but this year thanks to volunteer vigilance during critical weekends of the chick phase, two chicks fledged! Similarly at Koonya, after no success from 55 eggs laid in the three seasons of monitoring, in their final attempt one chick fledged to the delight of staff and volunteers who spent hours guarding it over busy summer weekends! The story is similar again, this time at Killarney beach in far west Victoria, nests have been fenced off each season and no success, but finally this season, two of those fenced nests produced a chick each! And so it goes at Apollo Bay, Cape Paterson, Black Rock and other beaches that receive hundreds to thousands of visitors. These success stories are much needed for the birds, but also they mean so much to the people behind this project. In total, 27 chicks fledged this season from 70 pairs monitored (112 nests). In comparison, 39 fledged from 90 pairs (145 nests) in 2006/07, and 32 fledged from 86 pairs (100 nests) in 2007/08.



Family of hoodies foraging at Pt Roadknight, Anglesea. The Great Ocean Rd Coastal Committee, Surf Coast Shire, Angair, volunteers and Birds Australia have made this site a success with permanent fencing and signs, plus prohibiting dogs from using this small point.

Biennial Count

Since 1980, the Victorian coast has been surveyed for hooded plovers every second year, over a given November weekend. Last year a third year student of Mike Weston's, Hayley Glover, started analyzing this data to look for areas of population decline and growth. Her analysis revealed multiple areas of decline, but was limited to surveys that had consistent start and end points over time. This made us realize the importance of consistency in survey areas, so we now have Meg working on maps for volunteers to use in the next count (November 2010). Meg is also calculating densities of hoodies along the coasts of Victoria, South Australia and NSW, so that we can directly compare population numbers between counts that have differed in coverage. If you did not receive a copy of the recent November 2008 count report and would like to, please let me know. In the November 2008 count, a total of 40 Hooded Plovers were sighted in NSW (39 adults, 1 juvenile), 376 in Victoria (359 adults, 17 juveniles) and 595 in South Australia (552 adults, 43 juveniles). This makes a total of 1011 for the three states (950 adults, 61 juveniles) and is in line with estimates that predict a population of 1160 birds for the eastern mainland.

Beach-nesting birds manual

Last July 'A practical guide to managing beach-nesting birds in Australia' was produced. This 300 page manual covers as much as possible about managing and monitoring resident shorebirds that nest on beaches and is not meant to be read from cover to cover. It is a reference manual with a thorough index so you can find the section relevant to your needs. Chapter 1 introduces the species; Chapter 2 provides a literature review of threats to beach-nesters and tabulates available management options for each threat; Chapter 3 details management options including site selection and practical considerations; Chapter 4 describes monitoring regimes (how often, when, what to measure, safety measures), and; Chapter 5 explores community engagement including volunteer management and participation. The manual is available for download from <http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/our-projects/management-manual.html> or you can request a copy from Grainne.

Fashion in the field

We have had hats and t-shirts made up for volunteers, and will be distributing these before the next season. Please let us know what size head you have (57, 59 or 61), colour preference (green or natural) and what size t-shirt you normally wear.

Volunteer profiles

Here are just a few profiles from the hundreds of volunteers involved. There will be new profiles appearing in each newsletter.

Cat Campbell: Cat comes into the BA office every Friday now that the University semester has started, prior to this, she was dedicating multiple days a week to volunteering for the BNB project. She enters data for hours on end, helped compile the 2008 biennial count report, and also helps in the field. On the first day I took Cat to the beach, I nearly impaled her with a fence post, despite this, she still continues to help!!

Aimee Reiss: Aimee came from all the way from New York to help with the BNB project. Her job in the US involved using pyrotechnics to prevent fowl fouling the region's water reservoir. Aimee stayed with volunteers in Tower Hill, Timboon, St Andrews and Melbourne, and covered miles of beach, monitoring breeding hoodies and talking to beach users to educate them about responsible beach behaviour. She helped warden the chicks at Koonya over the Labour day weekend, getting them through the last busy weekend so that they fledged.



Above: Cat Campbell taking down a fence
Below: Janelle Thomas, Clare Jones and Aimee Reiss

Volunteer profiles continued

Steve Johnson: Steve really inspires me. He became involved with the project while working as a police officer in Wonthaggi, hoping to find a local-based hobby to fill his retirement. Steve has since become one of the most dedicated volunteers we have. He regularly monitors 7 pairs of hoodies, a number of these are miles from an access point, and is happy to check on pairs further afield when there is no-one available to do so. Not only is Steve a thorough record keeper but he takes charge of protecting nesting sites, putting up signs and fences, putting out shelters after hatching, handing out brochures, talking to beach users and recruiting new volunteers. He does such an amazing job, I am worried my job will be given to him!



Steve Johnson releasing a rehabilitated hoodie rescued after entanglement The Oaks (J Fallaw)



Kai Paddy Barrett: the project's youngest volunteer (forgive me, I couldn't not include a picture of my offspring somewhere!) spends quite a lot of time on the beach, but he is yet to spot his first hooded plover, instead is distracted by the lapping waves. He will be receiving extra training!

Staff Profiles

Grainne Maguire, Project Manager: I have been working on the project full-time since 2006, taking maternity leave between September and December 2008, and now returning to the project as manager, working part-time 3 days a week. Prior to working for Birds Australia, I did my PhD through the University of Melbourne Zoology Department, researching the breeding behaviour and habitat ecology of the southern emu-wren, a tiny elusive bird that inhabits coastal heathland. My study sites were at Portland and Anglesea, where I spent eight months of each year from 2000 to 2004 trudging through snake infested swamps and heath, mist-netting and banding emu-wrens, video monitoring their nests, documenting their habitat use, quantifying plant density, collecting insects and thoroughly enjoying every minute spent watching these beautiful birds. The year I spent cloning their DNA and identifying gene markers was far less exciting! At the end of my PhD, I wanted to take on a job that would be research based but would have a practical conservation focus—the beach-nesting birds project

seemed like my dream job and it has been. When I first began, I was ready for the research but was completely shy about talking to new people, not the best quality to have when the issue relies on communicating with so many people, including angry ones! Luckily the volunteers involved in this project have been so supportive, and many of the land managers, rare gems. The people behind this project motivate me, but also I find it hard to sit back and watch these birds have such a tough time. I think the beach would have no soul without them. Before I began the job, I had no idea about the impacts my own beach behaviour was having on hoodies but now I can't visit the beach without seeing it as their habitat. I think that we'll turn things around for these birds with more education combined with active contributions from land managers.



Staff profiles continued

Meghan Cullen, project officer in GIS and education: Meghan recently began working on the project in March 2009 and brings new skills to the project. She works part-time on Mondays and Tuesdays, mapping data collected from biennial counts in GIS so that we have overlays of breeding locations and threats that we can use for prioritizing management and informing coastal policy, mapping start and end points of count segments so that future counts are consistent, and working with primary students so that beach-nesting birds become an educational component for coastal schools. Meg just completed her PhD through Deakin University Life & Environmental Science department on changes in vascular plant and small mammal communities over an elevational gradient in the Otway Ranges. She previously worked at Birds Australia mapping Important Bird Areas and analysing data collected by volunteers in ten regions throughout Australia with the NRM project.

Glenn Ehmke, temporary project manager: Some of you would know Glenn from his work on the orange-bellied parrot project, mapping habitat, analyzing habitat use data and advising on saltmarsh habitat



Glenn Ehmke photographing shorebirds, Corner Inlet (G Maguire)

management. Glenn has tremendous technical and analytical skills, but he is also incredibly passionate about the environment and has been a volunteer with the BNB project, keeping an eye on the hoodies in his local area, the Mornington Peninsula from the onset. When I went on maternity leave, it was reassuring to know Glenn would be managing the project in my absence. He brought fresh ideas, in particular, he wrote an induction kit for horse riders for Parks Victoria to incorporate in

their approvals for horse riding groups in far West Victoria. Glenn is now back on the orange-bellied parrot project but is still actively involved in hoodie conservation. He is also responsible for the brilliant photos of Hooded Plovers that I frequently use, and his time on the project has resulted in amazing shots including intruding hoodies attacking chicks of another pair, hoodies attacking gulls, vigorous broken wing displays by adults protecting chicks, chicks practicing flight for the first time, as well as shots of recreationists having close calls with camouflaged chicks.

Janelle Thomas, temporary project officer: Janelle began working on the BNB project as Biennial count coordinator and then assisted Glenn when I was on maternity leave. She has now moved into the role of Threatened Bird Network coordinator at Birds Australia, which will still see her involvement with the BNB project through recruiting new volunteers and helping with the Biennial count. Prior to working with Birds Australia, Janelle was a biodiversity officer on Kangaroo Island, which involved a study on the effects of fire management on biodiversity, revegetation techniques for biodiversity, weed mapping, Southern Brown Bandicoot surveys and involvement in the Koala Management Program. Janelle has worked on many species from plants to Platypus, Northern Quolls and Broad-toothed Rats! She became passionate about hoodies from the onset of her time with the project and you are bound to run into her on the beach next summer!

Participate in any way you can!

Please get involved in the beach-nesting birds project in any way you can, even for just a day or two. These birds need your support - this will ultimately spell their long term survival. Contact Grainne Maguire g.maguire@birdsaustralia.com.au, phone 0400 910 761 or 03 9347 0757



Left to right: Student's drawing Rye primary school; Hooded Plover 5 week old chick stretching wings (G Ehmke); chick about to be brooded (G Ehmke), hoodie incubating eggs (G Ehmke); Student drawing Rye; 1 day old chicks (G Ehmke); chicks hiding in Marram (G Ehmke); volunteers in West Gippsland (J Fallaw); Hoodie family safe behind fence (G Ehmke); red-capped plover chick measured as part of student Jessica Bywater's honours project (G Maguire); Pied oystercatcher chick (G Ehmke); Student drawing Rye; hoodie brooding (G Ehmke); Sign flanking fenced nest site (G Maguire); Searching for hoodies during biennial count (G Ehmke).