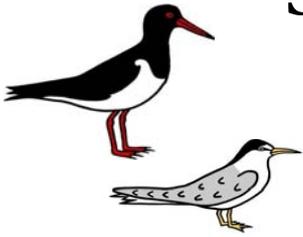
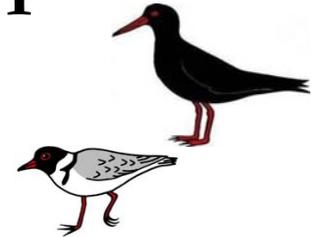


# FAR SOUTH COAST SHOREBIRD RECOVERY NEWSLETTER



*Sharing the shoreline*



## 2012/13 Season

### *This Season in Shorebirds*

This season we gained a greater understanding of just why these birds are endangered and suffering population declines. They can go from having a very successful season one year (eg last year) to an appalling season the next (eg this year)! This was the case for the Little Terns on the Far South Coast where we only managed 2 fledglings after the Bega River Mouth site (Mogareka) was abandoned Christmas Eve. It was a disappointing result and sometimes hard to understand but once again, a BIG THANKYOU to all the volunteers for their continued enthusiasm, and involvement with the program through thick and thin.

Overall we had 8 hoodies fledge this year, with a pair nesting at Bithry Inlet for the first time. Amy has often said "Bithry would be a great place for hoodies to nest" and she was right - it produced 2 fledglings. There has been a lot happening with the Hoodie banding program – both adults and fledglings have been flagged with small black and white flags on their upper legs (e.g 'P2'), so please keep an eye out for these on your beach excursions and report them in to NPWS Merimbula, Narooma or Ulladulla.

Pieds – there was a total of 41 pied nests from 37 pairs along the FSC this season. There were quite a few losses due to predation (foxes, avian and even domestic dogs), and unknown abandonment of eggs with a number of pairs having to re-nest. But it was encouraging to see pairs nesting

at sites which had not been used in a number of seasons, such as 2 pair along a 20m stretch of dune at Middle Beach with the usual neighbouring pairs still in place at Nelsons Lagoon and Bithry Inlet.

Sooty Oystercatchers were interesting this season. We surveyed Montague Island and observed 7 pairs holding territory but found only 3 nests. Numbers were down compared to last season and these 3 breeding pairs produced only 1 fledgling (compared to 8 fledglings last year). As a rule, Sootys breed on offshore islands, such as Montague, however during a beach survey in November, Jo Lane discovered a Sooty nest on a mainland beach – South Fullers, not far from Narooma. Perhaps we will have to re-write all those field guides!



Amy Harris with Birdlife Australia team, setting a hoodie trap Photo: Robyn Kesby

Throughout the season we continued to strengthen ties with Birdlife Australia. In November, a team came up from Victoria and delivered a wonderful workshop at Merimbula as well as a fieldtrip to Eden. It was great to have so many shorebird enthusiasts in the same room at the same time! We are also

excited about a successful grant from Birdlife Australia for some new signage to replace our old 'tired' signs. Keep an eye out next season for the new look signs.

The Shorebird Program monitors threatened shorebirds, collects data, protects nest sites and raises awareness throughout the community of the plight threatened shorebirds. The Program is a combined effort and many agencies are involved in contributing to its' success. We are grateful for funding provided by the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority and the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water NSW Fox Threat Abatement Plan. Thankyou also to local council rangers (Bega Valley & Eurobodalla) for assistance with patrolling Dogs on Beaches, Land and Property Management Authority, Livestock Health & Pest Authority and NPWS and Marine Parks field staff for reporting sightings in the field.

Some new volunteers joined the program this year and we are very grateful to you all for your sightings, reports and weekly monitoring throughout the season. It seems that awareness of the program and plight of the birds is increasing in the community.

## Hooded Plovers



This season 12 Hooded Plover pairs were recorded breeding within the FSC region, this is slightly greater than the number found in recent years (range 6 to 9 breeding pair 1995 to 2012). An additional 3 pair held territory but were not observed with eggs or chicks. These 30 adults and 2 additional single adults brought the total number of adults sighted within the region to 32. This is within the range of adult number observed in previous seasons (i.e. 28 to 40 adults). A key factor possibly underpinning this increase is the extensive monitoring of the FSCR this season by

volunteers and shorebird recovery coordinators. Additionally, biennial Hooded Plover count undertaken in November 2012 brought in additional volunteers to survey more remote beaches and less frequently visited sites. The entirety of the FSC coastline was surveyed during this count and this aided in identifying new shorebird nesting sites not only for Hooded Plovers.

This season monitoring revealed more than one pair along a number of closely located beaches where in the past there was only one breeding pair. This included, a pair at both Aragunnu and Bengunnu in Mimosa Rock NP simultaneously holding territory and incubating eggs and also one pair at both Short Point Beach and Bournda lagoon.

The Hooded Plover banding program re-captured one metal banded adult at Wallaga Lake this season. This was the northern most pair again for the FSC region this season. This banded individual had been present at Wallaga for many years and it was fantastic to finally capture this adult and read the tiny metal band to find out its origins. This bird had been banded as a chick at Middle Beach (Mimosa Rocks NP) in March 2004 by Jillian Keating. Hence this bird was 9 years old. It will be interesting to observe this bird, now flagged 'P2' over the coming years to determine its lifespan. This was one of two chicks banded at Middle Beach however the second chick has not been recaptured since.



"P2" Photo: Patricia Latimer

Three fledglings were raised in Mimosa Rocks NP this season – 1 at Bengunnu and 2 at Bithry Inlet. Some intervention was required at Bithry Inlet with fencing needed to prevent trampling of the nest due to its proximity to the entrance pathway and also a line of sandbags to prevent king high tide inundation. These measures proved successful management techniques with the chicks fledging in February.

One chick fledged from Bournda also quite late in the season – March after repeated losses during the incubation period here earlier in the season. Their neighbours at Short Point Beach were not successful after two attempts with both requiring fencing on this popular dog walking beach. But at least one fledgling took flight from this area.



*Pied Oystercatcher visiting Hoodie nest at north Long Beach. Photo by Motion activated camera placed by Steve Burrows*

One pair of hoodies nested amongst two families of Pied Oystercatcher on the beaches between Haycock Point and Quondolo. But whilst the chicks hatched out here they were not sighted again soon after hatching which was unfortunate. The most unfortunate pair were on a small beach in Eden Harbour having 5 unsuccessful nesting attempts. Their repeated losses were attributed to both human disturbance with people driving and lighting fires on this small beach and also avian predation. Greater success was had by the nearby pair at Nullica with their final attempt getting a single chick to fledging

age. In the past this pair have been successful with only marginal intervention however the high level of use of this beach and the location of the nest this season meant that signage and fencing of their nest was required if they were to have any success after previous losses.

Wonboyn region again supported two pair of Hooded Plover and had the most successful pair with an early nesting attempt hatching out 3 chicks that went on to fledge by late November.



*“W4” hoodie and partner at Womboyn Photo: Kerri-Lee Harris*

Nadgee Nature Reserve was monitored extensively on two occasions and also targeted beach work occurring occasionally throughout the start of the season yielded the discovery of two early nests at Newtons and Nadgee Lake. Up to 4 pair were observed in the reserve.

Outside of the breeding season in April a large group of Hooded Plover (30 to 40) were observed over the border in Victoria at the Gabo Island sandspit in Croajingalong NP in Victoria. This appears to be a winter gathering site. No large gathering site for Hooded Plover has been identified on the FSC of NSW despite surveying in late May. Indeed individuals appear to have dispersed with only a handful of individuals present during a late Autumn survey.

Thank you to all the volunteers that assisted with monitoring the FSC Hooded Plover population this season, including going the extra mile (or km!) for the Hooded Plover survey. It was a tremendous effort to repeatedly survey these 32 adults, your dedication and passion for our shorebirds is incredible!



## Little Terns

2012/2013 season has certainly had its ups and downs. Overall it has been a very disappointing season for the Little Terns - especially after such great success last year (**177** little tern breeding pairs). Despite a positive beginning with many nests at Mogareka, the site unfortunately was abandoned for no clear reason. Some of the birds moved north, with a total of **25** nests at Tuross producing only **2** fledglings.

Once again, there were only two breeding colonies established along the far south coast region of NSW (Tuross Lake and Mogareka/Bega River Mouth). Quite a few (**35**) Little Terns were observed at Wallagoot Lake on November 21st, but no nesting took place there. The last time Little terns attempted breeding at Wallagoot was 2009/10 season.

At the two breeding sites, the birds were behaving as we have come to expect, arriving late October/early November and displaying courtship rituals such as fish wiping, 'dancing' and making scrapes. By mid-November, Mogareka was the only site south of Sydney and things were looking great with **125** breeding pairs. Sadly, by Christmas Eve, the site was abandoned. Some of these birds travelled north to Tuross and set up a colony of **17** breeding pairs, while some went further north into

Jodie's region and nested at Tabourie, Burill, Conjola and Wollumboola.

Fairy Terns nested amongst Little Terns at both locations this season but with no success. This species has suffered considerable declines in the southern states of Australia and is listed as endangered within Victoria.

### Tuross Sandspit

Little Terns began to arrive at Tuross in early November and 45 birds were observed on November 6th. Weekly walkthroughs on a Tuesday for the following 2 weeks recorded only 8 birds each time and by the 27<sup>th</sup> November all the birds had disappeared. The reason for the birds choosing not to nest at Tuross at the beginning of the season is unknown. Their disappearance did coincide with an increase in the number of nests at Mogareka.

The structure and shape of the spit at Tuross this year was very low and would have most likely caused difficulties if the birds had chosen to stay during the king tides of Dec 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup>.

After Christmas, when the site at Mogareka was abandoned, some of the birds travelled north, back to Tuross and by Jan 3rd there were 40 birds observed flying. The walkthrough the following week (Jan 8th) was cancelled due to extreme heat and a catastrophic fire warning day. Over the next few weeks, there was total of **17** nests and **25** eggs. The site managed to produce only **2** fledglings (compared with **132** last season).

The Australia Day long weekend had some big seas and the last of the nests were lost to inundation. At least 1 nest was lost to gull predation and the fence was pulled down 29<sup>th</sup> January.



*Tuross site washed away Australia Day long weekend Photo: John Cornish*

Thankyou to our dedicated team of Tuross volunteers who have kept enthusiastic despite the disappointment of the season! There is a lot we can learn through bird observations and photographs. A few of our volunteers have taken some great photos and added some interesting information for the program.

### **Flagged Terns**

Pattie Parker took some photos of some flagged little terns at Tuross. When we sent them away to Daryl McKay, he informed us that one of the birds was flagged as a chick at Towra Point, November, 1992. This bird is now 21 years old and equals the record of the oldest recorded LittleTern! The other flagged birds weren't spring chickens either - 18 years and 16 years, perhaps choosing the south coast for their retirement years!

### **Diet**

John Cornish took a photo of a tern feeding on what we thought was a sea snake. When looking a bit closer – it was hard to identify, so we sent the picture off to the Australian Museum who identified it as a worm eel (a type of fish).



*Little Tern with worm eel, Photo: John Cornish*

### **Crested Tern Aggression**

Whilst waiting to capture that perfect shot of a Little Tern fledgling, John Cornish was surprised to see a crested tern through his lens grab the small bird. John managed to get a photo before noisily shooing the aggressor away.



*Crested tern with Tuross fledgling. Photo: John Cornish*

### **Mogareka**

All the signs were there for this to be a great season for the Mogareka site. Little Terns were first recorded on the 31<sup>st</sup> October when 24 birds were seen. Steadily we got more scrapes and nests each week and the “people” fence was erected November 21<sup>st</sup> to limit visitor access. Assistance by NPWS field staff and Bega Valley Council rangers is greatly appreciated.

There were 15 nests caged on the 14<sup>th</sup> November, and the following week another 15 nests were recorded. An amazing 60 new nests were recorded on the 28<sup>th</sup> November – giving a total of 90.

We were fortunate to have a team from Birdlife Australia involved with the walkthrough on that day and they were suitably impressed with the activity at the site. As the season progressed, the site ended up with a total of **124** nests, **271** eggs and **23** chicks.

The predicted 2.04m and 2.03m king tides on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> December respectively, caused concern and several nests were sandbagged.



*Nest 61 at Mogareka 3 eggs hatched Photo: Jill Whitley*

After discussion with NPWS colleagues in Sydney, it was decided to construct a seawall along the eastern edge of the colony. This took place on Dec 12<sup>th</sup> and was funded by BVSC which is greatly appreciated. The wall protected the remaining nests well.

The extremely windy weather during December may have covered some nests and caused them to be abandoned. Seagulls were observed preying on chicks on the Dec 20<sup>th</sup> and by Christmas Eve the entire site had been abandoned. There is no clear explanation for this, however quite a few hypothesis. The most likely explanation is a combination of the windy weather and seagulls.

Once again, volunteers set up a roster system to walk the perimeter of the colony throughout the season. Mogareka is an easily accessible site and receives a lot of visitors (and potential disturbance). Volunteers were available to educate the public about the Little Tern colony and highlight the importance of keeping dogs away. There were a few encounters with dogs reported, and a few fines issued by Council Rangers. However, most visitors were co-operative when it was pointed out that dogs were not allowed near the colony.

Driftwood on the site provided useful habitat for chicks this season. Sadly, some people also saw this as an excellent source of firewood and there was evidence of several fires at the beginning of the season.

Signs were made by BVSC highlighting “No fires driftwood provides important habitat for endangered little tern chicks”. As a result the incidence of fires stopped.



*Driftwood at Mogareka site. Photo: Jill Whitley*

Despite a disappointing result this season, we have had some positive experiences. Some new volunteers became involved with the roster, a Birdlife Australia workshop was held at Eden and Merimbula we have been successful in obtaining a Birdlife Australia grant to produce some new signage. Thankyou to all our valued volunteers - here's hoping for some more positive results next season.



## Pied Oystercatchers

Pied Oystercatchers were found across the region from Bateman's Bay to the NSW/VIC border. Many breeding pairs were recorded and some of the larger estuaries supported groups of non breeding adults present over the breeding season and augmented in the Autumn and Winter months as they were joined by breeding adults moving away from their territories.

It is estimated the breeding Pied Oystercatcher population of the Far South Coast totalled 37 pairs. This is the highest number of breeding pairs recorded on the FSC since monitoring commenced. This is both a measure of increased surveying effort through surveys such as the Biennial Hooded Plover survey, Hooded Plover banding surveying and also a genuine (though small) increase in the number of breeding pairs. This suggestion is supported with one or more breeding pairs recorded at sites that had either not had a pair recorded nesting previously or not in a few seasons, such as Congo Creek, Nangudga Lake, Corunna Lake and Middle Beach. Additionally, there was only a slight increase in the number of sites surveyed (i.e. 24 sites with breeding pair this season compared with 21 sites in 2011/12 breeding season), but with 9 additional breeding pairs in comparison to the previous season. Another 5 pair were suspected of nesting this season, holding territory but only observed with scrapes.

The larger estuaries such as Wagonga Inlet, Wallaga Lake, Wapengo, Mogareka, Merimbula Lakes, Pambula Lake, Wallagoot and Wonboyn River were sites that attracted large gatherings of Pied Oystercatchers in the non-breeding period (e.g. up to 23 at Wallagoot) and breeding period (e.g. 6 pair at Tuross Lake).

Overall this season 7 Pied chicks were confirmed to have fledged this season, which is within the range of that experienced in recent years – though quite low given the large number of breeding pairs recorded (6 to 23 fledglings for past 4 seasons). Unfortunately a number of sites were surveyed once or twice and confirmed as having eggs or chicks but follow up surveying was limited and hence the outcomes of these breeding events were classed as unknown where in fact chicks could have already fledged., hence this

estimate of the number of Pied fledglings this season is conservative.

A phenomenal 74 Pied eggs were laid this season and a large proportion of these eggs hatched (n = 36 eggs, 49%). Losses during incubation were mainly attributed to abandonment (14% of eggs) and predation by Goanna (8% of eggs). Domestic dogs, Foxes and Ravens all predated 6% and 4% of eggs respectively. The outcome of many nests remained unknown 32%. Nest-cameras were used at a number of nests to determine nest outcomes however there are presently only a small number of cameras available and not every nest sites is conducive to monitoring by cameras.

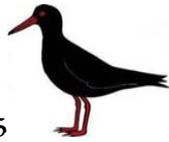


*Adult pied Oystercatcher feeding praying mantis to chick Photo: John Cornish*

The fate of the majority of chicks remained unknown (72% chicks) and overall fledging success was 19%. It is always difficult to trace the loss of chicks after they have hatched and left the nest. Often many perish within the first two weeks of hatching.

With 37 breeding pairs monitored and an additional 6 pair holding territory and/or observed with only scrapes this totals 86 adults. Combined with the additional 44 non-breeding adults observed throughout the season (September to February) there was a total of 130 Pied Oystercatcher adults observed within the FSC this breeding season. As with previous seasons this is a significant proportion of the NSW Pied Oystercatcher population (In October 1998, a

survey recorded only 232 Pied Oystercatchers in the state. NSW Wader Studies Group data).



## Sooty Oystercatchers

Montague Island was surveyed only once this season. Amy Harris and Patricia Latimer surveyed the eastern side, while Jo Lane and Katherine McKeller surveyed the western edge.

Although 7 pairs were observed holding territory, only 3 definite nests were seen and 1 fledgling recorded for the season (compared to 8 last year). Due to the size and shape of the island, and the fact that the birds are quite mobile it is sometimes difficult to get an accurate count.

Apparently Sooties only breed on offshore islands, right? Well this season we have had two separate observations that dispute this theory! Early in the season (Nov), during the annual Hoodie count when mainland beaches were being surveyed, some interesting sooty observations were made. Patricia Latimer saw a Sooty fledgling south of Mystery Bay which looked only 2-3 weeks old and too small to have migrated from Montague Island. It is suspected to have hatched nearby on a mainland beach. Jo Lane saw a sooty pair nesting just south of Fullers beach on the sand – not even on the rocks! Unfortunately this nest was quite close to the high tide mark and didn't survive the high tides throughout December.

Bournda Island was surveyed again this year in the hope of finding another Sooty nest. A pair bred successfully last season producing one fledgling, but no nesting was recorded there this season

**Thankyou  
Everyone!**