



HOODED PLOVER BREEDING SEASON 2023/24

What a season it was for these tiny, yet mighty shorebirds!

Hooded plovers, affectionately known as 'hoodies', breed from August to April with pairs claiming a territory of beach for nesting and raising chicks. Hoodies usually lay two to three eggs in a simple scrape. The pair will take turns incubating the eggs until they hatch at around 28 days.

Chicks are precocious, meaning they leave the nest shortly after hatching. Parents will stand guard and alert chicks if danger approaches, however chicks must find food and shelter for themselves. It's a precarious life for chicks on the beach as it takes five weeks to fledge. The reality is many nests fail due to weather, tides, predators and human disturbance.

To help hooded plovers, rangers alert beachgoers about nesting activity and volunteers monitor nests and collect data. Overall, the 2023-24 hooded plover breeding season on Phillip Island was quite good with 10 fledglings from 12 pairs. Although there were six fewer pairs this season compared to the previous ten-year average of 18, the ten fledged was almost as high as the previous ten-year average of 11 fledged.

Seven of the chicks were banded and one of the chicks from Surf Beach, flagged 'Yellow 7B' on 19/01/24, was photographed just a few months later at Point Impossible on the west coast on 01/05/24. The overall hoodie population on Phillip Island



was thirty-three for the November 2023 island-wide survey. The previous ten-year average is forty-two which was reflected in the lower number of breeding pairs. Overall, the fledged per pair rate was 0.83 (almost 1 chick per pair) and exceeded the BirdLife Australia benchmark of 0.50 and the previous ten-year average of 0.63.

Image 1: A clutch of hooded plover eggs.

The table below compares this season to the previous 10-year average, and the historic average.

PHILLIP ISLAND HOODED PLOVER BREEDING RESULTS 2023-24

	2023-24	Previous 10-year average	Historic average
(Averages started from 1992/93)			
Fledged	10	11.3	7.6
Breeding pairs	12	18.1	17.0*
Fledged per pair	0.83	0.63	0.54*
Nests	21	35.5	29.7
Eggs	51	83.1	69.3
Chicks	21	30.8	20.0
% eggs that fledge	19.6%	13.6%	11%
% eggs that hatch	41.2%	37.1%	41.2%
% chicks that fledged	47.6%	36.7%	47.6%
Hooded plovers November survey	33	43	36.6

*Number of breeding pairs started being recorded in 2002/03



HOODIE HEROES INSPIRE ACTION FOR CONSERVATION

To help the hoodies through the busy summer, rangers and volunteers alert beach goers about nesting activity. When eggs are found a simple nest refuge is put up that includes signage, rope fences and chick shelters. For the last two seasons larger 'Sharing Our Shores' signs, that include local school children's artwork, have been placed on access points to the busiest beaches. Local school children have designed posters aimed at raising awareness about vulnerable species as the 'Sharing Our Shores' community campaign comes to an end for the season.

The campaign led by Phillip Island Nature Parks in partnership with Bass Coast Shire Council and the Conservation Regulator aims to raise awareness about some of our most vulnerable species, including the beach-nesting hooded plover, and how visitors can support their survival while enjoying the beach.

Volunteers record all their monitoring activities on the BirdLife Australia MyBeachBird portal, so results become part of the national database that also includes the monitoring of red-capped plover, pied and sooty oystercatcher.



Above: Sharing our Shores campaign assets 2023.



Above: a vulnerable chick on the beach.

The nest camera study continued for the fourth year with two interns from Deakin University placing five remote cameras near nests. The study is designed to determine the causes of nest failure as around half of all nests failed with no identified reason. Images of cats, dogs, humans, and other wildlife were captured within the fenced refuges close to nests.

Hooded plovers raise their young on our shores and are listed as Threatened in Australia and Vulnerable in Victoria. As they nest along the high tide line and in sand dunes during spring and summer, their eggs and chicks are easily stepped on because they are difficult to see. Throughout the peak season of summer and Easter period, beachgoers are encouraged to stay on formal pathways, away from nest refuges and dunes and observe dog regulations.

The local community plays a vital role in safeguarding these tiny, yet mighty shorebirds. Starting environmental awareness early is a key factor to successful conservation. Children can advocate by sharing with family and friends how important it is to work together to protect nesting shorebirds and ensure this species has a safe haven to breed each year.

WHAT ARE THE HOODIES UP TO NOW?

Following the breeding season adults will often move from their breeding territories and can be found in small winter flocks. Fledglings, now called juveniles, often leave the island and join other flocks, they will need to find a partner and establish a territory of their own if they wish to breed next summer.

An adult hoodie was flagged White ZT on San Remo beach on 31 January 2023 and amazingly fledged two chicks, just across the channel at busy Cleland Bight, less than a year later on 27 December 2023. Not content with that, the pair had two more unsuccessful nesting attempts for the season.

The countdown is on for the next season to begin in late August to early September!





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