

# Word about the Hood

## Sixth Edition December 2011



CARING  
FOR  
OUR  
COUNTRY



Welcome to the sixth edition of Word About the Hood! This newsletter has some great stories with a mix of personal experiences, some science and insights into what is happening around Australia for beach-nesting birds.

### ***The non-breeding season...***

We have been working frantically during the 3 month off-season to compile and analyse all the data from the previous breeding season, as well as plan and organise everything for the next breeding season. If only we had more time! Why can't the hoodies shorten their breeding season to make life easier for us?!

June was unfortunately a time for being buried under a pile of paperwork and financial reports, and felt like stepping back in time to school with report after report due. It was however really interesting to have the time to collate figures. The BNB team have carried out 104 events/activities last financial year, interacting directly with 4000 people. We also had 8000 visits to the Wing Thing website, distributed 15,000 copies of the Wing Thing magazine, 500 dog leads ('Put me on the lead so the hoodies can breed') and 32,000 stickers last summer. These figures do not include the hundreds to thousands of people that our volunteers personally interact with on the beaches during summer. This is pretty impressive for getting the message out there!

Glenn Ehmke and Grainne Maguire (in a far lesser role) have put together the beautiful pocket-sized 'My hoodie' guide. This is the field companion to the website [www.myhoodie.com.au](http://www.myhoodie.com.au) where you can find all the information you need for monitoring pairs including video footage of the different behaviours you are looking for when trying to find out whether a pair has a nest or chicks. And answers to all those questions that beach users ask you like "Are hoodies bad parents because they don't feed their chicks?" We have had 5000 copies printed, so these are limited and predominantly being used for volunteers and people connected directly with the project.

## ***A bird in the hand is worth...***

Last season we began banding Hooded Plovers using a metal band on the lower leg and a single engraved orange leg flag which sits above the knee and has two unique letters.

We caught and banded 63 hoodies last season, with 36 of those from the Bass Coast – Steve Johnson is an amazing ‘hoodie hunter’ and banded nearly every chick that fledged last season plus at least one member of nearly every pair they monitor! Talk about knowing their birds intimately!



*Bird PV with Jonathon Stevenson*

Twenty four chicks were caught in hand nets and flagged pre-fledging (18 from Bass Coast, 3 from the Bellarine, 3 from Mornington Peninsula). Already we have amazing stories of travel for these little chicks. Little HC from Franklin Rd Portsea fledged in February and was spotted wintering at Point Roadknight with a flock of local birds and ones from Phillip Island and Kilcunda. He or she then turned up at Wild Dog creek Apollo Bay in mid October, and then in early November, Glenn and Grainne spotted it back at Franklin Rd Portsea! Typical twenty-something returning home for a stint!

Steve Johnson has also had the delight of getting word that a chick he banded with Jon Fallaw at Kilcunda at the end of the 2010 season, has been wintering at Pt Roadknight and hooked up with NK, the Point Roadknight west bird! They flew west and are now into their second nesting attempt at Fairhaven! This is the first time Fairhaven beach has been reoccupied by hoodies in at least 15 years! The Great Ocean Road Coast Committee (GORCC) have been swift to protect these nesting sites, and that is key to assisting birds who are settling into new beaches.

Over the winter we spent a few days chasing after flocks of Hooded Plovers! It's always such an incredible sight to see 35 hoodies together – no wonder some locals think they're not threatened when they visit the beach in winter. A few days in Venus Bay working in two teams made up of Mike Weston and Steve Johnson, and Jonathon Stevenson, Jodie Dunn (Shorebird Recovery Coordinator visiting from NSW) and myself, saw us capture and band 11 birds! Little PV became the poster boy of Parks Victoria (or was that Jono, see photo above)?!

A day on the Mornington Peninsula in late July tore Mike Weston away from his desk at Deakin Uni once again and he got that particular glint in his eye and started reminiscing about his younger days banding hoodies for his PhD (a long long time ago! Only kidding Mike!). At Koonya East, Mike recaptured a bird he originally banded in February 1997 as a juvenile and we flagged this one MW! This bird had a history of being sighted on different beaches of the Mornington Peninsula, of being sighted at Lake Victoria over on the Bellarine once and breeding a few times at Monforts beach before becoming a long term resident and breeder at Koonya. This bird is a champion breeder, where Val Ford has been keeping breeding records of it since 1997 and watched it breed success-



*Bird MW with Mike Weston and Martin Downs*



fully in the past (fledged 2 chicks in 2001; 1 chick in 2003; 3 in 2004 from two attempts) but with changes to the beach morphology and intense recreation at the site, together with a Kestrel pair that has been sighted twice taking chicks, this pair haven't successfully fledged young since (despite laying up to 21 eggs some seasons).

At Koonya West, Mike recaptured another old bird, captured as a juvenile from Gunnamatta in March 1997. This bird (given JZ) has never been sighted off the Mornington Peninsula and has been a breeder at Koonya West for many years, again well documented by Val (fledged 1 in 2002 season and 1 in 2005). We ended the day at Franklin Rd Portsea where Kasun and Mike nearly went swimming in their attempts to herd the hoodies into our trap, while Grainne managed not to get her feet wet – the bonus of being the project manager!

This season we have banded 20 hoodies so far (18 adults, 2 chicks). This means that there are lots of good reasons to stare at the legs of hoodies!

Remember the data we need about sightings of banded hoodies is:

- Date and time of day
- Location: be as specific as possible, a latitude/longitude is ideal
- Age: Adult, Subadult, Juvenile or Chick
- Flag ID of bird and which leg the flag and metal band are on
- Number of birds it is with
- Behaviour: breeding, not breeding, flocking?
- How you saw the flag: binos, scope or camera
- Include any photos



photo by Geoff Gates

### ***Breeding season in full swing again!***

The 2011 breeding season is now off and running. With new nests and chicks popping up all over the place, the BNB staff are racing to train volunteers and educate school children and the general public. We've got record numbers of volunteers signing on this year, all wanting to do their bit to help the hoodies. The Yorke Peninsula in South Australia is starting up a Friends of the Hooded Plover Group, making 10 Friends of hoodie groups now across Victoria and South Australia!

We hope you all had a good break and are feeling refreshed and raring to go for the season now upon us! It'll be challenging and also fun, and each year we get to know you better and it makes us feel like we have the best jobs in the world working with such enthusiastic, dedicated and interesting people.

The Beach-nesting Birds Team: Grainne, Meg, Kasun and Tanya



## ***The Perils of Hoodie photography***

**- Geoff Gates**



*photo by Geoff Gates*

It was a painstaking stalk closing the distance to the hoodies. For over thirty minutes I had maintained a low profile by waddling like a duck, crawling, sliding on my belly and feigning indifference when the birds looked my way. My quads ached and it was difficult keeping the camera equipment out of the sand. Finally I could lie next to the large clump of drying beach wrack, the only available cover in the vicinity.

The hoodies were all too aware of my presence but were happily preening as I focused on the nearest bird. I was about to take the first image when for some inexplicable reason the birds flew. I lay prostrate on the sand, aghast, watching them fly into the distance wondering what spooked them. A second later I felt something moist on the back of my thigh and then a hot breath. I turned to eyeball a large, intimidating dog that proceeded to slobber on me. "He won't hurt you" I heard the owner yell from a distance, "Fantastic" I sarcastically thought.

As an avid wildlife photographer I enjoy combining hoodie monitoring with my hobby. But things do not always go as planned, I can go weeks without getting a good image and some behaviours such as the crazy display still elude me.

Bird photography is an extremely challenging pursuit. It is not only the bird's cooperation that has a bearing on the likely outcome of an image. All the elements come into play ~ the light, wind direction and setting. Photographing at the bird's eye level will nearly always strengthen an image and with hoodies that means that you often need to be lying on the sand.

Being associated with a pair whose breeding territory encompasses the local nudist beach has led to some interesting encounters too. One morning I found the hoodies feeding out on the exposed reef at low tide. Unfortunately a few nudists were wandering around on the reef as well. I was busy taking images when the lower legs of a man appeared in the viewfinder. This middle-aged gent (and I use the term lightly) took great offence at my presence and scared the birds off. A verbal battle ensued and my response was swift. "Listen mate, I'm only interested in taking pictures of the birds and if I had a body like that I'd be wearing a paper bag over my head."

Other dangers await the unwary. Wading across the local estuary I was carrying my camera, telephoto lens and tripod across my shoulder when my foot found a large hole and I fell sideways into the drink. I somehow managed to keep thousands of dollars worth of camera equipment above the waterline. My wrist ached for weeks but the bank balance was kept intact.

Sometimes though, it just all comes together. Within minutes I can capture that special image. Often I will then relocate to a comfortable spot on the beach, sit back and observe the hoodies going about their daily existence.

In those moments I learn a lot about hoodie behaviours. Armed with this knowledge and being able to anticipate what will occur makes taking the next hoodie image just a little bit easier.



© 2011 Geoff Gates

*photo by Geoff Gates*



## ***Red-capped Plover – the forgotten ground-nester***

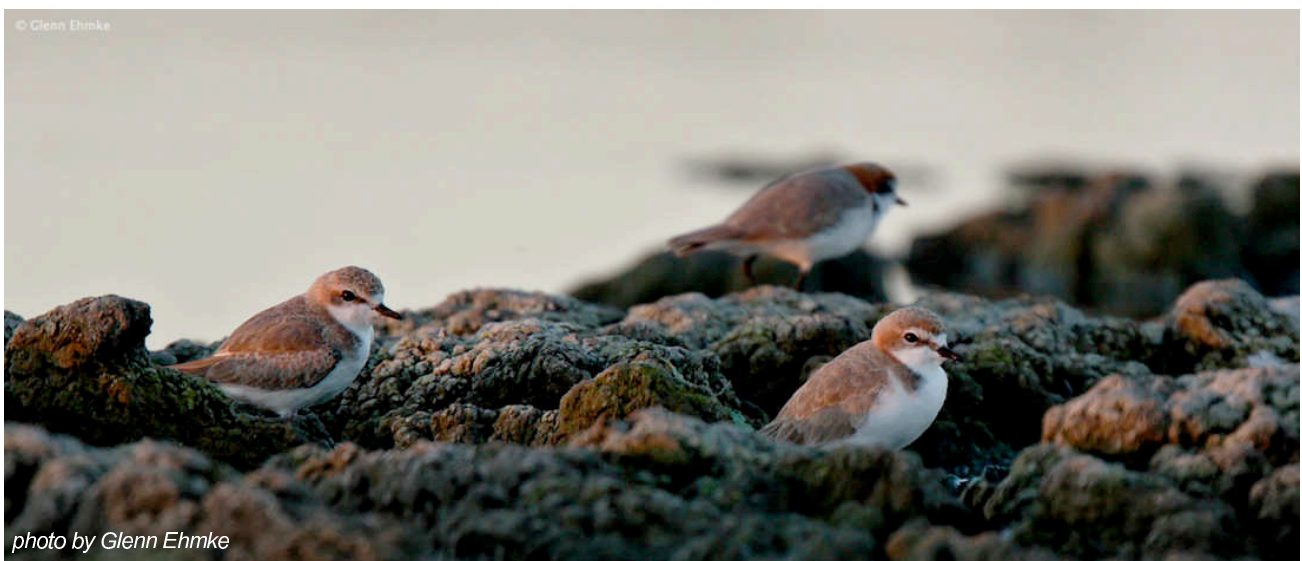
**- Kasun Ekanayake**

It is our smallest resident shorebird and most of you may have come across this beautiful Aussie battler commonly in wetlands but also on beaches. As many of our other beach-nesting birds, the Red-capped Plovers' breeding season spans from around July to March the following year, breeding whenever conditions are suitable. It lays 1-2 eggs per clutch in simple depressions on sand or shores of lakes and water bodies in wetlands and sometimes decorates them with shell or pebbles. Unlike other beach-nesters, they nest out in the open as well as under cover, tucked underneath vegetation. They also tend to show a lot of aggression towards predators and try and distract them by intense leading and feigning injury. Their chicks come out of the eggs after about 30 days and then chicks need to fend for themselves (escorted and protected by parents) for another 35 days before they are grown enough to be able to fly. The adults can also relay clutches up to seven times during a single breeding season similar to other beach-nesters.



I was privileged to be part of a group of students who studied the Red-capped Plover and we have found out that these little creatures are amazing in so many ways! They are sexually dimorphic whereby males possess a bright reddish-orange head whereas females possess a slightly duller orange head. There's also a bit of variation among males and among females in that, male head colour can vary from a bright reddish-orange to a duller reddish-orange and female head colour varying from a duller orange to a brownish-orange. The most fascinating feature of this bird's breeding biology is that during nesting, the female incubates the eggs during daytime and as soon as the sun sets, the male takes over for the night duty. Based on this finding, further research also helped us to find out that this distinctly regimented incubation pattern may well be an adaptation shown by these birds to avoid depredation of their eggs whereby duller females avoid the attraction of visually foraging predators during daytime.

The Red-capped Plover is common so people may not think it is as charismatic as the Hooded Plover. However, they face the same threats as the Hooded Plover and may face a similar situation in the future if neglected. Therefore, if you see them on a beach or in a wetland make sure you give them space and be careful when walking not to trample their eggs. Put your dogs on leashes and walk along the water's edge. Let's help these beautiful plovers now and protect them for future generations.



## ***Cradle Coast, Tasmania***

*-Hazel Britton Project Coordinator (Resident Shorebird Monitoring Project: Stanley to Narawntapu National Park)*

In September 2009 I was sponsored by Cradle Coast NRM to attend the Australasian Shorebird Conference in Hobart. During the conference, it became evident that we didn't know the status of resident shorebirds along a 120km stretch of north-west Tasmanian coastline between Stanley and Narawntapu National Park. The coast is dotted with towns and cities and the beautiful scenery naturally attracts many people, often with dogs, horses, trail bikes and vehicles. Pests such as feral cats and weeds also take their toll on this area and erosion and high spring tides have been known to remove shorebird nests. The status of beach-nesting birds in this area was definitely a knowledge gap that we were keen to fill.

Together with Dionna Newton, a Facilitator from Cradle Coast NRM, we developed a project to count and monitor the status of four resident shorebirds – the Red-capped Plover, Hooded Plover, Pied Oystercatcher and Sooty Oystercatcher. We also decided to note the number of Masked Lapwings, Fairy terns and Little terns plus keep a casual eye out for non-shorebirds such as White-bellied Sea Eagles. The counts take place twice a year in March and October.



Along this stretch of coastline, we were able to identify 41 accessible beaches for monitoring. It was obvious that we wouldn't be able to cover such an area without a lot of help and so we set about recruiting interested, and in many cases novice, community volunteers along with experienced birdwatchers via local media and our networks. Calling upon residents not only helped us gather the required people-power, but also enabled us to raise shorebird awareness across different sections of the community and promote behaviour that would help retain the shorebird population.

Since the first count in March 2010, the project has grown to involve close to 100 community volunteers from diverse backgrounds and age-groups. Volunteers are assigned a local beach and are matched with experienced birdwatchers to assist with identification. We've also run shorebird identification workshops open to volunteers and the general public and have been impressed by the participant's enthusiasm and retained interest. It's a thrill for many volunteers to see Red-capped Plovers; so small that they had not previously noticed them.

During one of the workshops we went on a field trip and were witness to a compelling display of beach disturbance when a quad bike rider raced around the sand. The biker seemed very keen to show off some riding skills in front of our crowd - little did they know how much of a lesson they were really giving! It couldn't have been a more graphic demonstration of the dangers facing our beach nesting birds and left a lasting impression on the volunteers, some of who were realising the presence of shorebirds for the first time.



In addition to the beach counts and monitoring, Cradle Coast NRM has also been delivering shorebird education in primary schools across the region. We're well on the way to having a next generation of beach-goers who walk on the wet sand to protect our best nesting birds.

As the October counting period gets underway, we're now planning a celebration of the achievements of our great volunteers. Come Coastcare week this year, we'll be bringing everyone together for lunch to share the count data, review the conservation improvements made to date and to give everyone a pat on the back for helping to raise awareness of this previously neglected beach-nesting bird area of Tasmania.

## Monitoring nesting Curlews of Central Queensland

- Hayley Glover Regional Landcare Facilitator, Pioneer Catchments & Landcare Group  
(hosted by Reef Catchments Mackay Whitsunday Isaac)



The Mackay region in Central Queensland, around 100km south of Airlie Beach, is often overshadowed as a birding hotspot by the famous wet tropics to the north. Mackay is fortunate to have a number of the Near Threatened Bush Stone-curlew, *Burhinus grallarius*, a large, ground-dwelling shorebird common to open grassy woodland environments and some offshore islands. The species is endemic to Australia and males and females look very similar. They are nocturnally active and many people from this region will be familiar with the eerie wailing call made by these birds at night. Their range has drastically declined in south-eastern states due to habitat fragmentation and depredation by foxes.

Pioneer Catchment and Landcare Group, Deakin University and Birds Australia have been running a community nest monitoring program over the 2011 nesting season. The project aims to increase community awareness of ground nesting birds in the region and develop a better understanding of nesting success of this species.

Bush Stone-curlews breed in winter, spring and summer and lay 1 or usually 2 eggs. Often these eggs are laid in a shallow depression near the base of a tree or beside a fallen log. Many of the nests we have monitored are from peri-urban backyards where people report what appears to be the same pair nesting in the same area for years. Their eggs are incredibly well camouflaged (see photo). Both parents will share the incubation which lasts for 25-27 days. Unlike the active nest defence of Masked Lapwings, Bush Stone-curlews are passive nest defenders which mean they will freeze, lower their head or even walk away quickly and quietly when they perceive a threat, relying on the camouflage of their eggs for protection. Nests are monitored using remote cameras placed 2 metres from the nest.

Through the help of on-ground staff from Mackay Regional Council and local Rangers from Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service and passionate community members, including members of Mackay division of BOCA, we have monitored the nests of 20 Bush Stone-curlews around the region. Our first nest was





discovered on 13th August in a suburban parkland and nests have been found in suburban backyards alongside the Bruce Highway to National Parks around the region. To date, many of the nests have hatched out two chicks which is a very encouraging result. Adults and chicks often leave the nest site within 24-48 hours after the last chick has hatched. How far they move is unknown, in urban areas it may be a few house blocks away, whereas in rural areas they may move further. This mobility makes monitoring chick's growth and survival very challenging and they cannot be monitored using these remote cameras. We are starting to receive some reports of observations of older chicks reappearing at the nesting sites with their parents, which is also very encouraging.

Through this project we have identified that mowing operations were threatening the survival of nests of these and other ground nesting birds. In response, we have been working with on-ground crews from Council and State departments to raise awareness of their nesting habits and give crews tips on behaviour of adult birds they might see that can indicate the presence of a nest site. Hopefully, these results and the positive attitude expressed by the community towards this project indicate a positive future for a great asset in this region.

This project has been funded by Rio Tinto's Hail Creek Mine Community Benefit Fund, the Hermon Slade Foundation (via Mike Weston, Deakin University) and the Australian Government's Caring for our Country.



### ***International Surf Pro on Kangaroo Island***

When Birds Australia heard there would be a surf event attracting thousands of visitors to a usually quiet stretch of beach with nesting hoodies and pied oystercatchers, we set about quickly finding out more about the event, birds at that site and writing specific protocols that would help control and mitigate impacts on the birds. Surfing South Australia were really receptive to helping out the birds as they recognise that caring for the environment often goes hand in hand with surfing. They were keen to pass on information about the birds to event goers so that the message could be taken on board by surfers who will then take the messages home with them to their beach.

In addition to coming up with protocols that outlined measures such as fencing nesting sites near the event and ensuring at least 150 metres of buffer between the event and the birds, plus regular announcements to event goers about the presence of nearby nesting sites, Birds Australia carried out several workshops in the lead up to the event. These were targeted at training volunteers to warden sites with nesting birds, and training Surfing SA staff

in fencing of nest sites and detecting nests and monitoring the birds. Grainne held a presentation followed by a beach visit at Maslins beach on the Fleurieu, training 25 volunteers from a range of groups such as Conservation Volunteers, Christian Surfers and Balanced Habitats, who put their hand up to assist in maintaining buffers around nesting areas on Vivonne Bay and raising awareness about these birds during the event.

At Vivonne Bay, Grainne surveyed the long expanse of beach, assessing the habitat, presence of threats and breeding status of Hooded Plovers and Pied Oystercatchers. During the workshop at Vivonne Bay, a local DENR ranger found a one egg nest at the Harriet river estuary, about 1.5 km from the event location. This was immediately fenced by Surfing SA and Grainne. It was monitored in the lead up to the event, in addition to the pair at Eleanor river, a site much closer to the event (750 metres). This had a pair acting very suspiciously but it is only now after the event that this pair have laid eggs (found by one of Surfing SA's staff). During the event however, this site was fenced off to give it protection regardless and signs erected to request that event goers not walk east of this estuary, as the beach and dunes to the east are a real stronghold for the birds. The amazing dune system here would no doubt attract curious walkers who could accidentally step on nests and disturb breeding birds.



The nesting birds at the Harriet made it through the event with eggs in tact. Ironically, it wasn't the event's visitors that were the main impact on the birds, but several locals and regular holiday makers with off-leash dogs. This site is directly in front of an access point from a council campground so is in a bad spot – estuaries are one of the hoodies most favoured habitats and their choice of this spot is presumably driven by abundant prey availability. This site also regularly gets horses and anglers spending long periods in the area. The nest has since failed, reported by a ranger.

The event went smoothly with a team of 8 dedicated volunteers, led by Chris Purnell (BA) and Conservation Volunteers staff, working long hours out in the harsh sun to warden sites throughout the week. They did an amazing job and deserve great praise. It was a great opportunity to get a lot of conservation messages out there and they spoke to lots of people. Now that the event is over, these birds go back to their quiet beach, however, it is important to remember that it can take just one person to cause nest failure for these birds and we've a long way to go with educating and changing behaviours at the local level. One thing that can't be helping these birds is the number of feral cats using the dune system – their prints dominate the sand and must be taking a toll on beach-nesting birds and other wildlife on Kangaroo Island.

Birds Australia will be writing a report about the event and suggesting improvements. We will also investigate the occurrence of similar events in proximity to beach-nesting birds around Australia to see if any measures are taken to protect the birds during the events (e.g. The Falls festival in Tassie; Johanna beach surf events), as it is likely that the impacts on these birds are often overlooked.



photo by Glenn Ehmke

## ***Days of Our Lives (The Hooded Plover Version)***

***- Natalie Sheppard (PhD student)***

I was first introduced to the Hooded Plover in February this year when I began my PhD project studying their foraging ecology through Deakin uni, with support from Phillip Island Nature Parks. Since then my fondness and respect for these little troopers has continued to grow day by day. I feel lucky to be working on such a worthwhile project and hope that my findings may somehow serve to protect such a special species.

I spent a few months over autumn and winter sampling Phillip Island beaches for Hoody prey items. I sampled the top 10cm of sand at different levels of the beach using cylindrical cores and found several species of amphipods (sand hoppers), isopods, worms, millipedes, beetles and other species that had washed up on the shore. The next step in this chapter is to figure out the proportion of each of these prey items in the Hoody diet, or in other terms, figure out their favourite meal.

Currently I am undertaking preparations for my next stint of fieldwork beginning early November. I'll be recording levels of human disturbance at breeding sites and determining the physical characteristics of beaches containing breeding sites. This part of my fieldwork will also involve observing Hoody foraging behaviour in their breeding season. I must say, the prospect of spending the summer sitting inside a hide on the beach saying "peck, walk, peck, probe, pause, peck" into a tape-recorder does seem quite odd. I'm pretty sure that most beach-walkers who happen past my hide and hear me inside talking about "pecks" and "probes" will definitely think it is odd! Oh well, mustn't get embarrassed, look at the amazing office I get to work out of! Yes, much worse offices in the world than the beaches of Phillip Island.

I can't wait to kick off this next season of fieldwork and discover more about the life of the Hooded Plovers. Just what exactly do they get up to all day and night? Something gives me the feeling that during much of the day the answer will be... not very much at all. Can't say I blame them. On a nice sunny day they do seem to be living the good life. Perhaps a lot of the action and drama happens at night? I'm looking forward to finding out.

## ***A field day in the life of a student***

***- Aimie Cribbin (Honours student)***

My field work is taking me along the Victorian coastline from Cape Paterson to Nelson, through hoodie nesting habitat looking at fox depredation on hoodie nests, using remote triggering cameras. This for me, involves roughly 15km of beach walking each day – and if I am really lucky, maybe only 10.

The days seem to either be blissfully clear or overcast rainy and windy. Walking along the beach on a clear day at low tide, well it seems almost perfect. Fighting along the beach on a windy day, as I am sure we all know, is not



too fun, especially when the sand is soft and you sink up to your ankles with every step you take, dodging waves as you go. As I walk I find myself constantly looking for Hoodie prints, and no often how many times I find them, I find myself still getting excited when I do. Sometimes it seems to me that certain parts of the beach are what I like to term a “hoodie-highway”, with prints going this way and that, up and down, back and forth.

Other things that I notice as I walk are fox tracks. They are everywhere. It’s almost impossible to go any distance into the dunes without seeing them, or other evidence of fox inhabitation. Tracks, scat, animal remains. But they aren’t the only animal hanging out in the dunes. Rats, mice, wombats, kangaroos, wallabies echidnas, dogs, feral cats, foxes, quail, oystercatchers, magpies, wrens and of course – ravens. All of these have shown up on my cameras at one stage or another, and most seem to be fairly snap-happy, getting their few minutes in the lime-light, or so to say. In several instances, I have had ravens, rats, mice and even a wombat not too happy with my camera placement, and they have ever so kindly re-arranged them for me so that I might catch them in a better light. However rather than foxes, ravens seem to be the largest threat to my false nests with nests often being taken within hours of being set up. These animals often return to the sight several days in a row just to see if they might be lucky enough to catch something more to eat.

As amazing a find as this is, it doesn’t look too good for our Hoodies. Dedicated parents as they are, it seems that Corvids are just as dedicated hunters, dead set to eat any Hoodie nests that they can. It really does give another meaning to “an unkindness of Ravens”.

## ***How hoodies can school the community***

*- Rose and Mike Clear*



*Hoodie progress sign at Sussex*



*Lost Hoodie chick being returned in granny's hat to its family*

Like other volunteers on the south coast of NSW during the nesting season, we spend many hours monitoring our beaches. Our experience in 2009-10 was especially noteworthy. It was our first season in the Shorebird Recovery Program of the NP&WS. It has and continues to be a great learning experience for us, but also involves quite an emotional engagement with the iconic little hoodies.

During 2009-10 we shared our experiences by way of regular email updates, with our grandchildren and other family and friends. They often seemed absorbed with the unfolding narrative. As it happens we both have a strong interest in education, and carry-out some volunteer reading work at the local public school. We started to put these two experiences together. The result was a book, “Letters to the family: the story of an endangered shorebird”, published in 2010 by Envirobook.

In our story we are ‘granny and papa’ writing to our grandchildren about the experience of watching out for a pair of hooded plovers, their eggs and chicks. Letters to the Family is a story made from those email updates.

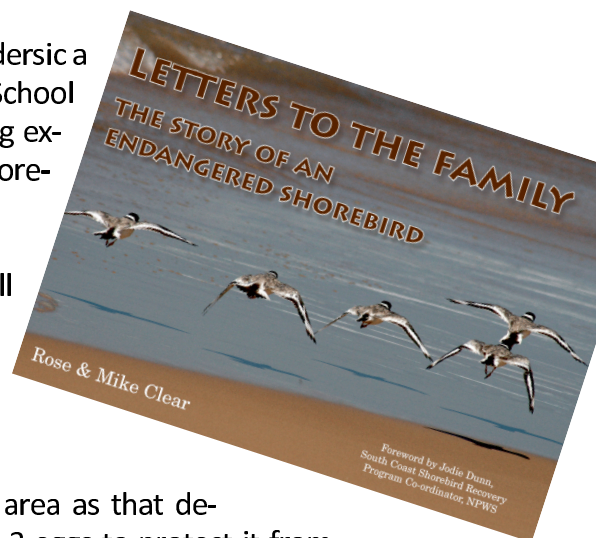
Motivated by a belief in the value of education and local families being more responsible for their beaches, we have used the book to talk with students and staff at Sussex Inlet and also at Ulladulla. These schools have Hooded Plover nesting sites at nearby beaches.

More recently we have also been sharing educational ideas with Liz Znidarsic a Tasmanian ornithologist who works with students at St Helens District School on the east coast of Tasmania. We hope this might result in interesting exchanges with students and comparisons of habitat and threats to shorebirds and biodiversity in the respective school locations.

The 2011 season for hoodies on the NSW south coast has started well although not without the usual sad losses. As our trusty National Parks & Wildlife Shorebird Co-ordinator, Jodie Dunn recently reported, there are now 12 nesting pairs. A decade ago when the recovery program first commenced 7 nesting pairs was the best result.

On the northern end of Cudmirrah Beach (more or less in the same area as that described in our Letters to the family) a cage was put over the nest with 3 eggs to protect it from raven predation. One chick made it to fledgling stage. Our volunteer colleague Sue Patrick, who spent most time monitoring this nesting, believes a severe storm may have been responsible for the loss of one chick. Most beachgoers are interested and helpful, but due to vandalism we had to replace the signs and fencing on 2 occasions.

We are hopeful now and waiting for the birds to re-nest. There are some good signs for the hoodies and we think that greater awareness on the part of the local community is having a positive impact. The change is small, but significant. The hoodies might be teaching us all about working together to protect our biodiversity.



*Shoalhaven & Nowra News*  
9 Dec 2010

## Children's book to help an endangered species

A children's book with a difference was launched recently at Sussex Inlet Public School.

Letters to the family: The Story of an Endangered Shorebird is story about the hooded plovers.

In this story the authors are Granny and Papa.

Granny and Papa are shorebird volunteers, Rose and Dr Mike Clear, who live at Cudmirrah, near Sussex Inlet.

They wrote regular email updates to their grandchildren and family, while watching out

for a pair of hooded plovers, their eggs and chicks.

Letters to the Family is a story made from those email updates.

The entire Sussex Inlet Public School body took part in the launch and the guests for the morning included National Parks Wildlife service's South Coast Region shorebird recovery program co-ordinator Jodie Dunn, Envirobook Publisher and Sussex resident Patrick Thompson and the authors.

Ms Dunn introduced the shore-

bird program by showing a recent national park DVD production, Saving Our Shorebirds and explained to the audience the purpose of the program to protect our endangered shorebirds.

In particular these include the hooded plover, little terns, and sooty and pied oystercatchers.

The hooded plover is in serious danger of becoming extinct in NSW, with only about 50 left found only south of Jervis Bay.

They are listed under the

Threatened Species and Conservation Act in NSW as critically endangered.

The shorebird recovery program relies on the work of volunteers, like Mrs Clear and Dr Clear along the South Coast.

Dr Clear spoke about the experience he and Mrs Clear had, that led to the book, and he read some key excerpts from the book.

Students were given the opportunity to ask about the shorebird program and demonstrated how

well they had listened by asking a range of very interesting questions.

The book is published by Envirobook and endorsed by NPWS.

Its registered price is \$9.95 and there are copies at Angus & Robertsons at Junction Street in Nowra, the Nowra office of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in Graham Street or through Mrs and Dr Clear at [rosemike2@dodo.com.au](mailto:rosemike2@dodo.com.au)

Sussex Inlet Public School students Elle Farrow and Tory-Lea Kirk join Dr Mike Clear, Jodie Dunn, Rose Clear and Patrick Thompson at the launch of Letters to the family: The Story of an Endangered Shorebird.

### ***Adventures of Beach Stone Curlew monitoring*** - Hans Lutter

As NPWS Volunteer Shorebird Wardens, Heather and I were wardening the newly hatched Beach Stone Curlew chick at Brunswick Heads one afternoon about a month ago. Whilst I was checking the Marshall Creek area, Heather checked the beach right up to the north break wall. After being gone for nearly an hour I was getting concerned and was about to go looking for her. Right then she arrived back, a Golden Retriever-cross dog by the collar on each hand! She had managed to catch them near the break wall. They were unaccompanied and without leads chasing waders right along the beach in a hunting frenzy, including the roosting waders beside the rocks (20 odd Bar-tailed Godwits, 4 Ruddy Turnstones and 1 Wandering Tattler plus heaps of Terns and Gulls)! This is a "dogs prohibited" beach.



They were actually quite friendly dogs and after she had caught the female the young male came willingly. But what a courageous feat, and then walking them back 1/2 km! We tied them up and gave them a drink and phoned the shire dog catcher who picked them up an hour later. He established that the dogs ran away from home near the Ocean Shores shopping centre about 5km away. The owners will be fined.

In the meantime Park Ranger Lori had arrived and when she saw us with 2 dogs tied up, she was lost for words.

But just imagine if these dogs had got into the protected fenced off Beach Stone Curlew area.



Heather and the dogs recovering from their adventure

All this happened only about a month ago and the chick was then only a few days old. It is now about 5-6 weeks old and waiting to be banded by Greg Clancy.

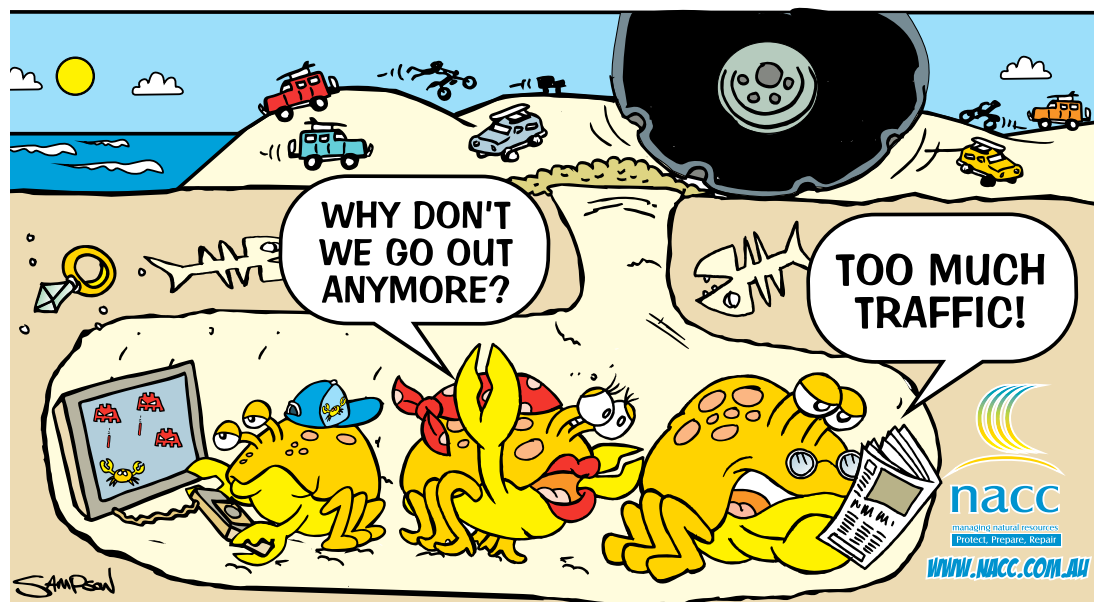
### Getting the message across - Tanya Pyk

We all know how difficult it is to reach some members of the community with our message.

The NACC in Western Australia have come up with a novel way to market conservation of our beaches, enlisting the help of local designer Jason Sampson.

They have created stubby holders which they give away at targeted events, regional shows, and community events. The NACC are a not-for profit organisation and work with a variety of state government agencies, Coastcare and community groups, other NRM groups and the Federal Government. The stubby holder project was funded through Australian government funding.

What a a great idea for thinking outside the square when trying to target those people/groups that are often difficult to reach with our message.





## ***Wilsons Prom not a wash out***

*- Grainne Maguire*



Sitting in the carpark at Picnic Bay, with the rain teeming on the car roof and showing no sign of slowing, I thought what a disaster, who on earth would want to show up to count Hooded Plovers on a day like this? Well the Friends of the Prom aren't shy of rain and the cars pulled in and out people came, unrecognisable in raincoats and hats, young and old, all set to go. We huddled around and speedily went through the data sheets, speedily so that they didn't become completely drenched and useless. Emily Green, the ranger, told

us ironically that in the floods all of their waterproof paper had been destroyed. We would see a lot of the damage the floods had done that day, with the rangers and volunteers already rebuilding so many of the main tracks to the beach that had been ravaged by massive flood waters.

Off we went along Picnic Bay beach, wiping fog and raindrops from binoculars and squinting hard through the rain. No Hooded Plovers had been seen when we reached the other end of the beach, no wonder, they surely would be cuddled up in the dune. On our return, suddenly there they were on the upper beach, well hidden despite their round white tummies. We had a good look at them through binoculars and then left them as they seemed keen for us to leave, alertly standing with their heads cocked. It was fun having kids along on the walk; they were looking at all the bugs in the sand (a little grade prep boy spotted an 'army bug' which had a green camouflaged pattern on its body and was sure to be on the 'Australian team'!).

We bundled in the car for more punishment and drove to Derby beach, where we set off along the new track, identifying flowering plants along the way. Unfortunately closer to the beach, Sea Spurge was strangling most of the life from the dune. We saw the pair at the estuary which had only recently lost their nest, and they were trying again, with a few well defined nest scrapes. Over the river mouth we waded - what was a little more water to us when we were already soaked! Ranger Emily felt guilty leaving us, but I think that with five weeks before her baby is due, that is a pretty sound excuse. The dunes turned to amazing cliffs of rock formations and blowouts beyond, then we came across Sooty Oystercatchers and a few more hoodies, even a flock of seven not very happy about each other's company! The clouds parted and we took the chance for lunch and then the others headed back. I continued on as I was curious about Cotters beach, being the best hoodie beach on the Prom, and I was momentarily fooled by the lull in the weather.



Being alone on an enormous expanse of isolated beach is such a rare and wonderful experience. I weaved my way through rocks and had a Sooty Oystercatcher call repeatedly at me, very annoyed that his peace had been shattered. Once beyond the rocks, the beach was wide yet eroded at the base of the dunes, and was dominated by a pebbly upper beach with loads of marine debris. There was enough rope and driftwood there to build a raft if needed! Given the weather to come, I may well have needed it.

I walked awhile and nearly missed two hoodies dead still behind seaweed, refusing to budge from their wind sheltered position. I kept walking, thinking I'll just go as far as that bit. No that bit of beach looks good, I'll just



go as far as that. Further on I reached the most amazing blowout and was just about to explore when before me were four hoodies. I quickly looked at their legs, not because of a strange fetish, but to look for leg bands, and was rewarded with an orange leg flag with the letters 'PT'. The lighting was perfect that I got the letters first go. This bird was banded as a chick at The Oaks on the Bunurong Coast (not far from Inverloch) in February 2011 (from a brood of three which all fledged successfully) and had been sighted in July, wintering on 13th beach over near Barwon Heads, and now to see it at Cotters beach, what a magic piece in the puzzle. I passed this information onto Steve Johnson who banded it and he was thrilled!

I ventured into the most amazing blowout I've ever seen and before me was a waterhole with an emu posing by its side. Above the gulls cried out and I looked up to see a White-bellied Sea-Eagle soaring low and close to where I was standing. I felt like I was in paradise, what a beautiful sight and how magnificent it was to stand in untouched dunes, such a rarity on our coast. The only prints in these dunes were of Emus and wombats. For all the time I spend on beaches that have been trashed by people, with ugly tyre tracks, dog prints and barely an inch of sand untouched, it was just so nice to be somewhere so special.

And then the skies opened and my special time came to a dramatic end! I walked for two hours in the non-stop rain, with my clothes soaked through and an old knee injury decided to show itself. This is what it feels like to be alive! The next morning, the day couldn't have been more different, blue sky and warm sun! Typical! I walked to the Tidal River overlook and spotted emu-wrens among the heath, a male with a grub in his beak, either on his way to feed his incubating female or to feed some tiny outstretched beaks.

Then onto Squeaky beach to have a quick look for nests. Here I spotted 3 birds on the beach, one and then a pair, very close to one another and each looking like they were hiding something. Crafty birds these hoodies are! I wandered back in the dune, spotting cat prints, and then like a 3D puzzle, I looked at the sand long enough and a hoodie materialised. It was very unwilling to leave the dune and I thought I'd find eggs for sure. It was even calling which made me think chicks possibly, but I only found 5 very fresh scrapes. Interesting that the bird was so defensive of these scrapes, which must mean it is keen to lay an egg very soon. Back on the beach, a bird flushed from a nest with one egg. This was on the lower slope of the dune near the start of the beach, very close to where people might sit – what a spot. Onto Picnic bay just to see where the pair were and whether they were in the same spot again, no sign of them until a quick look in the dune revealed the pair who were cuddling up in the grass on the crest of the dune. Below on the beach they had a very well defined scrape, which one bird went and sat in as we left. Then it was sadly, farewell to the Prom for now.





Mary asked me whether this was my job, to walk on beaches to look for Hooded Plovers. This project has evolved dramatically over the six years I've worked on it. Once upon a time I was lugging fence posts and enormous framed corflute signs all over beaches across the state, digging and hammering and wishing for bigger muscles, and now I do less and less of this (for one thing we ditched those heavy signs!) because volunteers, rangers and committees of management have all put their hand up to do their bit for their local birds, spreading the effort and making it sustainable in the long term. Instead I now work with a team of three other staff to involve new areas and new people in conservation of beach-nesters; to work to see that the beaches get the essential protection they need (i.e. working to ensure as a minimum all breeding sites are dog on leash during the breeding season); making submissions and comments on developments, management plans, coastal plans etc to ensure beach-nesting birds aren't overlooked and beaches are viewed as habitat; researching new ways of protection and ways of bringing about behavioural change (e.g. what should a sign say to make people want to comply?!); and coordinating 300 volunteers in Vic and South Australia through newsletters, and supplying equipment and advice about managing sites. We would love to work more closely with the Friends of the Prom who from just the few times we've met, seem to be an amazing group full of enthusiasm and energy. After all, there are not many people who come out rain or shine.

## Wing Thing - New Activity Book

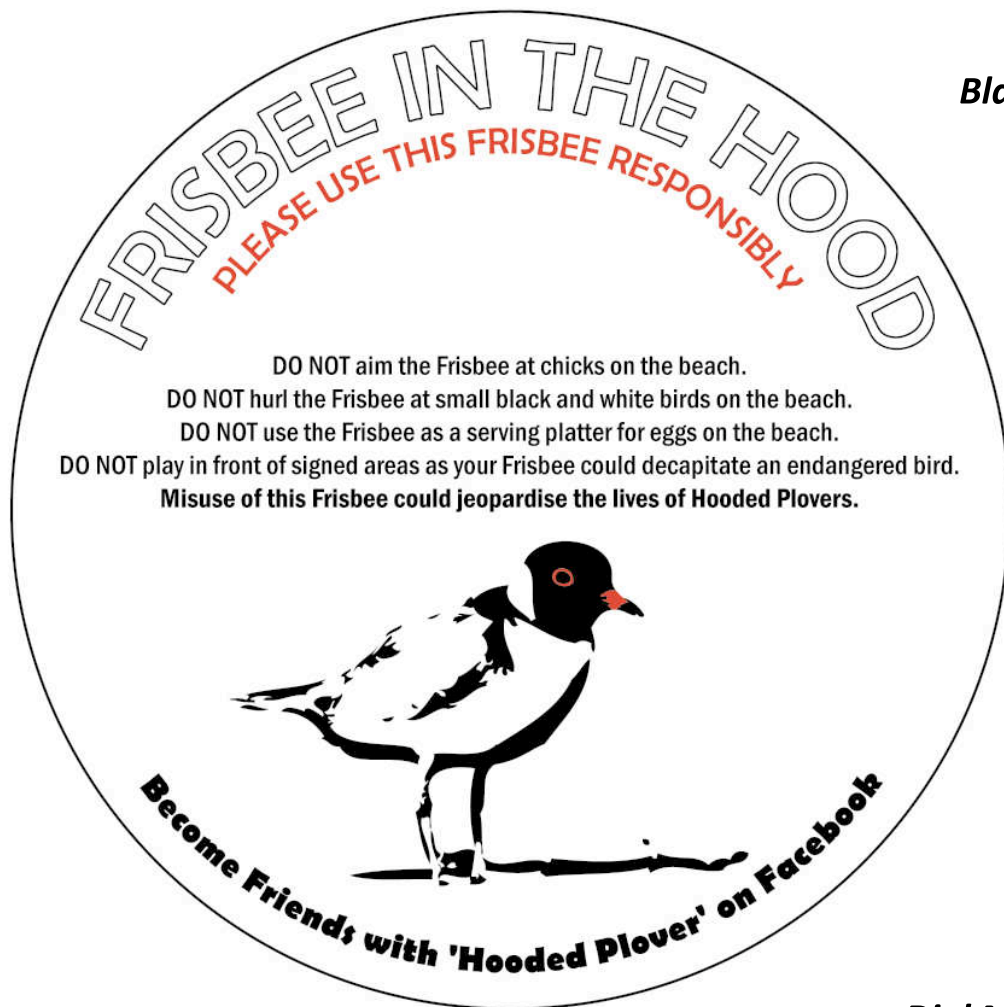
- Grainne Maguire  
& Georgie Read

Last summer we launched The Wing Thing Magazine and Website, an informative little book about the threats Hoodies face with interesting out-there competitions like "Eggs in Space" and "Create your own animation". This summer we have modified the book to make it an actual activity book with puzzles, colouring in and even a snakes and ladders game!



Contact us at Birds Australia  
to request copies.





## ***Black humour can't hurt***

*- Grainne Maguire*

Because we love merchandise and think it helps to spread the message, we've made some Limited Edition Frisbees to give out this summer! They invite people to befriend Bruce and Sheila the Hooded Plover couple on Facebook who have 303 friends.

## ***Dial M for Merger***

This will be our last newsletter as Birds Australia, so it may become a valuable collectors piece...! Many of you will have already heard that Birds Australia and Bird Observation and Conservation Australia (BOCA) have merged to form BirdLife Australia. Those who have not are probably thinking: Why, How, What?

Why the new organisation BirdLife Australia?

Birds Australia and BOCA make a great match with their long histories of conservation. Through their research and advocacy they have achieved a lot for birds in Australia; and that is something to be proud of. However, with a combined total of about 10,000 members we are small fry in the political and public arena. However, many of us feel that our voice for bird conservation is not heard loudly and clearly enough. We want to change that.

How will being BirdLife Australia help birds?

Many decisions – big and small – that harm birds are made with a lack of understanding or a lack of understanding of how many people support birds. Changing this is what BirdLife Australia is all about! We want to build up an organisation that is present and recognised around the country, wherever birds may need our help. We want to be strong in members and supporters and help them share (and enhance) their knowledge of birds, be it by contributing to bird research or by watching garden birds with their neighbours. And of course we hope you will help us find more voices for our birds.

What does that mean for Hooded Plover volunteers?

Not much will change as many of our volunteers are a mix of BA and BOCA members, as well as non-members who provide amazing support. The project, monitoring and management of Hooded Plovers will remain the same, adapting with research and learnings from our on-ground experience. The things that will immediately change are logos and layouts of the website and this newsletter which will be updated to our new common logo, released early next year. Our partner products such as signage will have logo changes but will not undergo major changes due to the years of effort that have gone into making these consistent across the coasts of Australia, gaining approvals from all involved and undertaking social research to get this right.

## Beach-Nesting Birds Summer Activities

**By BirdLife Australia and Friends of the Hooded Plover**

To find out more call BirdLife Australia on (+61 3) 9347 0757

Region	Location	Event	Date	Time
Far West Victoria	Warrnambool: Killarney Beach – meet at boat ramp car park.	Hooded Plover Beach Walk	10 <sup>th</sup> Jan	9 – 10 am
	Warrnambool: Meet at Lake Pertobe Adventure Playground on Lake Pertobe road.	Kids Conservation Craft	10 <sup>th</sup> Jan	1 – 3 pm
	Port Fairy: Meet at the west end of Ocean Drive (intersection of Anna Catherine drive) and walk towards Time and Tide café.	Hooded Plover Beach Walk	11 <sup>th</sup> Jan	9 – 10 am
	Port Fairy – Meet at the Village Green	Beach Walk and Kid Craft	11 <sup>th</sup> Jan.	10:30 -12:30 pm
	Narrawong Holiday Park	Dog's Breakfast, Free BBQ breakfast and information for dog owners.	12 <sup>th</sup> Jan	8 – 10 am
	Meet at Narrawong Holiday Park	Hooded Plover Beach Walk	12 <sup>th</sup> Jan	10:30 – 11:30am
	Moyneyana Festival	Stall with activities	13 <sup>th</sup> Jan	10:30 – 2:30 pm
West Victoria	Apollo Bay Market, Great Ocean Road	Information Stall with Kids Craft activities	Each Saturday from NYE through January. BA - Jan 7th	Early Morning till 4:30 pm
	Breamlea Caravan Park Recreation Room	Kids Conservation Craft & Scope on the Beach	6 <sup>th</sup> Jan	10am – 12 noon
	Point Lonsdale Foreshore	Kids Conservation Craft	8 <sup>th</sup> Jan	10am – 12 noon
Mornington Peninsula	St Andrews Recreation Hall	Kids Conservation Craft	28 <sup>th</sup> Dec	
	St Andrews Recreation Hall, 99 Bass Meadows Boulevard, St Andrews Beach	Hooded Plover Information and Training Day	10 <sup>th</sup> Jan	10am
	Sorrento Community Centre, 860 - 868 Melbourne Sorrento	Hooded Plover Information and Training Day	11 <sup>th</sup> Jan	10am
	Portsea Back Beach	Kids Conservation Craft	12 <sup>th</sup> Jan	Morning

Gippsland	Venus Bay Caravan Park	Kids Conservation Craft and Beach Walk	4 <sup>th</sup> Jan	11.00-12.00 and 1.00-2.00
	Wilsons Prom: Tidal River	Evening Presentation	4 <sup>th</sup> Jan	Evening
	Wilsons Prom: Tidal River Education Centre	Kids Conservation Craft and Beach walk	5 <sup>th</sup> Jan	All day
	Mallacoota Market	Stall with information and Kids activities	7 <sup>th</sup> Jan	7.00am – 1.30pm
	Marlo Caravan Park	Kids Conservation Craft	9 <sup>th</sup> Jan	10.00-12.00
	Lakes Entrance	Kids Conservation Craft	10 <sup>th</sup> Jan	10.00-12.00
Western Australia	Esperance, meet at Natural Resource Management Centre	Information session and Beach Walk	14 <sup>th</sup> Jan	8:30 – 12:30 pm
	Albany, South Coast NRM Conference Room	Information session	18 <sup>th</sup> Jan	2:30 – 4:30 pm
	Margaret River Community Resource Centre (The Church)	Information session	23 <sup>rd</sup> Jan	4 – 6 pm
	Preston Beach Community Centre	Information session and Yalgorup NP trip	25 <sup>th</sup> Jan	9:30 – 12 noon



CARING  
FOR  
OUR  
COUNTRY



For more information on the Beach Nesting Birds Project or to find out how you can contribute please visit:

<http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/beach>