

# *Sharing the shoreline*

## **SHOREBIRD BREEDING SEASON**

The 2019-2020 shorebird breeding season on the Far South Coast is now over. The season saw a lot of action in terms of wildlife, weather events and the Covid 19 shutdown. We had a period when the parks were closed on and off following the New Years eve bushfires. This meant some sites had little visitor pressure, but also that volunteers were unable to survey the sites. Other hazards included bushfire smoke, soot and ash clouds.

Hooded Plovers did reasonably well, fledging 7 chicks from 10 breeding pairs, with 3 of these coming from the pair at Bithry Inlet. The Pied Oystercatchers fledged 21 chicks from 16 breeding pairs.

Little and Fairy Terns again chose Tuross Lake and Mogareeka Estuary to nest. Forty-five little Terns fledged from the region. We had quite a number of sites home to Sooty Oystercatchers and nests were confirmed at Montague Island.

No school educational events were held over summer, but a few early season community events were attended with the shorebird education trailer. Shorebird volunteers were also taken on a field trip to Montague Island.

## **2019/2020 Season Summary**



**NSW National Parks  
and Wildlife Service**



Photo above: Smoke from bushfires at Tuross and raised nests. Bill, one of the Tuross volunteers braving the adverse summer conditions: Credit: Sophie Hall-Aspland

Thank you to everyone who helped with the conservation of our local beach nesting birds - your help is vital to the success of the program.

## Hooded Plovers

The 2019/20 season was fairly successful for Hooded Plovers on the NSW Far South Coast. We monitored 10 known breeding pairs which laid 17 nests containing 47 eggs. Seventeen chicks hatched but only 7 chicks survived to fledge age.

An unbanded pair was spotted at **Bingie Point** in December, but no nesting activity observed. U1 was spotted with an unbanded partner at **Coila Lake**, during May 2020. This bird was originally banded in 2014 at **Disaster Bay**, Eden but has not been seen at any beaches over the past few years. An unbanded pair was spotted at Potato Point Beach in May 2020.

The pair at **Bullengella Beach** (S2+p) laid 3 eggs, however all eggs were taken by a resident fox. Another nesting attempt produced 2 chicks, one of which fledged and the other was presumed to be lost to foxes. Fox control was conducted at adjacent private properties and removed a number of foxes. Again, we had trouble with vehicles on the beach until Council installed a gate, which defied even the strongest 4WD. Our 'dogs prohibited' signs were being removed as soon as they were installed. We then trialled 'dogs on leash' signs, which were relatively successful and remained in place for the duration of the season. Some people with dogs kept to the low water mark showing they were relatively effective.



Photo Left: New gate installed at Bullengella by Eurobodalla Shire Council. Right: Dogs on leash sign being trialled where dogs and sign removal is a problem. Credits: Sophie Hall-Aspland



S2+p's offspring from last season, P1 was also spotted at **Bullengella** with the parent birds, but generally has been seen resident further South at **Barragoot Beach** this summer. P1 was also sighted with two unbanded birds at **Murrah Beach**.

**Corunna Lake** did not have any breeding pairs, however a lone hooded plover was spotted. At **Wallaga Lake**, P2+p, were seen in September. No nests were found throughout the summer and later in the season P2 was seen alone. The **Bunga Beach South** pair (U6+R5) laid their first nest in September 2019, which produced 3 fledges. They renested again in December but later abandoned the nest, when U6 disappeared. R5 remained on his own until being seen two weeks later with an unbanded hooded plover. They have remained together since then.

At **Aragunnu**, the unbanded pair laid their first eggs in September 2019. This nest was found in a Pied Oystercatcher scrape and was reclaimed the following week by the Pied Oystercatchers, who added two eggs of their own. The Hooded Plover eggs were moved by hand to a new nest which had a single egg. The Hooded Plover pair laid a further two eggs, making five eggs in one nest. Unfortunately, 2 weeks later, this nest was predated. The Hooded Plover pair renested a couple of times but were unsuccessful. Losses are hard to attribute, but possibly ravens or goannas. It would be useful to place some remote monitoring cameras at this site.

The **Picnic Point** pair of Hooded Plovers (X1+Z8) were seen in September 2019, but did not nest. They disappeared for a while and turned up at **Bithry Inlet** in November 2019. Due to the fires the park was inaccessible until March, when 3 chicks, estimated to be 2 weeks old were spotted! None of the chicks made it through to fledging unfortunately.

At **Middle Beach** (S1+p) made two nesting attempts during October and November 2019, but all four eggs were lost, possibly due to ravens. They were also spotted further South at **Nelsons Beach** during December 2019 and February 2020, but did not nest. An unbanded pair was spotted at **Wallagoot Lake** and laid 3 eggs. Two eggs were lost and 1 chick hatched, but was later lost.

The **North Tura** pair (P5+p) first nested in August 2019. They made 2 nesting attempts and managed to hatch 3 chicks, which were later lost, cause unknown. The following three egg nest was predated on by a raven. Later in the season they moved across to **Bournda** but did not nest.

At **Haycock**, the birds (T1+p) started nesting in September 2019, but lost all 3 eggs to a raven. The birds spent some time trying to evict the new arrivals P1+p, who had recently arrived. They then nested again and had two chicks. They moved South to **North Long Beach/ Quondolo** where two chicks fledged. At **Disaster Bay Beach** an unbanded pair was spotted but did not nest.

At **Nelsons** beach, S1+p were present but had no nesting attempts. At **Murrah**, a lone hooded plover was seen in August but no later sightings were made. At **Barragoott Beach**, P1 was spotted on and off throughout the season, but made no nesting attempts. At **Corunna** a lone Hooded Plover was spotted in October, but no further sightings were made.

At **North Long Beach** (W2+p) were sighted but no nesting attempts made. At **Nullica**, X0+X5 did not successfully nest, however X5 paired with W2 (after X0 disappeared) and nested in late September, but later abandoned the nest. They nested again in October, laid another 3 eggs but all were lost. An unbanded pair at **North Long Beach/Quondolo** nested and fledged a chick later in the season. At **Saltwater** an unbanded pair nested with 3 eggs, but later lost the eggs, with raven tracks spotted in close proximity. They renested but the fate of this nest was unknown due to park closure.

## Pied Oystercatchers

Our Pied Oystercatchers had a fairly good season with 26 breeding pairs monitored. They laid 40 nests which contained 87 eggs. Forty eight chicks hatched but only 21 survived to fledge. Many threats were evident including dogs, ravens, goannas, Silver Gulls, feral cats and foxes. Inundation of nests was also an issue plus human disturbance.

Successful nesting sites included **Congo**, however the first nesting attempt resulted in a fox jumping the fence and taking all 3 eggs. The fox shooter was engaged and removed foxes and ravens. The second nesting attempt produced one fledge after careful daily observations by the **Congo** volunteers.

**Tuross Lake** was again home to many breeding Pied Oystercatchers, with 9 breeding pairs nesting throughout the lake from the entrance to the rocky and sand islands. At **South Tuross Beach**, 2 eggs were laid in September. Two chicks hatched, one was lost to a sea eagle and the other fledged. At **South Point**, two eggs were laid in October 2019. One egg was lost and one chick hatched and fledged. At **Rocky Isle**, 2 eggs were laid in September 2019 and 2 chicks hatched, but were later lost. At **Long Spit**, 3 eggs were laid in October 2019, 3 chicks were seen and one observed being taken by a sea eagle and the other two survived to fledging.

At **Eastern Isle**, two different pairs (North and South) occupied each end of the island. Both had 2 eggs laid in September 2019, which later hatched, however all four chicks were later found dead. At **Western Isle, (North East, South West and other)** four separate nests were found. At **Western Isle**, 2 chicks were sighted, however both chicks were later found dead after 2-3 weeks. All dead chicks were sent to Moruya veterinary clinic for post mortem analysis but were too decomposed. Further investigations are being made with the Australian Wildlife Registry to determine causes of death. At **Western Isle (NE)**, two eggs were found in September 2019, but were later lost. At **Western Isle (SW)**, a nest with two eggs was found in September 2019, two chicks later hatched, but were both found dead a few weeks later.

At **Brou Beach**, 3 eggs were laid in October 2019 and all were lost. Another pair laid 3 eggs in September 2019, 3 chicks hatched, 2 were lost and one fledged. **Coila Lake** on the northern side of Tuross Head occasionally has reports of pairs of Pieds nesting. No nests were seen but birds were observed feeding on the lake side.

At **Lewis Island**, three eggs were observed in September 2019. The site was disturbed by a late night party and campfire on the island and the birds disappeared for a few days. Luckily, they later reappeared with three chicks and two birds fledged during November. New signage had previously been installed by Eurobodalla Shire Council prohibiting dogs, campers and motorbikes.

**Mill Bay Island** was the chosen nest site for two resident pairs in Wagonga Inlet. The adults were observed displaying chick hiding behaviour and one fledge was observed in mid December 2019.

At **Wallaga Lake**, red flag C4 was observed with an unbanded female and 2 fledge in January 2020. We assume they had nested somewhere in the estuary. At **Bermagui Harbour**, a pair laid 3 eggs in October 2019 however the nest was lost a week later.

No birds were spotted nesting at **Corunna Lake** this season. Fox control was conducted at adjacent private properties and removed a number of foxes. Shorebird information was provided to the adjacent caravan park and holiday cabins at Mystery Bay, due to a number of dogs being seen in the Park.

At **Aragunnu**, A4+p first laid 2 eggs in September 2019. They chose to take over a Hooded Plover nest (which had been laid in a Pied Oystercatcher scrape). The eggs were left in place and 2 chicks later hatched. One chick was lost and one fledged in December 2019. At **Picnic Point**, 2 eggs were laid but were later lost. At **Bithry Inlet**, 2 eggs were laid by 8R+p in October 2019. A second unflagged pair nested two weeks later a few hundred metres away. Both of these nests were lost. At **Middle Beach**, the northern pair had 2 nesting attempts in September and October without success. The southern pair nested near the lagoon in September 2019 and fledged one chick.

At **Nelson Beach**, two nesting attempts occurred with two eggs each. The first nest hatched 2 chicks in October 2019 but both chicks were lost the following week. The second attempt fledged 2 chicks. At **Mogareeka**, two nesting attempts were made, the first resulted in 1 chick which was lost the following week. A second nesting attempt produced 2 fledge.

At **Wallagoot**, birds nested in December but both eggs were lost. At Bournda, 2 eggs were laid in September 2019. Only one of the eggs hatched and produced a chick which fledged. At **Short Point Beach**, a nest with 2 eggs was found in October 2019. The nest was predated by a fox the following week. They renested again in November 2019 and fledged 1 chick.

At Merimbula, two eggs were laid at **Spencer Park** in a tree hollow, adjacent to a walking path in November 2019 however due to their open location both eggs were lost. Unfortunately the 'dogs prohibited' area at Spencer Park has been changed to 'dogs on leash'. We hope BVSC will review this. At Pambula, a nest was discovered along **Pambula River** mouth in September 2019, but was later lost. This area has also been made 'dogs on leash' removing the 'dogs prohibited' protection.

At **Haycock Beach**, 7P+p nested in September 2019. Two eggs were laid, one egg hatched but the chick was later lost. At **North Long Beach**, SZ+p laid 3 eggs in September 2019 and went on to fledge 1 chick. At **Saltwater Creek**, JY+p laid 2 eggs in September 2019. Only 1 egg hatched and the chick went on to fledge.



Photos Above left: Combined Pied Oystercatcher and Hooded Plover nest at Aragunnu. Credit: Leo Berzins. Above right: Pied Oystercatcher nest at Spencer Park Merimbula in tree hollow. Credit: Natalie Ryan, BVSC

## Little Terns

Little Terns established two main nesting colonies on the Far South Coast this season at **Tuross Lake** and **Mogareeka Estuary**. A small nesting attempt was made at **Wallagoot Lake** but no fledges were observed. Overall, the total Little Tern adult population for the southern coastline of NSW was estimated at 102 breeding pairs. The average for the past 20 seasons is 125 breeding pairs. Overall 335 eggs were laid with 45 fledges.

Most egg losses were attributed to fox predation and inundation. No tern colonies nested at **Brou Lake** or **Wallaga Lake**. A small Fairy Tern colony nested and hatched chicks at **Wallaga Lake**. The site was unfortunately abandoned the following week after dogs were allowed to run through the colony and people walked through the fence.

### Mogareeka

Little Terns were first recorded on the 25th October 2019 when the first nests were counted. Overall 76 nests containing 168 eggs were laid. Fox predation during the week prior to 28th November 2019 caused the loss of 4 adult birds and 6 eggs. The fox shooting contractor was engaged for 5 nights but was unable to locate any foxes. The closure of the site was also an opportunity to remove the Silver Gulls which were also seen preying on chicks and eggs. This season the site produced 35 Little Tern fledges from 50 breeding pairs.

**Mogareeka** 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 to BVSC. Most visitors were co-operative when informed that dogs were not allowed near the colony.

A late lake opening occurred in mid February, but by then the chicks had all hatched, the birds had fledged and most Little and Fairy Terns had left the site. The birds left a few weeks early and we think this is due to the smoke hazard which covered the site during the bushfires in December and January.

'Dogs prohibited' protection has been removed from some parts of Mogareeka inlet, and changed to 'dogs on leash'. We have made a submission to BVSC highlighting the impacts on resident and migratory shorebirds and will update volunteers on any changes.

Photo below left: Cameras placed on nest cages at Mogareeka.  
Right: Nest cage at Mogareeka and a new volunteer. Credit:  
Sophie Hall-Aspland



## Little Terns

### Tuross Lake Entrance

The season began on 26 November with 17 breeding pairs and this rose to 36 breeding pairs early in December. The site was again expansive and movement of fences was required due to king tides and high ocean swells. Again, we had people walking through the colony along with emus! Strong winds caused sand inundation and egg losses, and fox predation caused the loss of many eggs. The fox shooter spent a few days at the site and remote cameras were deployed to determine patterns of movement. A winter shoot will be conducted to reduce fox numbers and trial drone use for the heavily vegetated dune system.

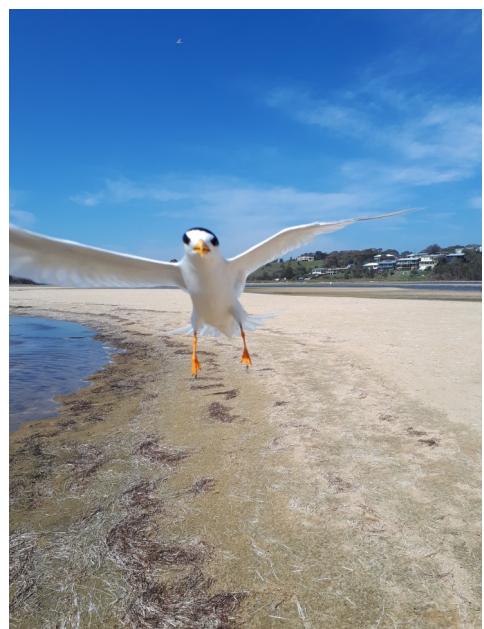
The breeding pair numbers dropped significantly to 3 pairs in early January. Again, we assume the smoke and ash from the bushfires caused the main body of the colony to leave early. Overall, 78 nests containing 165 eggs were laid. This season the site produced 10 fledges from 32 breeding pairs. The fledges were spotted at **Coila Lake** after leaving the site, catching fish. Presumably to fatten up before the long migration North.

Some filming commenced during Autumn to produce footage for educational purposes for distribution to the wider community. Hopefully this will engage them about the birds and also highlight the disturbance to the colony from nipper pumping and unleashed dogs.



Top Left: Visiting kangaroo caught on camera.  
Top right: Finally the fox is spotted at 4:07am but with a bandicoot in its mouth. Bottom left visiting emu. Credit: Nick Patrizi.

Photo bottom left: Fairy tern at Wallaga Lake.  
Credit: Sophie Hall-Aspland



## **Education Activities**

This year we intended to do talks at local caravan parks however due to the fires a lot of the visitors left early and the caravan parks were deserted. Instead, we attended some community events including Broulee Art on the Path and Bingie Bounce Back. Volunteers were also taken to Montague Island as part of a shorebird volunteer field trip. They got to see nesting seabirds and receive a guided tour from Ranger Amy Harris about the island and revegetation projects.



Photos clockwise from top left: Bingie Bounce Back Day, Broulee Art on the Path. Montague Island Shorebird volunteer field trip. Credit: Sophie Hall-Aspland

**Thanks for helping with the Far South Coast NPWS Threatened Shorebird Recovery Program**

**<http://www.southcoastshorebirds.com.au>**

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