

SOUTH COAST SHOREBIRD RECOVERY NEWSLETTER

Sharing the shoreline



May 2006

Welcome

I know it has been a long time coming and the Little Terns have left for sunnier shores, but here it is, the official newsletter for the South Coast Shorebird Recovery Program giving you all the gossip on our Threatened Nesting Shorebirds including endangered Hooded Plovers, Little Terns and vulnerable Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers. Find out whose nesting with who, where the fashionable nesting sites are and who looked best on the beach this summer. It has been an eventful season to say the least.

As many of you will already know, as well as our migrating terns heading to new horizons, so has our Far South Coast Shorebird Recovery Coordinator. Jill has taken up a Coast and Marine Officer position with the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority. She will be involved in a number of coastal and marine projects from Batemans Bay to the NSW/VIC border. The birds, the volunteers and especially the other coordinator will miss working with her a lot.

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Adult Little Tern returning to the Mogareka nest site to feed a hungry chick, Bega Rivermouth. Photo: courtesy of Dave Gallan

When storms in late November destroyed many shorebird nests, many thought that this season was going to be a disaster. But the ever-persistent shorebirds continued to produce eggs throughout the holiday season and beyond. The kinder weather, good fox control and the watchful eye of volunteers paid off for the Little Terns with 158 fledglings counted. Twenty Pied Oystercatcher chicks also took to the sky while Hooded Plovers continue to hang in there (just). ♦

Hooded Plovers

A total of 23 pairs of Hooded Plovers were monitored between Sussex Inlet and the NSW/VIC border this season with 17 pair confirmed as attempting to breed. Ten fledglings have been added to the adult population, six of which originated from the South Coast Region (Sussex Inlet to Batemans Bay) and four from the Far South Coast Region. The number of fledglings is one less than last season ie. 11 fledglings from 22 monitored pairs (2004/2005), Twenty-two pair produced 13 fledglings during the 2002/2003 season and nine chicks fledged from 15 monitored pairs the previous year.

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Summary of Hooded Plover breeding activity on the NSW South Coast during the 2005-2006 season

Site	Pairs	Nests	Eggs	Chicks	Fledglings	Main Fate(s)
Cudmirrah Beach	1	1	2	0	0	U(E)
Swan Lake	1	1	2	0	0	U(E)
Berrara Beach	1	1	3	0	0	U(E)
Inyada Beach	1	1	3	0	0	U(E/C)
		1	3	0	0	I
Lake Conjola		1	3	3	0	U(C)
Rennies Beach	1	1	3	0	0	Fx
		1	2	0	0	A
Racecourse Beach (Ulladulla)	1	1	3	3	3	3 Fl
Meroo Beach	1	1	3	0	0	I
Racecourse Beach (Bawley Point)	1	1	3	0	0	Fx
		1	1	0	0	U(E)
Island Beach	1	1	3	0	0	I
		1	2	0	0	I
Dawsons Beach		1	3	3	2	2 Fl
Bogola Head Beach	1	5	3?	0	0	R
			3	2+	0	U(C)
			3	0	0	U(E/C)
			3	0	0	U(E/C)
			3	0	0	?
Fullers Beach	1?	?	?	?	0	N
Pooles Beach	1	?	?	?	0	N
North Tilba (1080) Beach		1	3	0	0	R/Fx
Wallaga Lake		0	0	0	0	N
Aragunnu Beach	2	0	0	0	0	N
Middle Beach 1		1	3	2	1	1 Fl
Middle Beach 2		2	1	0	0	G
			3	2+	0	?
Turingal Head	1	1	3	0	0	R/Fx
Bournda Beach		0	0	0	0	N
Tura Beach		1?	2?	1	0	U(C)
North Long Beach	1	1	3	0	0	U(E/C)
Quondolo/Terrace Beaches	1	?	?	?	0	N
Nullica River Entrance	1	0	0	0	0	N
Saltwater Ck	1	3	3	?	?	U(E/C)
			3	1	1	1 Fl
			3	2+	0	G/R
North Wonboyn Beach/ Baycliff	1	1	2	0	0	U(E/C)
South Wonboyn Beach/ Greenglades	1	3?	2?	0	0	N?
			2?	0	0	N?
			2?	0	0	U
Jane Spiers Beach	1	1?	2?	0	0	N?
Newtons Beach	1	1?	2?	0	0	R?
Nadgee River Beach	1	0	0	0	0	N?
Nadgee Lake Beach	1	0	0	0	0	N?
TOTAL	25	36	96	19	7	

N = no nesting recorded
 A = abandoned
 I = inundated
 U(E/C) = unknown egg/chick loss
 Fl = fledged
 N? = suspected nest
 ? = awaiting results
 I = inunated
 G = goanna predation
 F = fox predation
 R = Raven predation

The low recruitment rate for Hooded Plovers continues to cause concern for the future of the species especially in NSW. A recent article written by Birds Australia's Mike Weston estimated the total population of Hooded Plover to be around 400 birds in Victoria. Add to this our 50 NSW plovers in and it becomes apparent that the species is literally living on the edge in south east Australia. Even in Tasmania the population of approximately 1700 birds is thought to be decreasing at 5% per year despite (until recently) the lack of foxes. Not so long ago Birds Australia successfully obtained a Natural Heritage grant in Victoria to promote the coexistence of beach users and local wildlife, using the Hooded Plover as a flagship species. The project will be similar to what we have been doing in NSW using coordinators to establish networks of people to assist with Hooded Plover and other species recovery actions.

In the northern part of their distribution Hooded Plovers had a number of attempts at nesting at various beaches with no luck this season. Bernie Clarke from Sussex Inlet reported a couple of nests from **Cudmirrah Beach** and at the entrance to **Swan Lake**. Both disappeared a few days after discovery and it was thought that one nest was lost to a quad bike. At **Berrara Beach** the local pair were recorded breeding only on one occasion this season with the eggs lost soon after laying. Up to three birds were seen within the fenced area periodically but unlike last season the eggs were few and far between. At **Inyada Beach** two attempts were made at nesting, the first clutch survived to the hatching date but the chicks were never seen. The second nest was laid in the creek bed and suprisingly, was inundated after a short storm. Fed up with Inyada the pair moved to **Lake Conjola** and set up a three egg nest amongst the Little Terns and Red-capped Plovers. All three chicks hatched despite 46+ degree temperatures on new years day and harassment by the Little Terns, sadly, despite the huge success of all the other species on Conjola sand spit, one by one the chicks disappeared to unknown causes until all three were gone. Unfortunately the necessity of the adults and chicks to venture outside of the fenced area for food puts them at risk to a plethora of threats not experienced by the other species nested safely within the confines of the fence.

When you read the bird books they often say that Hooded Plovers prefer secluded beaches away from human settlement. Obviously the two pair of Hooded Plovers that live in the Ulladulla area have not read the books as they occupy two of Ulladulla's busiest beaches. Both Rennies and Racecourse Beaches are very popular with sunbakers, swimmers, surfers and dog walkers. Despite the popularity of these beaches with humans and canines, the resident pair at **Rennies Beach** were keen to start breeding and laid a three egg nest up in the dunes about half way down the beach. Local resident Bill Hill was quick to spot the nest and phoned the NPWS to report his findings. Unfortunately a fox or dog consumed the eggs after about two weeks of incubation, confirmed by tracks leading to the nest site. It wasn't till late in the season that another

nest was located by NPWS Area Manager, Neale Watson whilst taking friends on a tour of the area. Nestled amongst seaweed and a patch of sand on the rock platform were two eggs just above the high tide mark. A dodgy fence (due to the hard substrate), signs and a cage were installed and the nest relocated further up the beach away from the surge. Within a week one egg disappeared from the cage, probably to a human, but the birds persevered with their single egg for another week before abandoning the site. Meanwhile, not much happened down at **Racecourse Beach** until near the end of the season when a three egg nest was found at the southern end of the beach. A fence and fresh Shoalhaven City Council signs banning dogs within 200 metres of the nest site were installed. A cage was put over the nest and the nest raised on sandbags. All three eggs hatched into very cute chicks with the parents standing on guard. Extra signs were installed and due to the close proximity of the beach to the Ulladulla NPWS office, the area was visited regularly to talk to dog walkers and to repair any damaged infrastructure. Luckily too, one afternoon whilst checking on the birds two foxie type dogs came charging down the beach, spotted the family of five plovers and preceded to chase them, scattering chicks and adults in all directions. After a bit of running and shouting by the coordinators the dogs retreated to their owners, one of whom (the bloke) ran away with the dogs, leaving his wife on the beach to explain. Apparently it was “all his fault” because he doesn’t discipline the dogs enough. After explaining that if one of the dogs had caught and killed one of the birds that they may have been up for a fine of hundreds of thousands of dollars and maybe even jail she was very apologetic. We are still not sure if she actually believed that there were Hooded Plovers on the beach as she had forgotten to take her glasses to the beach that day and couldn’t see them. Anyway, on the whole, dog owners were sympathetic to the cause and even though they still tended to walk past the nesting site, most restrained their beasts when in the signposted area. The upshot was that all three chicks fledged and flew to nearby Burrill Beach at five weeks of age. A great result!

There were two recorded nesting attempts at **Meroo Beach** this



Saltwater Creek's only fledgling will now be recognisable by his/her new metal band, Saltwater Creek. Photo: R. Kesby



A Hooded Plover chick awaits the hatching of his/ her siblings, Saltwater Creek. Photo: S. Burrons

season, the first recorded for this location since the beginning of the shorebird program. This is a great site for the birds as it is a wide beach in the middle of Meroo National Park. The park was acquired by National Parks from State Forests five years ago. It was infested by foxes and was popular for people on holiday with dogs. A fox control program by the RLPB over the last three years has seen the number of foxes reduced in the area but due to the surrounding rural land, foxes are continually migrating into the park. The first nest was found in November high up on the beach but was lost when large sea swells engulfed the beach. The second nest was laid almost in the same location. This time it was raised onto sandbags and a large fence was constructed around the site to ward off the expected holiday crowd. All was fine at the site until fox tracks were located on the beach. Within days of the predator’s appearance the eggs had disappeared, with distinctive fox tracks found leading to the nest site. This was very unfortunate, as this location along with our other coastal National Parks provides some hope for the long time survival of this endangered species. This site is a targeted control site under the Fox Threat Abatement Plan. Fox control efforts by the RLPB in the surrounding private lands provides an additional buffer for the Hooded Plovers. A phone call from part time Tabourie resident Jane Chadwick in early April of a pair of Hooded Plovers with a juvenile at **Tabourie Beach** was good news and suggested that the Meroo Beach pair had nested nearby in another location.

Not much happened this season for the pair that occupies beaches around Kioloa. Robyn and Steve Berkout from the ANU Campus kept a watchful eye over the pair but only one nest with one egg was found on **Racecourse Beach**, Bawley Point. This nest was lost soon after discovery to inundation. A number of well worn scrapes were found at the entrance to Butlers Lagoon on **Kioloa Beach**, but despite Steve and Robyn fencing the site, no eggs appeared. Either the eggs were lost very soon after being laid or the female was unable to form an egg. Judging by the number of tracks, the adults had spent a great deal of time fussing about within the fenced area.

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The trusty pair of Hooded Plovers that occupy the northern end of **Murramarang National Park** had an eventful season with their third attempt at nesting finally yielding success with two fledglings eventuating. This makes a total of 15 fledglings from this pair since 2000 including the massive six fledglings from two nests last season. This season the first nest tucked away from about 20 marauding magpies on **Island Beach** was lost when runoff after a big storm washed away the nest. A second attempt was made a little further down the beach on the edge of the sand dune but was lost to a large sea swell. Tired of the water damage the pair then moved south to their traditional stomping ground, **Dawson's Beach** and laid another three eggs high on the dunes. This remote location is great habitat for Hooded Plovers with rocks on either end where chicks can hide. Also the intensive fox control work within Murramarang National Park by the RLPB adds to the sites success. Another great result with an extra two fledglings added to the Hooded Plover population. A single bird was located by John Perkins at **Durras Lake** entrance this season but no nesting attempts were reported. This contrasts to last season when two nests were found at this location.

South of Murramarang National Park, it is not until Narooma that breeding pairs of Hooded Plovers can be found. This constitutes more than 100kms of coastline where this enigmatic bird once roamed, but today, is seen on rare occasions only. There was one record of a nest at **Potato Point** by a visiting Victorian birdwatcher, but a follow up visit by Jill Keating and Jenny Liney produced no birds or eggs.

At Bogola Head, just south of Nangudga Lake (Narooma) a massive six nesting attempts were recorded on this tiny beach. **Bogola Head Beach** lies within a small chunk of Eurobodalla National Park, which is surrounded by farmland. An electric fence is erected each season to keep the cattle off the beach but it was suspected that previous to this measure a three egg nest was lost to this bovine beast. Australian Ravens were thought to have consumed a second nest whereas the following two clutches disappeared to unknown causes around hatching date. All hope was lost until another late season nest was discovered by Patricia Latimer on the beach. A new fence was erected and four weeks later three healthy chicks emerged from the eggs. They were evident on the beach for the next two weeks but unfortunately disappeared to an unknown cause. A large amount of time was invested in trying to control foxes and ravens at this site including trapping and shooting.

On **Tilba Beach** a nest of three eggs was located by Patricia but disappeared during incubation. Raven tracks were observed leading to the empty nest and also fox tracks were found within 15cm of the nest. It seems the plovers at this location did not stand a chance against the predators, which is very unfortunate as this beach has hosted successful pairs in the past.

Down at **Middle Beach**, within Mimosa Rocks National Park, two pairs of Hooded Plovers attempted to nest. It is unusual to have two separate pairs nesting on the same beach. This led to some

interesting observations of interactions between the pairs whilst breeding. On one occasion the chick from pair No.1. was bullied by pair No.2. but at the same time one of the adults from pair No. 1. preferred to "hang out" with pair No.2. Strange politics going on in the Hooded Plover world. A total of three nesting attempts were recorded at Middle Beach with one confirmed fledgling and two "almost fledged" chicks recorded. The "almost fledged" chicks were seen at about four weeks of age but could not be located again after several searches. It was hoped that they had moved to another location but unfortunately a more sinister demise is suspected.

A single nest containing three eggs was discovered by Ron Smith at **Turingal Head**, but sadly the eggs were missing on a subsequent visit. Raven and fox tracks located on the beach suggested that these eggs shared a similar fate to many on the south coast. Meanwhile a "miracle" occurred on **Bournda Beach** when Derek and Glenys Lambert found two fledglings on the 17th of March, thought to have originated from a nest near Bournda lagoon. This was an exceptional result considering that earlier in the season only a few nest scrapes were found. At **Tura Beach** a single chick was seen roaming the beach with its parents but unfortunately was not present on a following visit, lost also to an unknown cause.

North Long Beach in Ben Boyd National Park hosted a pair of nesting Hooded Plovers found incubating a three egg nest. No chicks resulted as these eggs also disappeared to an unknown cause.

Three nesting attempts of three eggs each resulted in one fledgling for the traditionally successful pair of Hooded Plovers at **Saltwater Creek**. The first nest was located on the beach with three eggs intact. It was not known whether the eggs hatched, but no sign of eggs or chicks were found on a following visit. Not to be deterred a new nest was deposited on the northern end of the beach. Two of the eggs did not hatch but the third survived to fledge. Not long after the success the pair took advantage of the conditions and laid another three eggs whilst their original fledgling looked on. Robyn Kesby reported that at least two of the eggs hatched but unfortunately the chicks disappeared, perhaps to one of the roving goannas regularly seen on the beach, especially after the many holiday makers deserted the area.

Womboyn Beach is a large beach partially contained within Nadgee Nature Reserve. Hooded Plovers generally choose to nest at both ends of the beach, at the north end (Baycliff) or the southern end (Greenglades). One nest containing two eggs was located at Baycliff but it was thought this nest was lost as additional scrapes were found in the area during a visit several weeks later. It was suspected that three nests were attempted at Greenglades, the first was a scrape discovered, surrounded by raven tracks that was thought to have recently contained eggs. Two nests which followed were unconfirmed and no fledglings resulted.

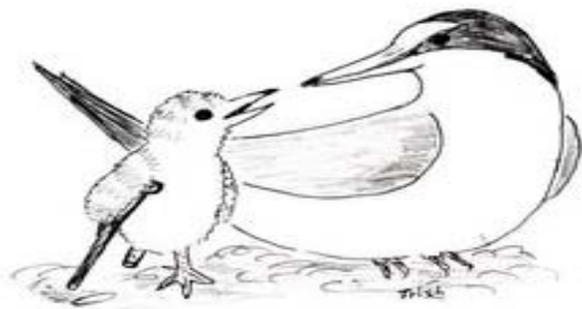
This season visits were made to Nadgee by Lyn Evans, Robyn Kesby, John Druhan and James Dawson. A single bird was found on



Stumpy the Tern, showing fresh stitches, Bega Rivermouth, Mogareka. Photo: G. Whitley

THE STUMPY STORY

During an inspection of the Bega Rivermouth Little Tern colony in January a chick was found huddled beneath a clump of vegetation with a severely broken leg. Being only a week and a half old, little hope was held for its survival. After consulting with Michelle Bailey, a WIRES wildlife carer, the tern chick was taken to Bega Veterinary Clinic where Wayne Milzon amputated the leg just above the break and inserted 2 miniature stitches. ‘Stumpy the Tern’ was then returned to Michelle who nurtured and fed the chick to health on tiny pilchards served with a pair of tweezers. Two days after being collected from the fenced colony ‘Stumpy’ was returned to the site. Within a minute a parent was alerted to the calls, landed nearby and started feeding and warming him/her again. This continued for a couple of weeks and all was looking well when Stumpy was seen taking his first flights. Unfortunately there is no happy ending. Stumpy was found dead three weeks after release on the spit. Feathers missing from the head indicated the sea gulls might have had something to do with this tragedy. ♦



Patricia Christie's interpretation of Stumpy and Mumma tern

Jane Spiers Beach and a pair with a scrape was located on Newtons Beach. Raven tracks traversed the nest site suggesting that the eggs became a meal for this cagey corvid. A large number of fox and dog tracks were also noted on the beach. Nadgee Nature Reserve is home to a large number of threatened species including all four species of threatened shorebirds. A study undertaken by the CSIRO for the last 30 years since the last big fire monitors the presence of predator species such as dingoes, quolls, foxes and cats. Also monitored is the presence of small native mammals such as bandicoots, possums and potoroos. The long term study allows the CSIRO to monitor these animals in a “natural state” where control programs and human settlements do not influence the population dynamics. The area is essentially a huge “control” site where comparisons can be made with more disturbed locations throughout coastal eastern Australia. During the 2002/2003 season it was noted by the CSIRO that the number of fox track records was unusually low. The reason for the reduced population of foxes was unknown but interestingly the 2002/2003 season is the only season out of three surveyed where Hooded Plover fledglings have been recorded for Nadgee. ♦

Little Terns

It was a very successful season for the Little Tern on the southern coast of NSW with three major nesting colonies at Lake Wollumboola, Lake Conjola and Bega Rivermouth. Although the birds arrived a little later than normal and the majority of nests consisted of two eggs rather than the traditional three, the overall result was a minimum of 40 fledglings for Lake Wollumboola, 36 for Lake Conjola and a massive 70 for Bega Rivermouth. Windang at the entrance to Lake Illawarra also rates a mention with four fledglings recorded on the sand spit despite a plethora of threats.

Ian Shaw recorded eighteen nests containing 39 eggs at **Windang** this season. Nesting started on the 2nd of December with the second nest following a week later. Many nests were lost to a host of threats including dogs, Silver Gulls, a hovercraft and even a helicopter, but the major losses were once again attributable to foxes. With the close proximity of houses, the local caravan park and the large number of people that walk in the area with their dogs, the control of foxes is difficult. Despite the relentless attack by these canine beasts, a total of six chicks were known to have hatched on the spit, four of which were observed at the end of the season by Chris Brandis as fledglings. We will have to look at methods to control foxes for this site in the future as it seems that since the birds re established after a 40 year absence, they are keen to maintain this spit as a nesting site, and will probably return next year. It will be interesting to see what the habitat is like when they return as the northern break wall and associated dredging is due to commence shortly.

Initial reports of a few Little Terns at **Lake Wollumboola** from Francis Bray didn't spark too much interest, as this site had not been utilised by the birds in big numbers since 2002/2003 where no fledglings were recorded despite 160 eggs. Foxes and a local dog called "Bindi" had been causing havoc at the site over the years as well as a very high lake level inundating the traditional nesting area. Reports of seven nests on the patch of sand between the lake and the ocean on the 24th of November came as a surprise, and even more surprising was the 40+ terns that were hanging around toward the end of the month. By the 18th of December, 26 nests had been laid with five lost to a dog and three inundated. With the help of volunteers Mike Abramowitz, Francis Bray and Keith Campbell, an electric fence was erected and many signs warding off dogs (not that dogs can read!) were placed at strategic positions around the landscape. Some nests were raised using sandbags and others close to the fence were caged. The first chicks began to hatch half way through December with their parents quickly shepherding the vulnerable balls of fluff into the vegetated sand dunes out of the electric fence. With the occasional dog in the area and the fear of foxes, keeping the chicks within the electric fence was imperative. This was achieved with the placement of plastic plant pots around the site. Pots of various sizes were partly buried in the sand on their side with the bottom of the pot pointing to the northeast, where the prevailing winds emanate. They proved very successful at retaining the chicks within the electric fence, with chicks regularly seen commuting from pot to pot.

By the end of January a total of 38 nesting attempts were recorded at Wollumboola containing 77 eggs. At least 50 of these eggs hatched and a minimum of 40 chicks went on to fledge. Darryl McKay managed to band 34 chicks and four adults. This was an incredible result considering the recent history of the site. The high survival rate of the eggs and chicks was attributable to the electric fence, fox control efforts by the NPWS, Shoalhaven City Council, the Department of Defence and the big effort in monitoring and protection from local volunteers, Francis, Mike and Keith.

A visit to **Lake Conjola** on the 29th of November to check on a couple of recently fledged Pied Oystercatchers revealed a pair of Little Terns fussing about on the sand spit. Two seasons of absence of the birds due to a persistent fox had ended and it was hoped that a few pair would return and attempt to nest at this location following the success of the Pied Oystercatchers. A site visit two weeks later was surprising when a total of 19 nests were located with about 50 terns fluttering above the sand spit. To top it off as well as half a dozen Red-capped Plovers a pair of Hooded Plovers had laid 3 eggs in the middle of the colony. This was shorebird heaven, with breeding recorded for all three threatened beach nesting species, it makes one wonder if this is how breeding events used to occur before the numbers of shorebirds were drastically reduced on our coastline. A total of 41 nests collectively contained 76 eggs which incidentally was one egg less than lake Wollumboola. Forty eight chicks were known to have hatched with 40 banded by Darryl. At

least 36 chicks survived to fledge. It is interesting to note that the two colonies at Wollumboola and Conjola were almost identical in numbers of birds, nests, eggs and fledglings. This may be just coincidence or perhaps it signifies the preferred number of adults needed to ward off predators such as ravens. Fox predation of eggs or chicks was not recorded thanks to the relentless work of Andrew Miners (RLPB) at controlling foxes in nearby Narrawallee Nature Reserve and Conjola National Park. Also, members of the public who visited the site were very supportive and very few dog tracks were found on the beach.

Every year Little Terns head strait to **Tuross Head** and set up nests on the sprawling sand flats and almost every year high tides or storm surge wash away much of their good work (except for the 2002/2003 season when nests were raised onto highrise sandbags). About 70 Little terns arrived at Tuross and began nesting on the 18th of November. Within four days 17 nests containing 34 eggs were on the ground and over 105 birds were observed by George Rayner, Bill Neilson and Peter Christie. That was until 5:00pm that day when torrents of water engulfed the egg laden sand mounds prepared by volunteers. To top it off a 7-metre swell on the nearby beach and high rainfall in the catchment swept walls of water over the sand spit engulfing all that lay low. This marked the end of all nesting attempts at Tuross and the terns abandoned the site. Ironically the rest of the season was exempt from storm activity and the spit remained high and dry. If only they had postponed their nesting attempts.

The first two terns arrived at the **Bega Rivermouth** site on the 22nd of October at 8:00 am, in line with Ron Smith's predictions. On the 2nd of November heavy rainfall within the catchment caused the blocked Bega River to over top the bank and pour into the ocean cutting the spit in half. This provided a plethora of easy to catch fish as the water level dropped and isolated the sand spit from four-legged predators travelling from the north. Within days the population of terns increased to over 100 and the first egg was laid on the 1st of December. Two electric fences were secured and half way through December, 17 nests were recorded on the ground. All was proceeding well until seagulls discovered that an easy meal could be made from roaming the tern site smashing eggs and consuming the contents. Ron Smith estimated that up to 30 nests were lost. To prevent further losses the decision was made to do something about these marauding gulls. With a shooting plan and associated paperwork was in place, two NPWS rangers, the coordinator and several volunteers arrived early in the morning on the 20th of December and watched the behaviour of the gulls in the nesting area. Ensuring that no members of the public were present, the snipers set up facing the ocean and dispatched any sea gulls that attacked eggs or terns. The result was amazing, within days the site changed from a struggling rookery to a bustling boomtown. By the end of December, 47 new tern nests were scattered across the sand spit and over 160 Little Terns were counted on and above the spit.

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The new year started with a 46+ degree day (not to mention sand temperature!) Amazingly the casualty rate was low with a few tern eggs and a couple of chicks lost to the stifling heat. To top this off panic struck the volunteers when it was realised that a 1.98 metre tide was expected later that month. Help from the “Tuross Estuary Mound Builders Guild” was sent for and nests were raised on sandbags and walls were constructed around vulnerable eggs. Not a sandbag was moistened; the calm weather conditions associated with the high pressure system ensured that the waves remained on the beach where they belong. A walk through on the 25th of January resulted in 18 fledglings, 59 chicks and 32 nests containing 46 eggs. The next day a fox arrived, jumping through both electric fences. Over two days it killed approximately 30 chicks and consumed 14 eggs. The fence was reset and fortunately it didn’t return after this killing spree. A total of 292 eggs were recorded for the site with eleven eggs attributed to Fairy Terns. About 150 chicks were confirmed as hatched with an extra 50 that were thought to have hatched. Darryl Mackay, the banding wizard, banded 75 chicks. It was estimated that at least 70 chicks fledged which was an incredible result considering the threats. It just goes to show that people can really make a difference when it comes to Threatened Species. Once again the Bega Valley Council rangers provided valuable support at the colony and the many volunteers who watched over the birds were richly rewarded for their assistance.



A successful Pied Oystercatcher family living in an expensive harbour side location, Batemans Bay Marina. Photo: L. Brooks

Summary of Little Tern breeding activity on the NSW South Coast during the 2005-2006 season

Site	Pairs	Eggs	Fledglings	Main Fate(s)
Windang Beach	10	39	4	Fx
Lake Wollumboola	35	76	36	Fl
Lake Conjola	35	77	40	Fl
South Tuross Head	19	37	0	I
Wallaga Lake	1	2	0	U
Murrah Lagoon	6	8	0	I
Middle Beach	2	4	4	Fl
Bega Rivermouth	93	241	70	Fl/SG/Fx
TOTAL	182	495	158	

I = inundation
 U = unknown egg/chick loss
 Fl = fledged
 Fx = fox predation
 S = Silver Gull predation

Pied Oystercatchers

This season the number of monitored Pied Oystercatcher pairs was lower than last season as was the number of chicks produced per pair was also lower. A total of 34 breeding pairs were monitored from Wollongong to the border producing 20 fledglings. During the 2004/2005 season a massive 45 pairs produced 37 fledglings whereas in 2001/2002, 17 monitored pairs fledged 14 chicks. Following the success of the last four seasons, not as much effort was put into locating the nesting birds and more effort was put into finding and protecting endangered Hooded Plovers.

A highlight was the success of the resident pair of Pied Oystercatchers at **Shoalhaven Heads**. The pair successfully fledged a chick for the first time in at least eight years with a tally of more than 20 failed nesting attempts. Rex Worrell who has been closely monitoring this pair was elated. The success was largely due to the efforts made to control fox numbers on Comerong Island and at Shoalhaven Heads. Last minute fox control efforts by Mark Sobieraski under the direction of Shoalhaven City Council ensured that the second nesting attempt was successful.

Lake Conjola was also a haven for Pied Oystercatcher activity this season with five fledglings recorded. Three nesting attempts by two pair at **Durras Lake** resulted in one fledgling largely due to the efforts of shorebird volunteer, John Perkins who spent many hours on the beach talking to locals, visitors and their dogs.

It was an exciting season within **Batemans Bay**, with two pair nesting within the urban environment. The first pair was found with two eggs on the sand spit near East’s Caravan Park on the northern side of the river. The sheer determination of the pair to hatch their eggs was shown by staying put on the nest whilst dogs walked their owners past the site and in chasing off sea gulls. A fence was erected, the eggs hatched and the chicks were moved by their parents underneath the Batemans Bay bridge to the safety of the piers below

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Summary of Pied Oystercatcher breeding activity on the NSW South Coast during the 2005-2006 season

Site	Pairs	Nests	Eggs	Chicks	Fledglings	Main Fate(s)
Shoalhaven Heads	1	2	4	2	1	1Fl
Lake Conjola	1	1	2	2	2	2Fl
	1	2	3	3	3	3Fl
Durras Lake	1	2	4	2	1	1Fl
	1	1	2	0	0	U(E)
Batemans Bay	1	1	2	2	?	U(C)
	1	1	2	2	2	2Fl
Tuross Estuary	1	1	3	2	0	2Fl
	1	1	2	2	0	U(C)
	1	1	2	2	0	U(C)
	1	1	2	0	0	I
	1	1?	?	?	0	N?
Wagonga Inlet	1	1	2	1+	1	1Fl
Tilba Lake	1	1	1	0	0	U(E)
	1	3	1	0	0	U(E)
			1	0	0	U(E)
			1?	1?	0	U(C)
Wallaga Lake	5	2	2	0	0	U(E)
			2	0	0	U(E)
		1	2	1+	1	1Fl
		1	2	2	1	1Fl
		1	2	2	1	1Fl
Merimans Island	1	1	2	2	1	1Fl
			1?	2?	0?	0
Bermagui Bridge	1	1	1	0?	0	U
Cuttagee Lake	1	1	1	0	0	I
Murrrah Beach	1	2	2	0	0	Fx?
			2	1	1	1Fl
Bithry Inlet	1	1	3	1	0	A,U(C)
Middle Beach	1	1	2	2	2	2Fl
Cowdroys Beach	1	1	2	0	0	R?
Nelsons Beach	1	3	2	2?	0	U(C)
			2	0	0	U(E)
			1	0	0	I
	1	2	2	0	0	Fx
			2	2	0	Ht
	1	1	2	1	1?	1Fl
	1	1	2?	1+	0?	U(C)
	1	1?	2?	?	?	N?
North Long Beach	1	1	2?	1+	1	1Fl
Saltwater Creek	1	1	2	0	0	U(E)
North Wonboyn	1	1	2	1+	0	U(C)
TOTAL	34	44	82	39	18	

I = inundation
 U = unknown egg/chick loss
 Fl = fledged
 Fx = fox predation
 S = Silver Gull predation

“On The Pier” restaurant. A story in the “Batemans Bay Post” about the rare birds nesting inspired local, Lisa Brooks to call the National Parks office to report a pair she had observed in her backyard. Sure enough a pair was discovered with two eggs just outside her backyard near the Batemans Bay Marina (see photo, page 7). A small fence was erected and signs informing the local residents and holiday makers were installed. The eggs hatched and the chicks were moved by the parents to a nearby urban creek. Despite the holiday onslaught and a sore leg, both chicks fledged. The behaviour of both pair of Pied Oystercatchers within Batemans Bay demonstrates how Pied Oystercatchers are capable of surviving and breeding within the urban environment. This is quite amazing considering the timid nature of most birds nesting in more isolated areas. Hopefully they will continue their success within Batemans Bay into the future.

Tuross Estuary was home to five nesting pair of Pied Oystercatchers this season with two definite fledglings. Four chicks were known to have hatched from two nests whereas two eggs were lost to inundation. A pair suspiciously behaving as though they had chicks was recorded in late October, but no evidence was found.

The resident nesting pair on the small island within **Wagonga Inlet** were once again successful with a fledgling recorded. While further south at **Tilba Lake** two breeding pair had four attempts at nesting however the fate of the eggs and/or chicks remains unknown.

At **Wallaga Lake** five breeding pair were recorded with five nests. One fledgling was sighted and it was thought that a further two might have fledged. At the **Bermagui Bridge** the resident grass nesting pair regularly reported by the local postie once again tried their luck next to the busy road. One egg was located but the fate remains unknown. A nest at **Cuttagee Lake** contained one egg but was lost to inundation. The local pair at **Murrrah Beach** had two attempts at nesting. The first two egg nest was thought to have been lost to a fox whilst happily one fledgling was recorded from the second.

No success was had by Pegleg this season at **Bithry Inlet** as two of her three eggs did not hatch and the single hatchling disappeared after several weeks. The island within the lake at **Middle Beach** hosted a pair of successful Pied Oystercatchers that raised two fledglings. Two eggs were lost at **Cowdroys Beach**, suspected as being taken by ravens. Three nesting attempts at **Nelsons Beach** all ended in failure this season with four eggs lost to unknown causes and one egg inundated.

Two nests on the **Mogareka** sand spit both failed this season despite past success within the tern colony. The first two egg nest

was lost to a fox. Although the second hatched, the chicks died when the sand heated to record temperatures associated with 46+ degrees on New Years Day. Meanwhile on the small sand island within the inlet it was thought that a fledgling had eventuated from a two egg nest, although this remains unconfirmed.

Further south at **Wallagoot Lake** two breeding pair of Pied Oystercatchers were observed but nesting was unconfirmed. A single fledgling located at **North Long Beach** originated from an unknown nest site whilst two eggs at **Saltwater Creek** were lost to an unknown cause (possibly inundation) and a single chick was observed at **North Wonboyn Beach** but not seen on a later date.

Sooty Oystercatchers

Sooty Oystercatchers were documented breeding on five offshore islands and for the first time on the mainland this season. Single visits were made to most sites. Although this painted a relatively detailed picture of nesting attempts, increased effort needs to be invested in follow up visits to determine fledgling success as only limited information was gathered on productivity this season. In terms of numbers, 25 nests were found on various islands up and down the coast. Large sea swells at the end of November wiped out many of these nests, especially those located just above the high tide mark.

No visits were made to the Five Islands off Wollongong with Southern Oceans Seabird Study Association (SOSSA) this season. In Jervis Bay, report of a chick came from Tony Carter (Booderee National Park) on Bowen Island but no comprehensive surveys were conducted.

A highlight this season was an amazing report of a Sooty Oystercatcher chick found on Paradise Beach at the busy end St Georges Basin. The chick was handed in by a member of the public to the Native Animal Network Association (NANA) who sent a picture to SOSSA for identification. This is the first record of a nesting pair of Sooty Oystercatchers on the mainland. Unfortunately the good intentions of its rescuer proved fatal for the chick which died after being transferred to Featherdale Wildlife Park.

The regular SOSSA south coast survey took place from November 8 to November 11. Unfortunately bad weather prevented the boat from leaving on the 8th but visits were made to the Tollgate Island and Belowla Island on the following days. It was not possible to land on Brush Island due to the bad weather, which was unfortunate. However eleven nests were found on Belowla Island by Lindsay



Sooty Oystercatcher chick, 1 to 2 weeks old. Five Islands Nature Reserve, Wollongong. Photo M. Jarman

Smith, Janice Jenkin-smith and Inger Van Dyke and five nests were found on the Tollgates.

A large storm wrecked havoc up and down the coast for all species of shorebird at the end of November. It is expected that many of the Sooty nests were also destroyed by huge waves. This was confirmed when a trip to Brush Island on January 25 revealed 18 adults but no fledglings. A couple of chicks were seen on the Tollgate Islands (A. Norman)

Montague Island was explored on November 21. Eleven pair with seven nests were found containing six eggs and three chicks. A storm at the end of November may have effected some of the remaining eggs, although most were way above the high tide mark on the rocky outcrops.

Summary of Sooty Oystercatcher breeding activity on the NSW South Coast during the 2005-2006 season

Site	Pairs	Eggs	Chicks	Fledglings	Fate (s)
St Georges Basin	1	2	1	0	D
Bowen Island	1	2	1	?	U(C)
Brush Island	9	?	?	?	IP
Belowla Island	11	19	?	?	U(E/C)
Tollgate Islands	5	9	1+	?	U(E/C)
Montague Island	11	6	3	1+	U(C)/ F1
Total	38	~38	~6	?	

U = unknown egg/chick loss

D = died

F1 = fledged

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Farewell and thanks for all the eggs.....

Photos D. Gallan, I. Van Dyke, M. Jarman, J. Keating and others

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