



Special Points of Interest:

- Best Hooded Plover season since monitoring commenced in 1999
- Over 112 Little Tern chicks fledged from 8 colonies
- Pied Oystercatcher status in NSW upgraded to endangered
- Sooty Oystercatchers surveyed on all islands off South Coast

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SOUTH COAST SHOREBIRD RECOVERY NEWSLETTER

2009/2010 SEASON



This Season in Shorebirds



On the South Coast this season we had a great volunteer effort to monitor and protect our shorebirds. Some volunteers really met the challenge this season, going to great efforts to help save nests. Thank you so much for all your efforts!!! Some of our volunteers got to meet and enjoy a visit with Sally Barnes who is the Deputy Director General of Parks and Wildlife Group (NPWS), see the photo to the right. The efforts of the volunteers undoubtedly helped us to fledge a record number of Hooded Plovers from numerous sites and also Little Terns had a fantastic season at Lake Conjola, although there was disappointment at the more northern Little Tern colonies.

On the Far South Coast this season the management and monitoring of threatened shorebirds was undertaken by both Amy Harris and Robyn Kesby who shared the duties. Amy managed the beaches from Bateman's Bay south to Wallaga Lake, whilst Robyn worked closely with the Mogareka Shorebird volunteers to manage both the Mogareka and Wallagoot Little Tern colonies.

In mid September 2009, many of the FSC beaches received a pre-season survey from a group of eager Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) students. This enabled early assessment of where pairs or groups of shorebirds were gathering and locate those early nesting pairs. It was a fantastic start to the season when they discovered a very early Hooded Plover nest near the Nullica River mouth, Twofold Bay. This nest went on to fledge 3 chicks!



Sally Barnes (Back Left: Deputy Director General NPWS) and SC volunteers & Jodie Dunn. Photo Kathryn Sarris.

HOODED PLOVERS



ON THE SC: This season, similar to last season, a total of 9 breeding pairs were recorded in the SCR. Whilst the Wairo Beach pair did not breed this season, a new breeding pair arrived in the Bawley Point region. In addition to this new breeding pair, five returning fledglings were sighted early in the season (Bherwerre Beach, Berrara & Wairo Beaches and Racecourse Beach - Kioloa).

Last season was the first time we had seen young adults recruited into the area and in particular forming breeding pairs.

In addition to the 18 breeding adults (9 pairs) and two non breeding pairs (Wairo and Racecourse Beaches), additional transient adults were sighted bringing the SC region total up to at least 26 Hooded Plovers, a dramatic increase on



Jodie Dunn and shorebird volunteers out spotting Hooded Plovers on the SC. Photo Jodie Dunn.

“The northernmost pair of Hooded Plovers in NSW nested at Mary’s Beach (Jervis Bay)”

previous seasons (16 to 19 individuals usually).

The northernmost pair of breeding Hooded Plovers in NSW nested again at **Mary’s Beach** this season. The first nest was discovered by Booderee Ranger, Tony Carter in mid October and all 3 chicks fledged in early December. This gave the pair enough time to lay two more clutches, although both were unsuccessful (ocean swells and human interference).

Cudmirrah Beach was a hive of activity throughout the season with an initial pair of ‘hoodies’ sighted with 3 chicks in September but this dwindled to only one chick being fledged. The fledgling and its parents were then joined by four additional adults who joined forces to undertake distracting behaviour while one adult attempted to nest at the back of the beach. By mid November only one pair remained with a new two egg nest that was quickly fenced off. A week later the eggs were lost to Ravens. The third nest was enclosed within a huge fence to prevent Ravens finding the nest, however this was aban-

doned. A fourth attempt in January hatched two eggs, but one chick was sighted half a kilometer down the beach running behind a group of Red Capped Plovers. Volunteers returned the ‘hoodie’ chick to its rightful parents, being readily accepted back. Unfortunately neither chick fledged.

The **Inyadda Beach** pair lost one nest before moving to **Manyana** to lay a 5 egg nest. This is highly unusual for Hooded Plovers to lay such a large clutch. The nest was taken by Ravens a week later so it is unknown if the eggs were actually viable. This pair then moved back to Inyadda, for two more unsuccessful attempts in the fenced area.

The **Narrawallee** pair had a highly successful season fledging 6 chicks. This was despite repeated disturbances by trail bikes ridden close to their nest site and a leopard seal hauling out regularly nearby. The ‘hoodies’ were undeterred, nesting successfully twice and fledging two clutches of 3 chicks in November and early February. Their success is undoubtedly influenced by the lack of foxes in the area with successful trapping operations removing two foxes early in the season.



Above: Dedicated shorebird volunteers Maggie Mance & Marg Hammon. Above right: Amy and Patricia Latimer at Wallaga Lake. Right: Hoodie family at Wallaga Lake. Photos Jodie Dunn and Stuart Cohen.

At **Rennies Beach** the one footed fledgling from 2007/08 returned to nest again. The area is very busy with off leash dogs and empty nest scrapes were found in early spring. Louise, a new volunteer, found a two egg nest on Pockets Beach (just north of Rennies). The fenced and caged nest was later washed over by huge waves. Amazingly, Chris, Louise's partner, dug a trench in front of the nest to divert further incoming waves and this worked effectively and the chicks hatched out a week later. The diligence of these two volunteers in talking to numerous dog owners and visitors assisted the birds to fledge all three chicks on Boxing Day, just before the influx of summer tourists.

The **Racecourse Beach** pair lost their first nest to a fox in September and their second caged nest was vandalized by someone attempting to remove the wire cage, the eggs whilst unharmed were unfortunately abandoned. A pair turned up on Rennies Beach with a few older fledglings from earlier in the season. This was probably the Racecourse pair which possibly were also the individuals sighted at Burrill Lake Entrance (worth keeping an eye on this site in future). Similarly, **Wairo Beach** was visited by numerous fledglings and adults from other sites.

A pair of Hooded Plovers returned to **Meroo Beach**

again in August. Local volunteers, Marg and Maggie, monitored the 3-egg nest from late August. Disappointingly two weeks later the eggs were gone, with many fox and raven tracks in the area. After a second unsuccessful attempt, the pair moved to **Termeil Lake Entrance**. This was only discovered after a long walk from Wairo through to Bawley Point in mid January. Their nest here somehow managed to survive the Christmas period next to one of our busiest NPWS camping areas. Thankfully one chick fledged in February.

Down at **Willinga Lake** a pair of Hooded Plovers turned up to nest this season. 'Hoodies' have not nested here for many years so this was a fantastic discovery. Whilst their first 3 chicks were lost to possible fox/raven predation, two of their 3 later chicks were suspected of being lost to a Whistling Kite. Marg and Maggie, two dedicated volunteers witnessed the Whistling Kite on the beach diving down to pick something off the sand. It is likely the kite took the first two chicks before they were flying confidently with the 3rd surviving to fledge.

Further south at **Bullpup Beach** an initial 3-egg nest was located by local volunteers Cecelia and Pat. These were quickly lost however, with raven tracks found leading up to the nest and the five 'Hoodies' later observed chasing a raven. They



Left Rob Perry helping cage a 'hoodie' nest with the 'box style' cage. Right: Hooded Plover Chicks just hatching
Photos Jodie Dunn.

abandoned the site in favour of nesting (3 eggs again) at **Butler's Lagoon on Kioloa Beach**. This survived the roaming foxes and ravens as well as people with dogs (tracks even inside the fenced area) for three weeks, when it was washed away in a king tide and big swell combination in early October. Less than two weeks later the pair re-nested with another 3 eggs. One of the chicks from this nesting attempt was found by Robin, a local volunteer, abandoned and weak early one morning on the beach. She took the chick home and warmed it up in the oven with the door open. The chick perked up and it was taken to Milton Vet where it was ad-

ministered hydration fluids and antibiotics. Local wildlife carer, Mari Gardner, was called upon to care for the chick, however disappointingly the chick later died. Only one of the remaining two chicks survived to fledge in Late December.

Overall the SCR had 9 breeding pairs incubating a total of 24 nests containing 65 eggs from which 30 chicks hatched and an amazing 17 chicks fledged. This is such a fantastic result for the region!

ON THE FSC: This season we must give recognition to the incredible efforts of our Hooded Plover volunteers, who went above and beyond in the name of conservation this season to monitor and survey beaches and nest sites within the region. Biggest thank you to Steve Burrows, Patricia Latimer and the Dempster's without whom much of the following information would not have been possible to obtain.

Overall the season was a phenomenal success for the Hooded Plover, they fledged close to 3 times the annual average number of fledglings. This high level of reproductive success was found across both regions (South and Far South Coast regions).

Within the FSC region a minimum of 14 fledglings were produced from 8 breeding pairs. Many pairs within the FSC region nested comparatively earlier than previous seasons, this was undoubtedly an influencing factor to the high degree of success for the season with many chicks fledged prior to the busy summer months. In addition the early start allowed two pairs (**Wallaga Lake and Nullica River mouth**) to successfully nest twice within the season, fledgling two clutches of chicks each. As mentioned above one pair at **Nullica** were sighted

by the CIT student group in mid September, however they had already been sitting for a few weeks as the nest hatched the following week (22nd September), suggesting they actually started laying in late August. The pair at **Wallaga Lake** however got down to business even earlier with nesting suggested to have commenced in mid August with their chicks hatching out around the 17th of September. Numerous other pairs commenced in September, namely a second **Nullica River** mouth pair (estimated early September), **Wonboyn** (19th September) and Nadgee Lake (estimated late September), which highlights the potential early nesting of Hooded Plovers in NSW.

The generally early Hooded Plover nesting was possibly stimulated by climatic conditions experienced throughout NSW this breeding season. The SC and FSC experienced above average temperatures (21 degrees+) from mid August onwards and this was the 2nd warmest August on record for NSW (Bureau of Meteorology website). The warmer conditions may have been the trigger for nesting to commence for established pairs.



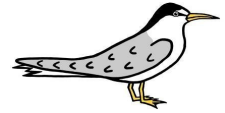
Above (l to r): photos 1 to 3, shift change for Hooded Plover pair at Wonboyn. *MAC photos.*

This season the FSC also had a 5-egg Hooded Plover nest (Jodie's 5 egg nest at Manyana discussed previously), this being found initially in mid September at **North Tura Beach** by the CIT student group and monitored closely by Derek and Glenys Lambert and Steve Burrows. Behaviour exhibited, namely avoidance to incubate the clutch of 2, 3 or 4 eggs, suggested that the female still had more eggs to lay. Indeed, when the clutch reached 5 eggs continuous incubation by both parents commenced. The eggs were lost just prior to hatching (ravens suspected).

This season a Movement Activated Camera (MAC) was used to monitor one of our more remote nests **north of Wonboyn (see above photos)**. This revealed fantastic photographs of the incubation period and confirmed that this nest successfully hatched out all three chicks. The later fate of these chicks was not obtained, this is where we need a roving camera to catch the action as they become mobile and roam the beach! Thank you to Steve Burrows for all his

efforts positioning and monitoring this camera. The hatching of the 3 chicks was an absolute highlight to watch on these amazing cameras.

Lone fledglings were sighted at a few locations this season, with their origins being unknown they were not included in the final fledgling tally for the season. The volunteers & Robyn were surprised to see one such fledgling appear within the Little Tern fenced area at **Mogareka** in early February. This is possibly the same individual sighted at **Wallagoot lake** earlier in the season. Another fledgling, possibly from a late breeding attempt last season, decided to hang around permanently at **Wallaga Lake** this season and keeping the resident nesting pair company. This breeding pair were suspected of killing a pair of Red-capped Plover chicks which hatched from a nearby nest. The two nests, Hooded Plover and Red-capped Plover nests were located very close and hatched within a few days of each other. The latter had undergone repeated attacks during incubation, thereby identifying the Hooded Plover pair as prime suspects in the killings.



LITTLE TERNS

" By late November numerous pairs were busily nesting at three sites"

THE SC REGION: The Little Terns were first sighted in the SCR in late October at Lake Conjola, Lake Wollumboola and Windang. During November the birds settled at these three sites and by late November numerous breeding pairs were busily nesting.

Windang

In preparation for the return of the Little Terns NPWS staff, LIA staff and local volunteers met on site to discuss options for protecting the Little Tern breeding area. The 'bird island' had once again become joined to the mainland due to sand build up. Whilst the channel was not dredged (due to high costs and presence of terns already on island). A 3 strand fence and signage along the rock wall to stop people and dogs accessing the spit and 'bird island' nesting area was installed by LIA staff. WCC also installed permanent interpretive signage during this time

By late November 22 Little Terns were present in the area and of these 6 pairs were making nest scrapes on the spit and 'bird island'. On November 27th two nests of one egg each were observed, but by the next day the one nest was gone. The second nest was and buried by strong winds on December 1st. The next day there were still 12 Little Terns at the site, but later that week the number had dwindled to 3 terns and by the 9th of December all the birds

were gone and no more nesting was observed.

Shoalhaven Heads

The first Little Terns were observed at Shoalhaven Heads on the 9th of December with a nest scrape, the same day that all the terns had departed the Windang site. Probably the pairs left Windang due to the bad weather conditions and moved further south to Shoalhaven Heads. This is the first time that Little Terns have nested at the site since 2003/04 when only one chick fledged from 47 eggs. Prior to this, adult birds were only observed at the site (46 in 2001/02 and present 2000/01) and a few nesting pairs reported before the South Coast Shorebird Recovery Program began in 2000 (Rex Worrell *pers comm*).

Nesting commenced on the 12th of December however fox predation, inundation and unknown loss of eggs caused the site to be abandoned by the 21st of December. More intensive management of this site is planned for next season if the Terns nest here.



Left: South Coast shorebird volunteers, Tom Kaar, Frances Bray, John Rooney & Mike Abramowitz. Photo Jodie Dunn. Right: Adult Little Tern feeding fledgling. Photo John Cornish.

Lake Wollumboola

Further south at Lake Wollumboola, the Little Terns arrived on the 27th of October. Numbers quickly built up over the next few weeks with more than 50 adults present courting and scraping by mid November, disappointingly though no eggs had yet been found. Three ravens were loitering around the main nesting area and the site warden suspected these birds of robbing the new nests, however no evidence could yet be obtained. They had also been suspected of taking the Red-capped Plover eggs all Spring. Finally in late November raven tracks were identified leading up to a robbed RCP nest further supporting suspicions that these ravens were also taking LT eggs.

The first eggs LT eggs were found on the 22nd of November, however sand burial, human egg robbing and big seas caused the loss of these early nests. To prevent raven predation, all new nests were caged while an avian predator shooting program was organised. Disappointingly even these nest cages did not protect the eggs as the Little Terns rolled their eggs to the edge of the cage within reach of the ravens. Sadly adult Little Tern numbers had begun to drop as the parents of predated nests abandoned the site. A quick second round of nesting was also met with raven predation and a further 10 nests (16 nests previously) were lost before these problem Ravens were removed on the 15th of December. However, all eggs were gone by this time and the adult Little Terns had abandoned the site. A Whistling Kite had even gotten in on the act, taking a couple of nests. Overall 41 nests had been located containing only 49 eggs, most nests did not even last long enough to have a second egg laid in them. No chicks hatched and there were

no fledglings for the usually successful Lake Wollumboola site.

Lake Conjola

Down at Lake Conjola the Little Terns arrived in October, though numbers fluctuated from a few pairs to up to fifty adults as birds moved through travelling further south. By early November the number had dropped to around 15 and the first nests were laid. Adult numbers and nests quickly built up over the next few weeks with more than 50 adults and 28 nests by the end of the month. Only a few nests had been lost over this time to inundation and an unknown predator. The massive seas in early December prompted some nests to be moved to higher ground, however 10 nests were still lost.

A second round of laying in mid December saw adult numbers increase to over 100, with 42 active nests as well as at least 26 newly hatched chicks at Lake Conjola. The Lake Conjola colony was doing very well with no fox tracks sighted on the beach at all due to the successful baiting and trapping operations in nearby Narrawallee Creek Nature Reserve. Nests continued to hatch successfully over the busy tourist season and fledgling numbers increased rapidly with a peak of 58 fledglings observed in one afternoon in the middle of January. In total this season at Lake Conjola there were 85 nests laid containing 181 eggs. Most nests hatched successfully with a grand total of 123 chicks resulting in at least 72 fledglings and a new record for the SCR.



Above: Darryl McKay banding a Little Tern Chick. Photo Jessica Rossell.



left: Gary Whitley and Liz Allen caging 'Nest 23'. Above: Robyn Kesby educating a group of young visitors about shorebirds. Photos Jessica Rossell.



Left: Mogareka Little Tern hatchling. Right: Mogareka washed over by huge seas and flooding waters. Photos Jill Whitley & Jessica Rossell.



THE FSC REGION:

This season did not see a large gathering of Little Terns at any one site, instead numerous smaller colonies established along the FSC at Tuross Lake (only 2 nests), Brou Lake, Wallaga Lake, Mogareka and Wallagoot Lake. This contrasted to the 'eggs in one basket' approach for the SC region with a record number of Little Terns breeding at Lake Conjola, after initial failings at Windang and Lake Wollumboola.

Initially, it looked like **Tuross Lake** was going to have a great season as the number of Little Terns grew each week from early November onwards. Up to 60 Little Terns were sighted. Many scrapes were appearing at the closed lake entrance so the protective fencing went up in anticipation of many eggs appearing soon after. The first egg did appear on the 29th of November, however only days later massive seas swept over the entire sandspit washing away the first egg and causing the Little Terns to disperse from the site rather than establish a colony here. Disappointingly, only a very small number remained throughout the season with only a single further nest (unsuccessful) being laid on the shoreline of Coila Lake located on the northern side of Tuross. Big thanks to Bill, George, Peter, Trish, Jennifer, John, Bill and Barbara for all their efforts despite the disappointment.

Approximately 20 adult Little Terns chose to nest at **Brou Lake** this summer. The lake was initially very low with a huge sandspit at the entrance for nesting. Nine nests were progressively laid over December. The adjacent campsite remained relatively quiet until late December and amongst the Christmas campers were members of the regular 'Friends of Brou Lake' group who kept a watchful eye over the birds. In January, 2 fledglings were confirmed taking flight, with another 3 suspected of fledging later though this was not confirmed.

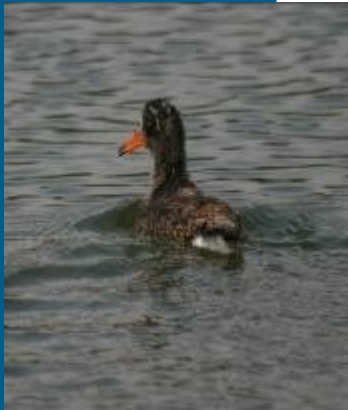
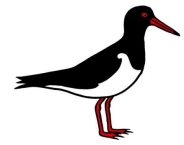
Wallaga Lake was shorebird heaven this season with 3 threatened species breeding along its protected shoreline. The 'Littles' were joined by a

number of Fairy Terns, and both species nested on a sand island behind the closed lake entrance. This was surrounded by water and prevented any fox predation of the colony. Up to 17 Little Tern nests and 6 Fairy Tern nests were laid from the 21st of November onwards. Many runners survived to fledging (up to 21 fledglings sighted).

The **Mogareka** Little Tern volunteers did a fantastic job of monitoring the **Bega Rivermouth and Wallagoot Lake** again this season. Thank you to all the volunteers who were so dedicated this season. The small group of Little Terns at Mogareka waited until the 15th of December to lay the first eggs within the prepared fenced area. The commencement to the season went fairly smoothly, however the end of the season saw record rainfall and king tides threaten the colony and repeated sandbagging was needed to save many nests. One nest in particular was laid in a vulnerable position close to the sea ward side of the sandspit, this nest was progressively moved 11 times by Gary Whitley to prevent it being swept away. It was finally sandbagged and incredibly the single egg eventually hatched out even after all the commotion caused by the opening of the river entrance. An incredible effort by Gary and the volunteers to successfully fledge this little chick! In the end 18 chicks successfully fledged at Mogareka this season, including this last little guy!

Water levels in **Wallagoot Lake** were extremely low at the commencement of the shorebird breeding season. As such, the shoreline was inundated with large groups of shorebirds feeding on the exposed molluscs and invertebrates. Gatherings of up to 40 Pied Oystercatchers were a regular feature of the shoreline. Whilst Wallagoot Lake did host a number of breeding Little Terns this season, the majority of nesting was undertaken by their close relative the Fairy Tern. The Fairy Terns nested very early (early November) in comparison to the Little Terns (early December). Unfortunately both the Fairy and Little Tern eggs were repeatedly predated, possibly by goannas, and they all eventually dispersed by mid December. However, two Fairy Tern chicks must have hatched and survived to fledging as they were later sighted at Mogareka.

PIED OYSTERCATCHERS



Far left: Pied Oystercatcher chick swimming. Centre: Libby Shields & Clint Deddon signposting Pied Nest. Above: Pied Pair near dune nest. Photos Jodie Dunn.

The conservation status of the Pied Oystercatcher in NSW has recently been upgraded from threatened to endangered – 'The scientific committee established by the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 (TSCA) has recently determined that the Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus longirostris* is now listed as an endangered species under schedule 1, part 1 of the Act'.

THE SC REGION:

On the South Coast this season eleven breeding pairs and their nests were monitored.

Up at **Shoalhaven Heads** two pairs of Pied Oystercatchers returned to the area this season, however nests were found for only one of these pairs. The first nest of two eggs was discovered in mid September, by an SCC contractor working and was quickly fenced off. However, strong winds characteristic of the site covered the eggs and although latter being 'dug out' by the parents the eggs eventually went missing. Two weeks later there was another two egg nest, but also a fox present in the area. No fox control could be undertaken so the small electric fence was installed around the nest. Less than a week later the eggs were taken and there were fox tracks inside the fence right up to the nest scrape. The Pied's nested a third time with another two eggs in early November. The electric fence was

moved to encircle this new nest but again the nest only lasted a few days and was taken. There were no tracks to reveal the predator due to windblown sand, however the electric fence was operational.

Further south at **Lake Conjola**, four pairs were found nesting on the islands and two pairs at the entrance. Of the island pairs only the Caravan Park Island pair were successful in fledging a chick. Whilst the Post Office Island pair endured what appeared to be an attack on the nest with feathers surrounding an empty nest scrape and although losing the eggs at least the adults appeared to escape alive. The Berringer Lake (arm of Lake Conjola) pair lost their 3-egg nest to inundation. At the lake entrance two pairs nested very close together (20m) in October, both with 2 eggs. Both similarly lost an egg and hatched a chick. However, whilst the higher dune pair were able to hide their chick up in the dune vegetation, the lower northern pair had just hatched out their tiny chick right along the edge of the protective fence by the lakes edge. Disappointingly this chick was found dead only a few days later, probably due to the disturbance of people walking around the lake edge and fence, resulting in the parents not feeding or brooding the little one. The dune chick went on to fledge in mid December.

"Non-breeding
Pied
Oystercatchers
formed
conspicuous
groups of up to 40
individuals"

Two pairs thankfully had a perfect breeding season, namely the pair at **Narrawallee Inlet** and at **Durras lake entrance**. If only there were more stories like these two! The first afore mentioned pair chose to nest just outside the Hooded Plover fence in late September. The fence was extended to protect their nest and the chicks hatched out four weeks later. The area was under extensive fox control and quite remote, as it is part of Narrawallee Creek Nature Reserve. The only threats are people bringing their dogs across the inlet from town and the odd trail biker on the beach. Both chicks successfully fledged in late November. The second pair at Durras Lake entrance had a 3-egg nest on the sand flats, despite usually nesting up on the southern bank. Evidence of fox inhabitation in the area prompted soft jaw trapping and when the three eggs disappeared the worst was assumed. But a few weeks later the pair were sighted with three chicks, and it was realised that the nest hatched and was not taken by the fox. The entire clutch went on to fledge in early November. Meanwhile a two egg nest was discovered further up the lake on the NW side in late October. However the fate of this nest is unknown.

At **Burrill Lake** this season only one breeding pair was located at the lake entrance. The pair behind the Bottle Shop were suspected of breeding however no eggs or chicks were observed. The pair down at the entrance were found with two chicks on the sand island in early October, however later in the month one of these chicks was found dead from unknown causes. The second chick went on to fledge in November.

At **Batemans Bay Marina** the usual pair began nesting in late September on the rock wall alongside the residential area and sand flats. The only threat here is people with off leash dogs, so a few signs were installed but the nest location kept secret (due to vandalising in previous years). A couple of weeks later only two eggs remained, so the third

must have either rolled out or been kicked out. In late October the nest hatched, however sadly one of the chicks got caught between the rocks and appears to have drowned in the rising tide. The second chick went on to fledge in early December.

In total in the SCR eleven pairs incubated sixteen nests containing 28 eggs and hatching fifteen chicks. Nine chicks went on to fledge. Another pair had two eggs however their fate is unknown and a further two pairs are suspected of nesting.

THE FSC REGION:

Whilst we did see large gatherings of Pied Oystercatchers (mainly non-breeding individuals) along the FSC this season they did suffer reduced breeding success.

Non-breeding Pied Oystercatchers formed conspicuous groups of up to 40 individuals at locations such as **Wallagoot, Wallaga and Brou Lakes** and the total number of individuals within the FSC region conservatively estimated at 168 (breeding and non-breeding adults), of which 36 (21%) were breeders. The very low lake levels at these sites provided a veritable feast along the shorelines and with previous years most estuaries and rivers were home to at least one breeding pair. Whilst, many Pied Oystercatchers were monitored this season only a handful of notable pairs are presented here for brevity.

Conversely, this season high lake levels within **Tuross Lake** prevented many pairs from nesting in their usual locations, including 'Rocky Island' a tiny (approximately 9 sq m) rocky outcrop on the western edge of the lake. This location usually hatches at least one chick, however only the entrance sandspit and its associated sand flats were suitable Pied nesting habitat this season. Unfortunately, no fledglings were confirmed for Tuross this season, or for Wagonga Inlet, Narooma, both usually producing one or two fledglings from the many pairs that inhabit these areas.



Left: John Perkins helping out. Centre: The hidden 'dune' Pied Nest. Right: Surveying SC estuaries with the boat. Photos Jodie Dunn.

Wallaga Lake was home to at least 4 breeding pair of Pied Oystercatcher's with many more non-breeding individuals moving into the lake as the summer progressed. Of the four pair only one was confirmed as fledging 2 chicks, this pair breeding on the large sand island near the entrance that also supported breeding Little Terns and Hooded Plovers. This island was such an asset for breeding shorebirds this season.

The Pied's at **Murrah River entrance** were again monitored by Sue and Carl Swenson this season, though despite caging the nests, which are notoriously predated by foxes, no successful fledglings eventuated.

Bithry Inlet was home again to a charismatic pair of Pied's who incubate their eggs, usually in a very prominent location on this beautiful, popular inlet. Their success in previous seasons was again matched this season with one fledgling taking flight amongst the groups of summer beachgoers. Further south at Tathra, one pair again nested within the Little Tern fenced area at **Mogareka**. The pair of eggs however disappeared and no later searching revealed any sign of chicks that possibly hatched.

Amazingly, cliff nesting is not just for Peregrine Falcons, as Steve Burrows found a high nesting pair of Pied Oystercatchers up on a rocky ledge above **Wonboyn**. The pair apparently had quite a

nice 'birds-eye view' and happily incubated their clutch to hatching. However, no signs of the hatched chicks were later reported.

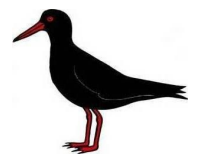
This season six fledglings were confirmed for the FSC region, which is an underestimate as many nests hatched but follow up monitoring was not undertaken due to logistical or time constraints.



Pied Oystercatcher Pair at Wallaga Lake amongst the many Black Swans present this season. *Photo Stuart Cohen.*

'Seven off-shore islands on the southern coastline of NSW were surveyed for Sooty Oystercatchers'

SOOTY OYSTERCATCHERS



Sooty Oystercatchers well camouflaged on a rock platform. *Photo Jodie Dunn*

This season all 7 offshore islands on the southern coastline of NSW were surveyed for nesting Sooty Oystercatchers. Most islands were surveyed once early in the season and if time permitted further visits were made to determine breeding success and fledgling numbers.

During November and January thorough surveys were undertaken of all seven offshore islands – Brush, Belowla, Grasshopper, Wasp, the Tollgates (both islands), Snapper and Montague. Brush and Belowla Island were also visited earlier (late October) in an effort to gain further insight into the problems with breeding success on these islands.

Two Sooty Oystercatcher nests were also found at Island Beach and another two were reported at Honeymoon Bay on Beecroft Peninsula and Green Island, Jervis Bay.

Brush Island

An initial pre-breeding survey was undertaken on the 20th of October. Phil Craven (& accompanying seabird researchers) reported only a couple of nests but more than 20 breeding pairs establishing territories. A second more thorough survey was undertaken on the 11th of November. This visit revealed 24 pairs and 4 individual Sooty Oystercatchers with eleven active nests (19 eggs) and two predated nests (2 broken eggs). Predators were many including, 10 ravens, a pair of peregrine falcons, and a sea eagle. A motion sensor camera was placed on a nest in the SE corner to trial their application for capturing nest predators.

During the third visit on the 24th of November only the southern half of the island was surveyed due to time restrictions. This section of the island now had 14 Sooty Oystercatcher pairs (9 nests, 14 eggs) and 2 individuals, having increased from 10 pairs (7 nests, 12 eggs) and 2 individuals from last visit. Only one nest was missing, this appeared to have been squashed by passing Little Penguins. A further four nests had been laid on the SW and SE corners of the island. In addition, one 2-egg nest had hatched. A further 3 cameras were placed on separate nests.

The last visit to Brush Island on the 14th January found that most of the breeding activity was finished. The results were rather disappointing with

one 1-egg nest left to hatch, only one fledgling sighted and five pairs displaying behaviour indicating chicks present. A final visit in early February would have been desirable to determine the fate of the chicks. Also disappointingly, two motion sensor cameras had disappeared, with one definitely stolen/vandalised and the second may have been washed away in big south swells. The final camera lasted the 6 weeks on the island, capturing images of the parents getting on and off the nest but not the eggs. The last frame was of a Raven standing over the nest, then no more activity or triggering of the motion sensor, indicating, as suspected, that Ravens are predated nests on Brush Island and may be the reason for such low breeding success.

Belowla Island

Like Brush, Belowla Island was subject to a pre-season survey (10th of October by Mike Jarman and seabird researchers). The small island was very busy with eighteen pairs of Sooty Oystercatchers (5 active nests, 6 eggs). Nesting activity increased by the 11th of November with most pairs incubating eggs (12 pairs, 5 unmated individuals, 11 nests, 16 eggs) and some hatching by the 24th of November (8 nests, 4 likely to have hatched though one looked predated with fresh egg albumen in the scrape). The final visit on the 14th of January found 16 pairs on the island, however their distribution was different to previous visits with pairs spread more evenly and even occupying the Western side, which during peak breeding was mostly empty. One pair on the northern end had a late two-egg nest, while at least three noisy pairs had chicks and another three pairs had a fledgling each.



Above: Beautiful Tollgate Islands. Right: Sooty Oystercatcher Adult. Photos Amy Harris.

Grasshopper, Wasp, Tollgates and Snapper Islands

Of these four islands Grasshopper was the only to receive an early season visit (29th October), this and 3 other islands were subsequently surveyed on the 24/25th November 2009 and 21st of January 2010. In the interests of brevity the highlights are given below:

- Grasshopper hosted 10 breeding pair, 15 eggs, 2 confirmed fledglings, two nests were predated by unknown avian predator.
- Wasp Island had 12 breeding pair, 2 fledglings confirmed, some possible egg predation evident.
- The soaring cliffs of the Tollgate Islands doesn't prevent Sooty Oystercatcher breeding, 8 breeding pair were recorded. 2 confirmed fledglings.
- Snapper Island, although having 2 pair sighted initially with chicks the outcomes of these nests remain unknown.

Generally for 'Sooties' this season peak laying appeared to be mid/late October, peak hatching mid/late November and chicks still to fledge in late January.

Montague Island

Montague Island was surveyed on two occasions in November and December 2009, unfortunately later surveys in January/February were not possible this season.

The southern island was surveyed by foot on all occasions and 7 pairs were identified as defending territory. The sites chosen were known nest sites from previous season, though as no nesting birds were banded/colourflagged it is unknown if these were previous pairs exhibiting site fidelity.

Despite the regularity of boat movements (potential for up to 6 commercial vessel movements per day)

at the main jetty 2 Sooty Oystercatcher pair chose to establish territory of either side of this busy site. The southern most pair, right on the tip of the island were the only pair to be sighted with chicks this season (2 confirmed), but it is suspected that at least one other nest had hatched out chicks due to the intense guarding behaviour by one pair at a south-eastern site.

As follow-up surveying was not possible it is unknown how many fledglings were produced this season. The north island was surveyed from the NPWS boat and only one pair were sighted at the northern end of the island, no nesting behaviour was observed at the time of surveying.

Mainland Nests

In addition to these regular offshore island nests, four nests were found on the mainland of the SCR. These occurred from mid October onwards at Honymoon Bay (Jervis Bay), Bhindijine Beach (Jervis Bay) and near 'singing stones' at Island Beach, but the fate of these nests remains unknown. In contrast to the usual 'rocky' nest sites one pair of 'Sooties' nested within the sandunes this season at Island Beach (sth end of Pretty Beach), ravens are suspected of predated this nest.

In total (SC + FSC REGIONS) there were 75 breeding pairs of Sooty Oystercatcher, 71 on the islands and 4 on the mainland as well as nine pairs that were suspected of nesting (i.e. held territory but no eggs sighted). There were also another 5 non-breeding birds observed. There were 49 nests containing 69-72 eggs and at least 33 chicks as well as a minimum of 8 fledglings. The extra visits and motion sensor cameras gave extra insight into the nesting of the Sooty Oystercatcher and attempts will be made next season to improve our knowledge of this species through more island visits.



Left: Sooty Oystercatcher pair. Centre: Sooty Oystercatcher eggs. Right: Well camouflaged Sooty chick. Photos Jodie Dunn.

Summary Statistics for Each Species

Table 1 (below): Number of Hooded Plover eggs, chicks, fledglings and nests for each region on the South Coast during the 2009/2010 breeding season

	BREEDING PAIR	NON-BREEDING ADULTS	NESTS	EGGS	CHICKS	FLEDGLINGS
SC REGION	9	8	24	65	30	17
FSC REGION	8	6	11	31	23	14
TOTALS	17	14	35	96	53	31

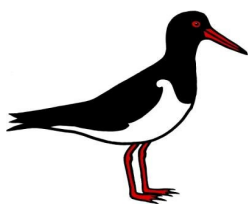


Table 2 (below): Number of eggs, chicks, fledglings and nests for each Little Tern colony on the South Coast during the 2009/2010 breeding season

COLONY	EGGS	CHICKS	FLEDGLINGS	NESTS
WINDANG	2	0	0	2
SHOALHAVEN HEADS	7	0	0	5
LAKE WOLLUMBOOLA	49	0	0	41
LAKE CONJOLA	181	123	72	85
TUROSS/COILA LAKES	2	0	0	2
BROU LAKE	17	8	2	9
WALLAGA LAKE	50	31	21	17
MOGAREKA	47	20	18	25
WALLAGOOT LAKE	2	0	0	2
TOTALS	357	182	113	188

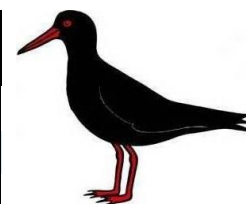


Table 3 (below): Number of Pied Oystercatcher breeding pairs, eggs, chicks and fledglings along the South Coast Region of NSW during the 2009/2010 season.

	BREEDING PAIRS	NON BREEDING ADULTS	EGGS	CHICKS	FLEDGLINGS
SC REGION	11	4	29	15	9
FSC REGION	18	136	40	11	6
TOTALS	29	140	69	26	15

Table 4 (below): Number of Sooty Oystercatcher breeding pairs, eggs, chicks and fledglings along the South Coast Region of NSW during the 2009/2010 season.

	BREEDING PAIRS	NON BREEDING ADULTS	EGGS	CHICKS	FLEDGLINGS
SC REGION	69	21	67	31	8
FSC REGION	7	2	2	2	?
TOTALS	75	23	69 MIN	33 MIN	8 sighted

THANK YOU

THANK YOU TO ALL THE WONDERFUL VOLUNTEERS WHO HELPED TO PROTECT AND MONITOR OUR THREATENED SHOREBIRDS THIS SEASON!

Here are just a few of you!



TOP: MOGAREKA VOLUNTEERS. *Photo Jim Kelly.* ABOVE: SOUTH COAST VOLUNTEER GROUP. *Photo Jodie Dunn.*

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