

# SHOREBIRD RECOVERY NEWSLETTER FAR SOUTH COAST

*Sharing the shoreline*

April 2012



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## 2011/12 Season

### *This Season in Shorebirds*

Wow – another great season for the Shorebird Recovery Program on the NSW Far South Coast with some wonderful results. Firstly, we must say a BIG THANKYOU to all the volunteers for their continued enthusiasm, passion and involvement with the program. We certainly couldn't achieve these results without you.

Staffing for the program became a joint effort this season. Amy Harris took time off to look after her 2 beautiful children and it took 3 people to replace her!! Lucy Gibson (Narooma Office), Robyn Kesby (Merimbula Office) and Jo Lane (Narooma Office) did their best to keep the program alive.

Robyn had some happy Hoodie stories down south with a total of 8 fledglings this year. Lucy and Amy had some pleasing Pied Oystercatcher results and Jo was thrilled with the success of the Little Terns this year. (Tuross had the largest breeding colony in the state!)

We also recruited some new volunteers, presented our long term volunteers with 10 year and 5 year pins, and put up some new permanent Hooded Plover signs in Ben Boyd National Park.

Besides good management, the birds also had some good luck! We were extremely lucky with the weather this season, especially the very high tides (1.97m) due on Boxing Day. Thankfully, there was no swell associated with this king tide so nests were not threatened.

Foxes were scarce this season too as the baiting program continued both on and off park. There were limited losses to avian predators too.

Once again, the Shorebird Recovery Program is a combined effort with many people and agencies involved in contributing to its' success. Thankyou to local council rangers (Bega Valley & Eurobodalla) for assistance with patrolling Dogs on Beaches, Land and Property Management Authority for funds for fox control on Crown Lands, Livestock Health & Pest Authority for fox control and NPWS and Marine Parks field staff for reporting sightings in the field. Ongoing funding from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Office of Environment and Heritage) underpins the program.

Once again, thankyou to all our wonderful volunteers - your involvement is essential and greatly appreciated.



Off-leash dog, Mogareeka Photo: Liz Allen

## Hooded Plovers



The final tally for the Critically Endangered Hooded Plovers on the Far South Coast this season was 8 fledglings (compared with 9 last year) from 7 breeding pairs. The season was progressing quite slowly and in fact a bit disappointing as we only had 5 confirmed fledglings. However, late in the season, (mid March) we had a call from a member of the public who had seen a family of Hoodies with 3 near fledglings at **Middle Beach, Mimosa Rocks NP**. This sighting was also confirmed 2 days later by Ross Olsen (Livestock Health & Pest Authority) but when Jo Lane went down to see the next day only 3 adults were sighted. Thankfully, John (who initially sighted the Hoodies) had taken video footage and we were able to confirm 3 fledglings which was a great way to finish to the season taking the tally to 8 fledglings.

The figure of 7 breeding pairs is similar to previous years (2010/2011 = 7 BP, 2009/2010 = 8 BP, 2008/2009 = 7 BP, 2007/2008 = 8 BP) and doesn't indicate any significant short term change in the breeding population.

The total maximum adult number this season was 26. This is slightly lower than the range of adult numbers sighted within recent years (range 28 to 40 adults) but reduced surveying of some areas this season, such as Mimosa Rocks NP is the most likely cause of this slight reduction.

Overall for the FSCR (Batemans Bay to the Vic border) a total of 7 breeding pairs incubated 11 nests containing 31 eggs, hatching 13 chicks and a definite 8 fledglings. In addition to these breeding adults, another 11 individuals were sighted within the region, bringing the total up to 25 adult "Hoodies" for the FSCR.

Key breeding sites were similar to last season with the southern most sites being the most successful. Previous seasons have seen a southern contraction to the distribution of Hooded Plovers in the FSCR, with many sites in the north of this region which were previously highly successful sites such as **Bogola Head** and **Tilba Lake** entrance now abandoned or only intermittently visited by non breeding adults or pairs. The most northern pair this season bred in **Mimosa Rocks NP**. This is hundreds of kilometres south of the next northern breeding site in **Murramarrang NP** north of **Batemans Bay**. The reason for the southern contraction in the region remains unclear with no Hooded Plover pairs breeding between **Batemans Bay** and **Bermagui** this season although a pair had an unsuccessful nest attempt at **Aragunnu** early in the season.

This pair was seen consistently at **Aragunnu** over a period of 3 weeks during summer but no nesting was observed. A pair was also seen at **Bengunnu** in December but once again no nest.



Tura beach Hoodie Family *Photo: Liz Allen*

The northern end of **Short Point Beach** at **Tura** was an intensive site for breeding this season with two clutches of eggs laid (6 eggs). The first 3 eggs all hatched 2 chicks fledged, but unfortunately the second clutch was taken either by a fox or kestrel at the time they were due to hatch. This pair may be the ones which usually breed within Bournda NP and have had a similar success rate (2 chicks fledged 2010/11 season) after multiple attempts. Thanks to the many local

residents who monitored the pair this season. It is an area intensively used for dog walking and beach access, so the signs and fencing were essential along with a 'quiet word' to some beach users!

Further south, **Twofold Bay – Eden** again supported two pairs of Hoodies that fledged 2 chicks. In previous seasons minimal nest protection has been needed despite the presence of people and dogs. However this season a nest narrowly escaped accidental trampling by horses so signs and fences were essential. Twofold Bay Beach Resort also handed out brochures and stickers to raise awareness with beach users. This season 4 nesting attempts by 2 pairs yielded 10 eggs from which 4 chicks were sighted and 2 fledged. Most of the egg losses in Twofold bay this season were to inundation by large ocean swells.

Sadly the two Hoodie pairs in **Ben Boyd NP** were unsuccessful this season. No eggs were located but several well-used nest scrapes were found at Terrace Beach. This area has had increased lace monitor activity over the past few years and these are the suspected culprits.

**Wonboyn and the northern part of Nadgee NR** benefited from the involvement of two new volunteers, Kerri-Lee and Paul, this year. **Greenglades** is notoriously unsuccessful and was again this season and despite repeated nesting attempts (2 attempts, 6 eggs) all eggs were lost. **Disaster Bay Beach** had more success with 1 chick fledged. The single pair at the site hatched all 3 eggs, though 2 chicks were lost to unknown causes prior to the third fledging. The wilderness area of **Nadgee Nature Reserve** is only intermittently surveyed due to its remoteness. Lyn Evans found a pair nesting at **Nadgee Lake** with 3 eggs early in the season, however their fate remains unknown. Only 2 adult pairs were located in March by Grainne and Glenn from BirdLife Australia.

At **Wallaga Lake** no Hooded Plovers chose to nest in the area, although a pair was seen there on regular occasions. Perhaps a pair seen at **Tilba Lake** was in fact the same pair, however no nesting was recorded at Tilba Lake or Tilba Beach. This area was regularly monitored by Lucy Gibson, Patricia Latimer and Julie Morgan throughout the season.

The pair at **Middle Beach** was intermittently monitored this season but the resident pair showed no breeding activity. However, as mentioned earlier a Hooded Plover pair with up to 3 chicks near fledging age appeared late in the season. It is suspected that this pair nested somewhere between **Nelsons Lagoon** and **Middle Beach**, bringing the nearly fledged chicks to Middle Beach to forage at the lagoon entrance.

Pattie Parker from Tuross spotted a young Hooded Plover on **South Tuross Beach** in December. It had a metal band which Jodie Dunn at Ulladulla was able to confirm was a recently fledged chick, most likely from **Kioloa**. It is great to see some Hoodies in this part of the world – it would be wonderful if they returned.

Some end of season fox control on Crown Lands at Kiah and Wallaga may hopefully result in a more successful season next year.



Juvenile Hooded Plover, South Tuross Beach  
*Photo: Pattie Parker*



## Little Terns

2011/2012 appears to be one of the best seasons on record for Little Terns on the far south coast.

It seems that concentrated breeding at a reduced number of colonies has proved a favourable tactic this season. Only two breeding colonies were established along the southern coastline of NSW (Tuross Lake and Mogareka/Bega River Mouth). For the first time in a very long time there were no significant Little Tern colonies in the South Coast Region (north of Batemans Bay). Only one pair successfully nested at **Burrill Lake** this year and fledged 2 chicks from 2 eggs laid.

Of the two colonies, the larger was located at Tuross Lake with a record number of breeding adults present (**114** breeding pairs). Mogareka/Bega River Mouth had **63** breeding pairs creating a total of **177** Little Tern breeding pairs along the southern NSW coast this season.

Fairy Terns nested amongst Little Terns at both locations this season. This species has suffered considerable declines in the southern states of Australia and is listed as endangered within Victoria.



Little Tern chick *Photo: John Cornish*

## Tuross Sandspit

Little Terns began to arrive at Tuross in early November and Pattie Parker saw 12 on November 5<sup>th</sup>. By December 9<sup>th</sup> there were more than 200 Little Terns and 20 Fairy Terns. Shorebird volunteers initially fenced off an area and erected warning signs but quickly realised that this would have to be extended to accommodate the large number of birds that were nesting - more than twice the size of previous years. The final nesting area covered most of the sandspit at the southern end of **Potato Point Beach**. The area was mapped by Rachel McInnes with GPS and covered approximately 30,000 square meters or 3 hectares!

Within this site, there was total of **124** nests and **276** eggs were counted. Of these **10** nests (conservatively) were Fairy Tern nests and **12** Fairy Tern fledglings were definitely sighted. That gives a total of **120** Little Tern Fledglings and breeding success rate for the colony of **47.8%**. The average number of eggs/nest was **2.2**.



Little Tern fledglings Tuross *Photo: Pattie Parker*

This is a fantastic result and well deserved for the many dedicated volunteers in this area. Last season, 2010/11, storms and high tides washed away many of the nests. There were only 13 nests, 22 eggs and 14 fledglings (average 1.6 eggs/nest)

This year, only 2 nests were lost to inundation. Several of the nests were sandbagged before Christmas to protect from the predicted high tides of 1.97m on Boxing

Day. Thankfully, there was no swell associated with these large tides and no nests were lost during this time. The other big factor protecting the colony this season was the fact that Tuross Lake entrance remained open, meaning that foot traffic from Tuross wasn't possible. People staying at the caravan Park at Potato Point generally swam in front of the caravan park, with only a few keen fisherfolk and some keen birdwatchers making the 10 minute trek to the colony. The only other access to the site was by boat.

Reduced human disturbance, increased signage, fox baiting and no dogs greatly increased the success of the colony. Also, as the colony was so large they were able to deter avian predators such as gulls and ravens. However, it is thought that some of the eggs from the last nests were lost to ravens sighted in the area.

The first fledglings of the season were counted on January 3<sup>rd</sup> when 28 were spotted. On the 10<sup>th</sup> January, 62 fledglings were seen and the largest count of the season - 109 fledglings was counted on January 16<sup>th</sup> by Pattie Parker. By Feb 5<sup>th</sup>, it was eerily quiet in the colony with only 2 fledglings remaining. The season officially ended on Valentines Day 14<sup>th</sup> February when the fence came down.

## Mogareka

Little Terns began arriving at Mogareka in mid November, and the "people" fence was erected November 22<sup>nd</sup> to limit visitor access. Assistance by NPWS field staff and Bega Valley Council rangers is greatly appreciated.

Several non-breeding Little Tern adults were also sighted amongst the colony. Numbers grew steadily over the season and by 22<sup>nd</sup> December there were over 100 adults and 53 nests. A fox entered the site in early December and it is suspected that 10 eggs were lost as a result. Fox traps

were buried within the colony and baits laid in the adjacent area. The site was closely monitored by Ron Mudie and the fox did not reappear. Thanks Ron for your hard work!



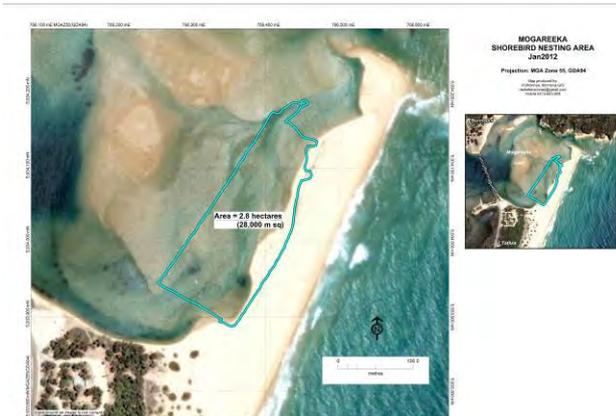
Ron Mudie covers fox trap *Photo: Robyn Kesby*

There were a total of **71** nests at the site and **142** eggs (average 2 eggs/nest). Of these **8** were Fairy Tern nests and **5** Fairy Tern fledglings were definitely sighted. Little Tern fledgling numbers were **51** giving the colony a breeding success of **39%**.

This result is comparable to last season (2010/11) when a total of **45 breeding pairs laid 73 nests, containing 167 eggs and fledging approx 46 chicks (giving a breeding success of 27.5%)**

The last of the 71 nests was laid 19<sup>th</sup> January and the final fledglings (totalling 56) had left the site by the 12<sup>th</sup> February.

The sand spit had built up over the winter and the terns took up a lot of this area. Volunteer wardens set up a roster system to walk the perimeter of the colony throughout the season. Mogareka is an easily accessible site and receives a lot more visitors (and potential disturbance) than South Tuross. Volunteers were available to educate the public about the Little Tern colony and highlight the importance of keeping dogs away.



Map showing outline of Little Tern nesting area at Mogareeka. *Credit: Rachel McInnes*

There were a few encounters with dogs reported, but most visitors were cooperative when it was pointed out that dogs were not allowed near the colony.

On a less positive note - there was unfortunately two incidents of vandalism of signs and some of the rope from the fence removed. Also, some people entered the colony, collected and dragged firewood through the colony and had a fire (outside the fence).

As with the colony at Tuross, factors contributing to the success of this site, include favourable weather conditions, fox control efforts, the sheer size of the colony deterring avian predators and the many hours of volunteer efforts in erecting fences, signs and talking with the public.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> January Darryl McKay came from Sydney and banded Little Tern and Fairy Tern chicks. Six Little Terns were metal banded and 5 Fairy Terns were flagged (light green) at Mogareeka and later that day 2 Fairy Tern chicks were flagged (yellow) at Tuross.



Fairy Tern fledgling with yellow band  
*Photo: John Cornish*

Something worth noting from this season is this fantastic photo from David Gallan It is a Little Tern fledgling feeding on a prawn. It has been previously thought that they only fed on fish. Thanks Dave for the great photo!



Little Tern fledgling with prawn  
*Photo: David Gallan*

Overall results for Far South Coast for Little Terns (not including Fairy Terns) are very pleasing. This season **177 nests produced 380 eggs and 171 fledglings, giving a breeding success of 45% compared to last season when there was 234 nests containing 492 eggs and 180 fledglings giving a breeding success of 36.5%**



## Pied Oystercatchers

The endangered status of the Pied Oystercatcher can be a little deceptive at times with 112 adults sighted throughout the season on the Far South Coast. However, of these adults, only **26** breeding pairs were found, laying **58** eggs, hatching **28** chicks and **22** fledglings. This season was comparably more successful than the last 17 fledglings in 2010/11) which is encouraging.

This season, many estuaries and lake entrances supported large groups of adults with up to 18 sighted in Tuross Lake, Wagonga Inlet (9 individuals), Wallaga lake (10 individuals), 11 Wonboyn Lake presumably non-breeding individuals.

Again this season **Tuross Lake** was a hot spot for Pied Oystercatcher breeding with 8 fledglings confirmed from this one lake. In recent years this site has been a favoured breeding site for multiple pairs.



Pied Oystercatcher chicks at Tuross  
*Photo: John Cornish*

The pair at **Mogareka** pair did really well fledging 3 chicks on their second attempt.

A newly discovered site at **Merimbula Lake** near popular **Spencer Park** was also highly successful with 2 chicks fledged. Thanks to Ranger Craig Dickmann for reporting these.

**Wagonga Inlet** had a successful breeding pair this season at Mill Bay Island. 2 chicks were observed throughout December but only one survived to fledge.

Lucy Gibson and Patricia Latimer were very pleased to report 1 fledgling at **Tilba Lake**. On the 11<sup>th</sup> January it was seen flying with its parents.



Mogareka Pied Oystercatcher family  
*Photo: Liz Allen*

Ross Olsen found a fledgling at Aragunnu in Mimosa Rocks NP. Robyn Kesby confirmed 2 fledglings from the mouth of **Curalo Lake** in Eden, and 2 at **Terrace Beach** in Ben Boyd NP. Amy Harris reported a fledgling at **Congo Creek** and another at **Moruya River** west of the bridge.



Banded Pied Oystercatcher *Photo: Liz Allen*  
*Liz Allen photographed this banded Pied Oystercatcher at Mogareka reported it to the ABBBS. They replied that the bird was banded in Bundjalung National Park 17/11/2006, and has mostly been sighted in and around North Stradbroke Island Qld until November 2010. Most banded birds seen here come from Victoria!*



## Sooty Oystercatchers

This season, 2 sites on the far south coast were surveyed and found to have breeding Sooty Oystercatchers. Montague Island was surveyed by Lucy Gibson and Patricia Latimer on the 21<sup>st</sup> December 2011 and five breeding pairs were found. Due to the size and shape of the island, and the fact that the birds are quite mobile it is difficult to get an accurate count but conservatively up to 13 adults were sighted. From the five breeding pairs 7 fledglings were seen.

This season Doug Reckord confirmed a fledgling from Bournda Island which is attached to the mainland in Bournda National Park. The last two seasons this site has been monitored for nesting Sooty Oystercatchers and with at least one chick fledged each season, this is a fantastic development! The nest was found in late September with 2 eggs. Only one survived to fledgling age but this is a promising result and we will continue to monitor Bournda Island each season.



Sooty Pair Bournda Island *Photo:Liz Allen*



Sooty Oystercatcher with chick at Bournda Island. *Photo:Liz Allen*

A kestrel checks out the Hoodie nest at Tura. and Gull on Bournda Island *Photos Liz Allen*



And ....

Don't forget to check the website at [www.southcoastshorebirds.com.au](http://www.southcoastshorebirds.com.au) from time to time. The video 'Saving Our Shorebirds' which was produced to celebrate 10 years of the Shorebird Recovery Program is on at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixMppzLO24I> This is useful for people wanting to know more about what the program involves. News from Jodie Dunn about South Coast breeding sites will be sent out as soon as it arrives.

If you hear of anyone interested in volunteering, or need to change your contact details please contact Robyn at [robyn.kesby@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:robyn.kesby@environment.nsw.gov.au) or phone 02 6495 5021.

August is the time when Hooded Plovers are starting to pair up for nesting and the season kicks off again soon after that.

We look forward to your involvement again next season and wish you all good health and happiness until then!

from Jo Lane, Lucy Gibson, Robyn Kesby and Amy Harris