

## HOODED PLOVERS – WASHPOOL AND ONKAPARINGA BEACHES

### ***Summary Progress report: 01/02/21 (Full article)***

Hooded Plovers have returned to the Washpool to nest for the second season running on Sellicks Beach, finding a good vantage position for the nest on the top of the pebble banks North of the outflow stream at the bottom of Button Road. They have had 3 nestings so far this season: the first 2 failed due to Ravens taking the eggs, but 3 chicks hatched from the 3<sup>rd</sup> nest on New Year's Day with assistance of volunteers and rangers who cleared the beach in front of the enclosure to allow them enough space to hatch their eggs without the disturbance of beach goers. This was the start of an intensive monitoring phase by volunteers to alert beach goers of the presence of newly hatched chicks on the beach and to direct passing traffic around the chicks when they were taken down to the water's edge to feed. These are beach nesting birds and they spend their entire lives along our coastlines as they have for thousands of years. Not many people realise that the chicks have to feed themselves from when they hatch out of the eggs under the constant attention of the parents of course but this means they need to forage where food supplies are plentiful i.e. along the water's edge and high tide lines and in the tidal pools that form after the tide goes out. This meant that the chicks were constantly running the gauntlet of passing traffic. The great majority of beach goers and local residents were very supportive and complied with the requests of the volunteers and it is largely to their credit and the ongoing support of the volunteers that the chicks survived as long as they did.

However we lost the first chick after 3 days – all 3 chicks were accounted for at 7:30 p.m. at the end of Day 3 but only 2 were found the next morning. Some disturbance overnight may have contributed to its loss but it could also have been lost to other unrelated causes. Seagulls were a constant threat and failed in their first attempt to take a chick as witnessed by a number of volunteers who saw a seagull pick the chick off the beach and drop it when attacked in the air by both of the adult Hooded Plovers – fortunately the volunteers were close by and could chase off the following throng of seagulls. After a particularly busy day during which the 2 remaining chicks were constantly threatened by seagulls, the adults took the chicks up the washpool stream, initially to the relief of the volunteers but this put them into a different danger when the chicks both got stuck in the algal mats floating on the stagnant surface of the washpool channel. Both chicks were rescued that day by volunteers who waded into the channel and picked the chicks out of the algal mats and returned them to the adults at the head of the washpool outflow.

It was very disappointing to then lose the 2<sup>nd</sup> chick to seagulls who took it off the beach early one morning. The adults returned to the stagnant washpool channel later with only 1 chick remaining but this chick also had to be rescued by one of the volunteers – it was again returned to the adults who cleaned it up and took it back but did not return to the washpool. They lost the 3<sup>rd</sup> chick on Day 12 probably taken by a seagull or washed out by the strong tide while trying to feed along the water's edge. The adult birds, (male tagged "SR" and partner) stayed for about 4 days on the spot where the last chick was lost then flew off and were later seen at the southern end of Sellicks Beach near Cactus Canyon. They returned to their nesting site a few days ago and yesterday (29/1/21) were seen roosting back in the enclosure so there is still a chance they may nest again.

This same pair (or at least the same male with identity tag “SR”) have been nesting along Aldinga and Silver Sands for the last 5 years at least but have yet to fledge a chick. The eggs hatch after 28 days if incubated properly (i.e. minimal disturbance) and then the chicks have to find enough food to keep them growing and strong before they can finally fly after 35 days!! A few years ago “SR” and partner got their single remaining chick to 34 days before it disappeared at the back of the beach below the Lower Esplanade – from a nesting at Quandong. Other known reasons for chick losses along the Aldinga – Silver Sands beach include vehicles, Magpies, Ravens and Kestrels. Other suspects include feral cats, foxes and uncontrolled off leash dogs and simply not getting enough food to survive so it is a tough battle for these chicks.

Just down the beach at Aldinga south of Morgan Ramp, 2 chicks hatched on Boxing Day under the watchful eye and protection of the volunteers. Then, 2 days later the adults walked the chicks 1.5km North up the beach across the busy boat ramp (with volunteers stopping the traffic to allow them to cross the ramp!) and all the way to “Gordon’s Point” to a previous nesting site that was washed away by storm tides. Unfortunately, despite the constant monitoring by volunteers one of these chicks was taken by a seagull in broad daylight and then early one morning, the last chick was possibly taken by a fox (fresh fox tracks identified in the sand where the chick was last seen). This breeding pair have been seen back in the area intermittently but have not nested again.

It’s a different story on the Northern Onkaparinga Beaches where a total of 5 chicks have now fledged this season from 4 nests at Pt Willunga N and S, Maslin Beach and Ochre Cove. There is another nest due to hatch at Moana under constant monitoring of the volunteers in the mouth of Pedlar Creek. In all this has been a successful season for the “Hoodies” and thanks are due to the dedicated volunteers and also to the co-operation and support from most of the local beach users and dog walkers who have kept their dogs on a leash when passing by the nesting enclosure and banners – a big thank you to you all!! Thanks as well to the City of Onkaparinga Council crews for logistical support and assistance in putting up and taking down the nesting enclosures and signs. Recent sightings of 15 Hoodies with mixed adults and new juveniles on Snapper Point Reef at low tide feeding and ‘flocking’ together are a sight for sore eyes so get on down and have a look for yourself!! Thanks to FOAS for the opportunity to bring you this ‘Hoodie Story’ feel free to direct any queries my way – cheers

Dudley Corbett

*In full acknowledgement of support, training, guidance and data management provided by ‘Friends of the Hooded Plover’ and local and regional co-ordinators from Onkaparinga Beaches and Fleurieu Peninsula in conjunction and under the auspices of Birdlife Australia and Green Adelaide – refer links on MyBeachBirds Portal for contact information:*  
<https://portal.mybeachbird.com.au/site/index>

Photos by Dudley



Button Road - SR



Two 8 day old chicks – Sellicks, Button Rd. 09/01/21



SR & partner at The Washpool



Button Rd 201211 nest 3