



# SHOREBIRD CONSERVATION

## PROTECTING SHOREBIRDS FROM HUMAN DISTURBANCE: The Mornington Peninsula National Park Hooded Plover Recovery Program.



Birds Australia  
CONSERVATION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE



Natural  
Heritage  
Trust



Parks  
VICTORIA

### Where

The Mornington Peninsula is located to the south of Melbourne and separates Port Phillip Bay from Bass Strait. Much of the Bass Strait coastline of the peninsula is protected by the Mornington Peninsula National Park. This is Victoria's most visited national park with over 3 million tourist visits each year. Residential development backs onto a large portion of the park and the coastline is under heavy pressure from recreational users.



### The Birds

The target species of this project is the hooded plover which is a breeding resident of the coastline. This species is listed as vulnerable in Victoria and it is estimated that 30-50 individuals occur within the park. The high energy surf beaches and rocky platforms of the Mornington Peninsula National Park are also home to a number of other resident shorebird species including the pied and sooty oystercatcher.

### Who

The Mornington Peninsula Hooded Plover Recovery Program is coordinated by Parks Victoria (PV) which is the state agency responsible for the management of parks and reserves within Victoria. PV receives considerable volunteer input from a community based group known as the Friends of the Hooded Plover (FHP). The FHP was formed in 1991 following concerns for the long-term survival of the hooded plover population on the peninsula. The group consists of around 15 members, most of whom are local residents. Other groups and organisations that are involved with the project include Birds Australia and the Mornington Peninsula branch of the Bird Observers Club of Australia.

### Problems and challenges

Because it is located close to residential areas and is such a popular holiday destination, the Mornington Peninsula National Park is subject to a wide range of threats and pressures. The hooded plover population in this area is threatened by human disturbance, introduced species and natural events such as storms.

Negative human impacts include direct disturbance of birds when feeding or nesting, trampling of nests and eggs and predation and nest disturbance by unrestrained domestic dogs. Dogs were in fact the largest cause of breeding failure. A wide range of innovative management actions is required to successfully manage these threats.

Introduced species can have many negative impacts on hooded plovers. For instance, foxes prey on eggs and young chicks. Other less obvious impacts of introduced species are the effects of introduced weeds, such as sea spurge, and dune stabilisation plants such as marram grass. If unchecked, such plants can alter the shape and ecology of fore-dunes and make habitat less suitable for hooded plovers.

Natural events, such as storm tides and predation by native species can also have negative impacts. On their own, these events would not be normally expected to have an enormous impact, however when they are coupled with the above threats and the fact that the existing population is so small, such impacts can be significant.



Hooded plover nest.



## Solutions

With the support of PV, the FHP have been carrying out surveys of the numbers, breeding attempts and success, and behaviour of hooded plovers since 1991. This has provided a valuable set of data. This careful monitoring means that threats to breeding success can be identified and outcomes of management actions can be objectively assessed. Therefore, future management decisions can be based on hard data rather than on best guesses. The long-term high quality data collected by this project is one of its strongest assets.

To address threats associated with human disturbance, PV and the FHP have sought to inform park visitors and beach users of the significance of the area for hooded plovers and of the plight of this species. This has been achieved through various means, ranging from interpretive signs located at key access points to the utilisation of different media such as articles in the local paper. Information has also been provided to local rate payers through the mail and the FHP have directly spoken with visitors and distributed pamphlets at breeding sites where human impacts have been particularly high.

As well as monitoring the hooded plover, the group also occasionally monitors the activities and behavior of visitors on the beaches. This provides an indication of how successful measures such as increased signage and temporary beach closures have been.



© Mike Weston/Aquila

Hooded plover nest.

The FHP have received grants from sources including PV, Coast Action/Coast Care and the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust. This has enabled the group to undertake a number of tasks for which other organisations, such as PV would not have had the time or resources.

The actions of the FHP have been guided by PV who were able to share their expertise with the group and provide a wide range of resources. Expert advice has also been sought from other organisations such as Birds Australia. The project has been able to demonstrate its success and share the knowledge it has accumulated by extensively publishing results in recognised scientific journals.

## Outcomes for the environment

- A long term monitoring program which gathers data on the birds, their habitat and impacts of people has been implemented.
- Data collected has been used to formulate management actions which address key threatening processes.
- Awareness of the hooded plover and its conservation requirements has been raised in the broader community.
- A number of innovative management strategies, including the strategic location of signs, fencing and formalisation of visitor access, temporary beach closures and the Plover Watch program have been developed and implemented.
- Domestic dog access has been controlled and restricted through regulations in areas where hooded plovers are breeding.
- A weed control program aimed at sea spurge has been undertaken.
- A fox baiting program has been carried out and over 60 foxes have been removed from the park in recent years.
- The observations of the group and the activities of the project have greatly contributed to the scientific knowledge of the biology, ecology and conservation of hooded plovers.



Hooded plover protected area sign on the adjacent Bellarine Peninsula

## Outcomes for the participants

- Members of the FHP have gained a wide range of skills ranging from bird and plant identification to communication, negotiation and planning skills through their hands-on experience with this project.
- The group has gained valuable experience in successfully applying for grants.
- The contribution that the FHP have made to conservation was acknowledged with the presentation of the Victorian Coastal Award for Excellence in the category of Species Protection and Coastal Conservation and Protection by a Community Group.

## Measures of success

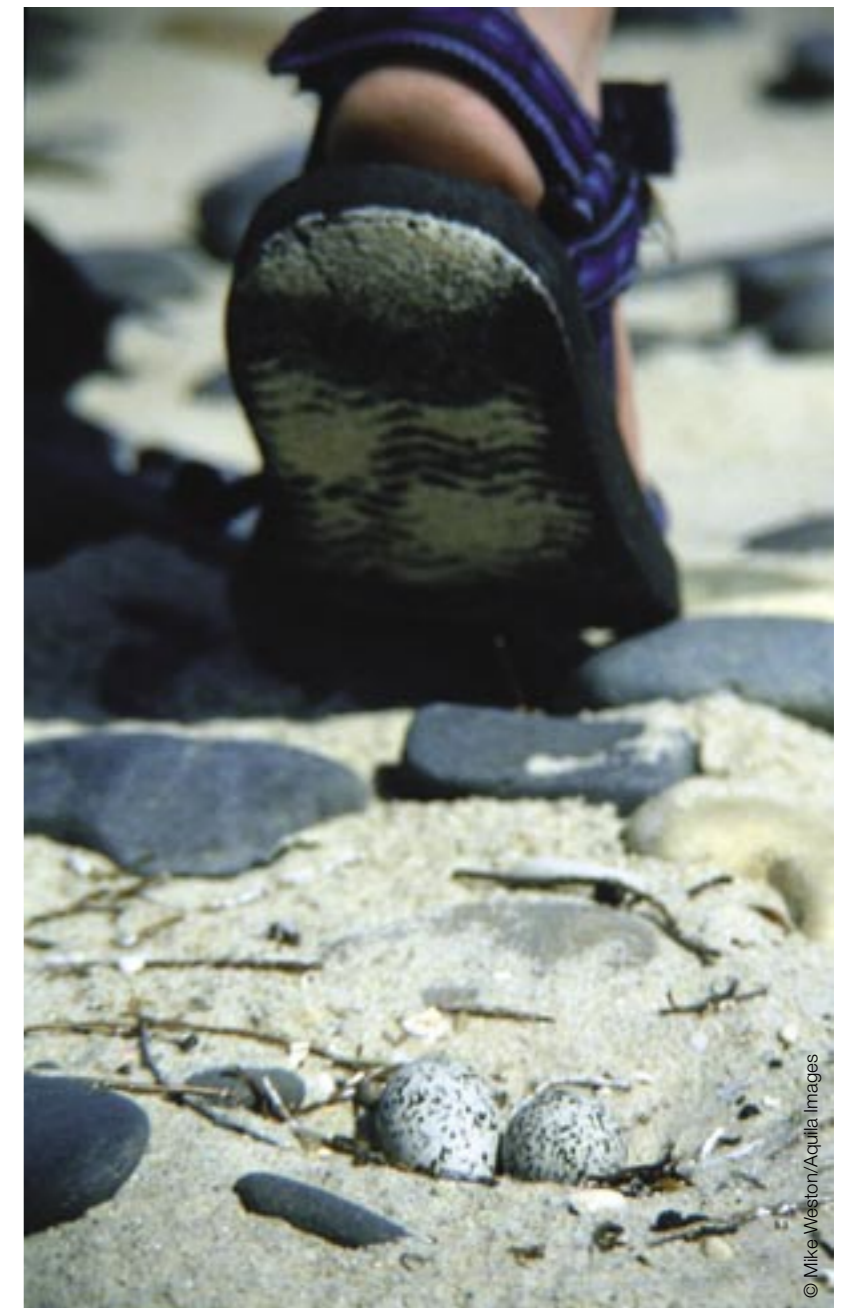
Because the project has been collecting high quality data for such a long time, it is relatively easy to measure the success of outcomes. Some of the main indicators of success include;

- An increase in the number of adult birds and the number of chicks successfully fledged since management actions commenced.
- A significant reduction of weeds such as sea spurge following control programs.
- The project has been identified as a flagship program within PV hooded plover management sites and has been adopted as a model for community involvement in data collection at the Phillip Island Nature Park.
- The contribution the project has made to the understanding of hooded plovers has been significant as can be seen from the number of reports it has generated in scientific journals.

The continuation of the monitoring of bird numbers and management outcomes will ensure that this project delivers important and successful conservation outcomes for many years to come.

## Future strategies and directions

- The current population and habitat monitoring program will continue in the long term.
- Future management actions will continue to be reviewed and adapted as required based on performance indicators.
- Management will be guided by the Mornington Peninsula National Park Hooded Plover Strategy.
- Links with other conservation groups, scientists and stakeholders will be maintained.



Hooded plover nest- a close call.



© Mike Weston/Aquila Images



## Summary

The features that have contributed to the success of this project have included;

A comprehensive long term monitoring program which gathers scientific data and enables project outcomes to be assessed

Management actions have been based on sound scientific information

The project is progressive, adaptable and willing to learn from its past actions

The PV staff and FHP members have shown immense dedication and personal interest in the project

In the future, the project will need to;

Maintain the current momentum of enthusiasm and ensure that adequate resources are available for the project to continue uncompromised

Ensure that the FHP maintains current levels of active membership and is capable of recruiting new members

## Key groups and contacts

### Birds Australia:

Tel (03) 9882 2622

Email: [mail@birdsaustralia.com](mailto:mail@birdsaustralia.com)

Website: [www.birdsaustralia.com.au](http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au)

### WWF Australia (Shorebird Conservation Project and Threatened Species Network):

Freecall 1800 032 551

Website: [www.wwf.org.au](http://www.wwf.org.au)

### Parks Victoria Rosebud office

Tel 13 1963

Website: [www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au)

### Australasian Wader Studies Group

Website: [www.tasweb.com.au/awsg](http://www.tasweb.com.au/awsg)



© Mike Weston/Aquila Images

Temporary beach closure at Hooded plover breeding site.

The shorebird case studies were developed by Birds Australia as part of the Shorebirds Conservation Project which is funded by the Natural Heritage Trust and managed by WWF Australia

