

TEAM OYSTERCATCHER NEWSLETTER No. 4. March, 2021



Greetings all, and I welcome you to our new bi-annual Team Oystercatcher Newsletter. Interest in Oystercatchers in South Australia is steadily growing, resulting in a need to establish a bi-annual newsletter, to replace our previous annual one. The plan is to have the March edition mainly comprise our observations (pictures included) and stories about Australian Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers around the State, whilst our August edition will mainly contain the report card on numbers of Oystercatchers seen over the previous 12 months, for comparison with longer-term data. In this newsletter we plan to take you to many areas of the State where observations on Oystercatchers have been made by our volunteers. We thank those who greatly contributed to this newsletter. We start with the South East of SA and then head steadily westwards.

South East SA

- **Sighting of a long-term flagged Pied Oystercatcher.**

Maureen Christie of Friends of SE Shorebirds (FOSSE) provided this article from a South East Newspaper about the sighting of a long-term flagged Pied Oystercatcher at Carpenters Rocks by Ross Anderson (Limestone Coast District Ranger). It highlights the usefulness of flagging/banding projects on these shorebirds.

Flight of fancy at Canunda National Park as H9 spotted three decades after first sighting.

One of the oldest known pied oystercatchers in southern Australia has been sighted just north of Carpenter Rocks in Canunda National Park during volunteer biennial monitoring this week.



Known by its band number, 'H9', is more than 32 years old and is still part of a breeding pair, successfully hatching a chick this year.

H9 was first banded by volunteers from the Victorian Wader Study Group when it was at least two years old in 1990 at Barry Beach to the east of Wilsons' Promontory in Victoria.

Limestone Coast District Ranger Ross Anderson said ongoing monitoring of coastal bird populations by the Friends of Shorebirds SE volunteer group had been highly valuable in contributing to National Parks and Wildlife Service South Australia's (NPWSSA) understanding of these species.

He said it was very important that visitors avoided driving on beaches during the breeding season, which ran from mid-November to February.

"Unfortunately the nests and chicks are subject to a number of threats such as predation by foxes, disturbance by dogs and use of vehicles on the beach," he said.

"Chicks have been known to use vehicle tracks to get cover from wind on beaches making them more susceptible to being run over.

"If you do drive on a beach keep to the wet sand and do not drive above the high tide water mark, or in coastal vegetation on the foredunes, where birds may nest. Also while driving ensure you take care to go slowly and keep an eye out for chicks and eggs.

"It's also important for dogs to be left at home when visiting national parks and conservation parks and kept on a lead at beaches where they are allowed."

Ross said it was difficult to distinguish whether a pied oystercatcher was a male or female, with both of equal size and colouring, which is why H9's sex was unknown.

"It's quite common for resident birds, such as pied oystercatchers, to move some distance until they find a territory they decide to stay in," he said.

"Pied oystercatchers are territorial during their breeding season, but then during autumn they will gather in large flocks. They do tend to mate for life, but as H9's partner is untagged it's assumed to be the same bird but this is unknown.

"I have personally seen H9 a number of times during the past 10 years when undertaking bird surveys from Carpenter Rocks to Southend. It has been known to inhabit this area since as early as 1999."

- **Ongoing Oystercatcher flagging work in the South East.**

Some flagging and banding of Oystercatchers continues at a limited level in the South East. On 1 November, 2020 at Blackfellows Caves Beach, as a by-catch to a targeted flock of Ruddy Turnstones by the VWSG flagging team, led by Maureen Christie, a Sooty Oystercatcher was flagged by Keith Jones, under the supervision of Maureen and Jeff Campbell and released in good condition (see below). The flag code was R1 and we look forward to hearing of reports of its future whereabouts. Previous flagging studies in Victoria suggest their movements are more restricted than for some POCs.



Sooty Oystercatcher R1, ready to be released at Blackfellows Caves Beach, SE SA on 1 November, 2020. Photo: Jenny Hiscock

Coorong Ocean Beach

- **Sighting of another flagged Pied Oystercatcher**

This high energy beach, extending from north of Kingston SE to the Murray Mouth, has traditionally provided excellent nesting and foraging habitat for Australian Pied Oystercatchers. In the early 1980's, counts of more than 500 birds were reported (Wainwright & Christie (2008)). On Sep, 28, 2020, Angus Droogan-Turniski (Coorong National Park Senior Park Ranger) spotted a flagged Pied Oystercatcher, R5 on the beach at 32 Mile Crossing (see picture below). It was one of a pair. The bird had originally been flagged as a young bird by Maureen Christie at Danger Point, east of Port MacDonnell in March, 2016, a duration of more than 4.5 years, and suggesting it now reached adulthood.



Flagged Pied Oystercatcher (R5) at 32 Mile Crossing, Coorong Ocean Beach on 28 Sep, 2020. Photo: Angus Droogan-Turinski

- **Recent shorebirds survey of the Coorong Lagoon and Ocean Beach**

In mid-January, 2021, Birdlife Australia conducted its regular summer Coorong count of waterbirds, including resident and migratory waders. In more recent years, the count has been confined to the Coorong Lagoon; however, this year the survey was extended to the Ocean Beach between Tea-tree Crossing and the Murray Mouth, a distance of 100 km. Steve Klose (Birdlife Australia coordinator), Angus Droogan-Turniski (Coorong Park Senior Ranger) and Keith Jones (volunteer counter) undertook the survey. We saw many pairs of adult Pied Oystercatchers, some with nests and young birds, ranging from chicks to recently fledged birds. Several of the adults showed classic distraction behaviour, attempting to direct us away from their nests or chicks. Additionally, we saw a flock of

more than 50 birds, foraging for Goolwa Pipsis. We only saw a small number of Sooty Oystercatchers, and they appeared nearer the mouth, whereas the Pied Oystercatchers extending along most of the beach. The beach is used by recreational line fishers and commercial pipi fishers, both using ORVs. Several parts of the beach were heavily impacted by these vehicles. We also saw other resident shorebirds (Hooded Plovers, Red-capped Plovers), as well as migratory Sanderlings, a Grey Plover and Red-necked Stints. The results of the whole survey will be reported in Birdlife Australia Shorebird reports and the Oystercatcher counts in the next Team Oystercatcher Newsletter.



Small flock of Pied Oystercatchers on the Coorong Ocean Beach, near Tea-Tree Crossing, Jan, 2021, photo: Keith Jones

Murray Estuary and Goolwa Ocean Beach

- **Continued monitoring of Oystercatcher numbers on the SE Fleurieu Coast.**

We are now well into our 10th year of monthly monitoring Oystercatchers on the Goolwa Beach (Middleton Point to Murray Mouth) and the western part of the Murray estuary (immediately inside the mouth). During this last spring (Sept – November), small numbers of non-breeding Pied Oystercatchers were again seen on the eastern most part of the Goolwa Beach (Barrage to Beacon 19 beaches). Slightly higher numbers of Sooty Oystercatchers were also counted on this part of the beach, but elsewhere on the beach both species were conspicuous by their absence. Very small numbers of both species were seen immediately inside the Mouth. Dredging of the Mouth continues, and the high numbers of ORVs with accompanying Goolwa pipi gatherers has been apparent from November (start of the recreational Goolwa Pipi season) throughout the summer.

So far, no flagged Pied Oystercatchers have been spotted this year; however, a Pied Oystercatcher with green and white plastic rings was sighted by Bob Green (SE SA Birdlife Australia member) in June, 2020, on Bird Island, immediately Inside the Mouth. This bird has been sighted three previous times in this same area since 2012, and records indicate that it had been banded in Port Phillip Bay, Victoria sometime before 2007, making it at least 13 years old. Recently in January, 2021, Reece Pedler spotted this same bird with its partner on the eastern side of the Mouth near the dredge outfall, again indicating that Pied Oystercatchers are capable of moving between the estuary and the ocean beach. Human activities (walkers, dogs, ORVs, pipi gatherers) continue to be monitored at all 10 sites in this region and results will be presented in the August, 2021 Team Oystercatcher Newsletter.

Fleurieu Peninsula

- **New monitoring on the western Fleurieu**

Sooty Oystercatchers are the more common species around the Fleurieu Peninsula, probably due to the preponderance of rocky shoreline and adjacent islands, where they have been reported to nest and rear their young. On the South Coast, they are often seen in small numbers at Middleton Point, the intertidal rocky areas of Encounter Bay, on Granite Island and near Cape Jervis, with nesting reported on the Pages Islands in Backstairs Passage. On the west side of the Peninsula in Gulf St. Vincent, small foraging flocks of up to 5 birds have been observed at Snapper Point, near Aldinga Beach, small numbers at Marino Rocks and amongst the rocks at the mouth of the Field River, just south of Hallett Cove Beach (Observations by B. Simes, J. Cobb, A. Burns, resp). More detailed monitoring of these birds will commence shortly.



5 Sooty Oystercatchers with a flock of red-necked stilts and a Hooded Plover at Snapper Point, Aldinga, Jan 2021. Photo: Barry Simes

With the exception of the SE Fleurieu (eastern Goolwa Beach as reported above), Pied Oystercatchers are rarely seen on the rest of the Fleurieu Peninsula. One pair is known from near Lady Bay (western FB) (A. Droogan-Turniski), and the next northward sites are at Semaphore South, northern Westlakes shores and the beach inside North Haven (MA Van Tryg, K. Jones, pers. obs.).

Kangaroo Island

Peter Haswell, Dave Potter and Jean Turner report here on their observations on numbers, foraging, breeding and threats to Pied Oystercatchers on Kangaroo Island.

Nepean Bay Conservation Park – *Peter Haswell*

Peter Haswell writes about some interesting observations about nesting Pied Oystercatchers on KI. Peter would like to know if anyone else has seen similar nesting strategies. Peter is fortunate enough to have a property that runs along over 2 kms of coastal reserve with a mostly undisturbed straight stretch of beach in Nepean Bay, Kangaroo Island. Pied Oystercatchers (& Hooded Plovers) are constantly present and generally maintaining their breeding territories throughout the year. He has been monitoring them for Birdlife Australia for about 6 years.

There are many threats to successful breeding despite the relative isolation of the habitat - White Bellied Sea Eagles, Pacific Gulls, the tidal nature of the beach, illegal 4WD vehicles but mostly it is the patrolling Rosenberg Goannas that have been observed or leave their tell-tale tracks around what remains of eggs.

This year Peter has observed instances where it is highly likely that two Pied Oystercatcher nests have been moved by the parent birds as an adaptive behavioural response to high tides. The Oystercatcher nests, about 400 meters apart were both moved on the same day to higher ground towards the sand dune above the high tide mark. Peter believes that the birds may have chosen nesting areas below the high tide mark and potentially in the path of illegal 4WD vehicles as a way of avoiding the goannas that had eaten their first clutch attempt. Ens (1991) mentions that if the first egg is lost, the parents may then move to another nest scrape. The nests were visited one day apart making it appear unlikely that the birds had lost the eggs with the tide and re-laid the exact same number of eggs (3 eggs in one scrape and one in the other) a day later.

There is scant scientific reporting of moving nests relating to tides. Has anyone else observed such adaptive behaviour?

P.S. The one egg is now a fluffy chick with very protective parents and the nest with originally three eggs failed for reasons unknown.



Getting to Know Kangaroo Island's Black and White Beach-Lovers - Australian Pied Oystercatcher - *David Potter and Jean Turner*

Population Size

Taylor et al (2014) estimated the population size of Australian Pied Oystercatchers in Australia at around 12,000-14,000 with 4,000 to 5,000 breeding pairs. South Australian population was estimated at 21 %. Using a total global population total of 13,000 individuals there are 4 sites within South Australia that regularly have more than 130 individuals, meeting the Ramsar criterion of 1% to be proclaimed as of international importance. These are West Coast/Eyre Peninsula, Spencer Gulf, Kangaroo Island and The Coorong.

An attempt to calculate the size and any fluctuations of the Kangaroo Island population has been made by monitoring flocking roosting high tide sites at Cape Rouge and Reeves Point in the Bay of Shoals, Cygnet River Estuary and Strawbridge Point at Island Beach in Eastern Cove.

In areas, K. Jones (Team Oystercatcher Newsletter No. 3, 2020) estimated from data collated from DGP/JAT, K.E., J.H./J.B. and KJ between 2015/2016 and 2019/20 that the overall population during the 2019/2020 monitoring season was 226, marking a slight increase from 2015/2016, of about 190. However, for some of these areas, both these figures are lower than from previous monitoring programs in the 1980's and 2000's.

From historical records of Bird Data, provided by BirdLife Australia, highest and average counts in the 2000's are seen below.

Area	Highest Counts	Date	Average	Number of records
Bay of Shoals	240	1/3/2009	93	30
Eastern Cove Including Pelican Lagoon	217	25/2/2011	103	38
South Coast	20	30// 2008	8	20
Nepean Bay	68	13/12/2009	33	15

Unfortunately, data wasn't collected consistently but the table below gives a rough idea of the population over time if survey methods and timing of them surveys did not change with time. Note, high tides counts are important for flocking populations, such as for Oystercatchers.

Season	Bay of Shoals	Eastern Cove	Nepean Bay	South Coast	Total
Summer 1984	46	187	64	5	302
Autumn 2009	240	104	36	2	382
Spring 2010	133	89	No data collected	18	240
Winter 2012	131	63	No data collected	10	204

Monitoring of POCs started with a shorebird monitoring program in about 1984 throughout the Island and while sites were initially visited four times a year this quickly dropped off to twice a year or some sites once a year. There were also gaps of several years and all monitoring ceased by 2014 except at Island Beach by DGP/JAT and Nepean Bay by PH/ JB. Looking at these tables and assuming the data within them is accurate, the population of Pied Oystercatchers within Eastern Cove has

declined since monitoring began and using present day figures the population at Nepean Bay may also have declined leading to an overall decline of the total population of Australian Pied Oystercatchers on Kangaroo Island. The numbers within the Bay of Shoals appear to be stable.

Current Monitoring

Currently, DGP/JAT are monitoring only part of the Bay of Shoals while PH/JB are monitoring only part of Nepean Bay. DGP/JAT are monitoring most of Eastern Cove while Les Montanjees monitors the Baudin Beach site within Eastern Cove as well as Christmas Cove at Penneshaw.

Monitoring at Island Beach, Baudin Beach, Browns Beach, American Beach, Reeves Point to the Kingscote Boat ramp and Pelican Lagoon during the non-breeding season occurs monthly. This gives an indication of the population at these sites and occupancy of breeding territories over the year. Other sites such as Brownlow Beach to Cygnet River Estuary, Cape Rouge Beach in the Bay of Shoals and D'Estrees Bay monitoring is more sporadic. Other locations such as Antechamber Bay, Vivonne Bay and Hanson Bay are visited only occasionally during the year.

During the breeding season territories are monitored weekly at Island Beach, Browns Beach, American Beach, Pelican Lagoon and American River and more likely fortnightly at Reeves Point to Kingscote Boat Ramp.

This is in its third year of long term breeding studies of success at these locations. At Island Beach there are 13 breeding territories over 5.3 km averaging about 400m between territories.

Intensive monitoring during the breeding season also began this year at Strawbridge Point Beach and now that a stock proof fence has been erected at Cape Rouge beach more intensive monitoring also began.

Les Montanjees monitors Baudin Beach, Christmas Cove and Hog Bay Beach at Penneshaw for both Hooded Plovers and Pied Oystercatchers while similarly, Peter Hastwell and James Barnes monitors a section of Nepean Bay adjacent to their property for both Hooded Plovers and Pied Oystercatchers during the breeding season.

Observations of Banded POCs

Banded on Kangaroo Island

- A Pied Oystercatcher with metal band 92329, was banded as a "runner" at Emu Bay by Terry Dennis 27th Oct 1987. This was first photographed in 2006 by DGP/ JAT at Rocky Point, Island Beach where it holds a breeding territory. It is still breeding and raising chicks at 33 years of age ! Only finally this year, after photographing this bird for several years, we were only able to ascertain all the numbers on the band due to wear and tear. This has been confirmed by Terry Dennis and the ABBBS. It had moved at least 37km since banding.
- A second bird carrying a metal band with unidentified numbers presumably also banded by Terry Dennis has recently been observed at Island Beach. Concurrent Island Beach East and West surveys were conducted to ensure that there were 2 metal banded birds at Island Beach in 2019. This bird was part of a pair in the western part of Island Beach, but hasn't been seen since.

Banded in South Australia

- Black Flag with white lettering Flagged by Friends of South east Shorebirds and Victorian Wader Study Group at Piccanninnie Ponds east of Port MacDonnell in Jan 2018 as a recently fledged bird. This was seen at Reeves Point on October 24th 2019 by DGP/JAT. This bird had travelled at least 400 km.

Banded in Victoria

- Yellow flag with black lettering LV, originally flagged at Barrys Beach , Corner Inlet , Eastern Victoria on 6th July 2012 as a 4 year old. This was seen at Brownlow Beach June 2020 by John Hodgson as part of a pair. Seen at Cape Rouge beach by DGP/JAT August 2018 and possibly seen at Reeves Point by KJ in June 2018. Note that this is the most westward movement recorded by an Australian Pied Oystercatcher banded at Corner Inlet (J. Driessen, VWSG Bulletin No 43 Oct 2020).
- Yellow flag with unidentified black lettering seen at same time as LV at Reeves Point by KJ in June 2018. This bird had originally been flagged at Corner Inlet, Victoria. Distance ~ 875km.

These observations indicate that there is movement within the Island and at times from elsewhere in South Australia and Victoria. However as there has not been a banding program in recent times on Kangaroo Island, it is unknown whether there is regular movement between the island and the mainland or within the Island. An understanding of their ages at release and resighting would also assist in determining their age at recruitment to breeding territories. Observing the metal banded bird in its breeding territory at Rocky Point for 14 years is consistent with findings in Tasmania by Newman (2008) that pairs remain faithful to territories.

Habitat and Food

At Island Beach, Pied Oystercatchers will feed occasionally on the upper beach amongst seagrass wrack presumably searching for beetles and amphipods and other invertebrates. However a lot of the time is spent probing in the wet sand for bivalves and annelid worms. Unlike most other resident shorebirds, Oystercatchers feed their young up to time of fledging. When feeding young chicks, the prey is taken to the shallows and washed before giving it to the chicks. Generally during the breeding season, birds holding territories will feed on the wet sand in their territories. As the tide recedes, non-breeding birds and parents with their more developed chicks, (i.e. about a month old) move further out onto sandbars and into shallow water, perhaps up to 75mm deep where bivalves may still be open. A lot of birds move out to submerged spits at Strawbridge Point where the water is deeper. Birds can be seen foraging in water mid chest deep. As females have slightly longer bills, the majority of these may be females. On incoming tides, these birds move into the shallows and eventually form tight resting flocks on the upper beach, usually with numbers of Cormorants, Pelicans, Gulls, Terns, Masked Lapwings, and occasionally Grey Teal. With ebbing tides, some birds also move into Pelican Lagoon to their feeding territories and move out with rising tide.

Similarly in the Bay of Shoals, flocks of Pied Oystercatchers form at Reeves Point and at Cape Rouge in mixed flocks of waterbirds, Gulls and Terns and other shorebirds. As the tide recedes they move out to the sandbars and mudflats and move back with the rising tide.

When monitoring first began smaller flocks of Sooty Oystercatchers also used to occur at these roosting sites. However aggression from the Pied Oystercatchers towards Sooty Oystercatchers has been noted in the last couple of years at roosting and POC breeding sites. Sooty Oystercatchers

generally now have to roost at other sites, such as the Bay of Shoals Breakwater and at Island Beach they forage closer to shore on mudflats near Strawbridge Point.

At times when roosting sites are encroached by very high tides, the birds may seek roosting sites elsewhere. At Island Beach there is a small tidal lagoon behind the dunes at Sapphire town and a resting flock of between 10 to 30 birds may be seen there when it contains water. However, at American River (at Swan Crossing) a large flock of over 50 birds can sometime be seen resting on the grassy verge next to the main road. This flock has been observed by DGP/JAT to move into a paddock to feed. Also DGP has seen a large flock from this area fly inland to an unknown location, perhaps to another feeding paddock or to another roosting site such as the Bay of Shoals. Also in the past Kathie Stove (pers. com.) has seen Pied Oystercatchers on the grassy flats behind the big dunes at American Beach. Feeding on grass also has been observed at Reeves Point and the roadside verge at Penneshaw and its adjacent Golf Course (Jones et al, 2018). This has also been noted in Victoria and Tasmania (Minton, 1999; Taylor et al, 2014). However, foraging away from the shore may not always be associated with high tides. For example, on the 15/12/2018, 2 adults and 1 fledgling were foraging away from the Island Beach after 3 days of rain. The tide was ebbing and the conditions were calm. Also, on the 9/12/2020 after rain on previous days with good conditions and a low tide, 2 parents and 1 fledgling were encountered 2 streets back from the beach. There were numerous freshly emptied garden snail shells all the way to the beach. On seeing us the birds were more wary than on the beach and moved into the bush. A fortnight later, the fledgling flew from the beach to the street closest to the beach and walked quickly up the hill to the next street where it had been presumed feeding previously. There was plenty of beach to forage, so, clearly, the parents had been teaching the fledgling other food sources. Graham and Cheryl Casey have also observed a single bird up their driveway and at the rear of their house several times over the years.

The pairs that have rocky platforms exposed at low tide in their territories will feed preferentially on these platforms as the tide ebbs. Any chicks including very young ones will move out on these platforms and crouch and hide behind rocks near the water's edge unlike other chicks that will move into the dune vegetation.

Breeding

Pied Oystercatcher nests have been found by DGP/JAT at Christmas Cove, American Beach, Brown's Beach (including Crabby Jack's Beach,) Antechamber Bay, Nepean Bay, Island Beach, Pelican Lagoon, American River, Cygnet River Estuary, between Reeves Point and the Bay of Shoals boat ramp, Cape Rouge Beach, D'Estrees Bay, Bales Bay Beach and Hanson Bay Beach.

Other sites that have not been investigated during the breeding season include Eleanor River Beach, Vivonne Bay/Point Ellen and Emu Bay.

At lower energy beaches such as Island Beach and Cape Rouge Beach, most nests are placed on the upper beach on sand. Where accumulation of seagrass occurs such as American Beach, Sapphire town at Island Beach and D'Estrees Bay, eggs may be laid in scrapes in the seagrass.

Also eggs can be laid in little hollows screened by low density vegetation partially up high dunes such as at Antechamber Bay and Bales Beach.

Nests can also be placed on shell mounds amongst samphire such as at Remembrance Point, American River, Cygnet River Estuary and high up on rocky ledges or in rock groynes such as at Rocky Point, Christmas Cove and Bay of Shoals Boat Ramp.

Some pairs at Island Beach also lay in either the 1st or second fore-dune. These are birds that have lost their nest to storm-driven tides in previous years or this year. While this quite often ensures success, unfortunately, after the first clutch was washed away, for its second clutch, 1 pair chose a building site 2 streets back from the beach which had no work on it for about 1 year. Building recommenced 1 day after the first chick had hatched (the other egg was infertile) but it did not survive. However, this does show that Pied Oystercatchers are more aware of their surroundings than just the beach. At Cape Rouge Beach, 1 pair laid eggs in an adjacent paddock which had not been grazed for several months, and prior to fencing to keep sheep of the beach. Unfortunately on 1 of our visits, sheep had returned to the paddock and had trampled a newly hatched chick and a chick that had been ready to hatch (feathers were still stuck together). Newman (2008), and Russell & George, (2012) also reported paddock nesting. Nesting usually begins at Island Beach mid to late August and finishes by the end of November. 1 or 2 replacement clutches may be laid depending on the season. No further clutches are laid if an attempt is successful. However, if environmental factors are unfavourable, further clutches may not be laid if the 1st clutch fails. Island Beach is approximately 5.3km long with 13 breeding territories with an average of about 400m. In order to measure breeding success, the number of eggs in each clutch is recorded, the number of chicks hatched, and the number of chicks surviving to fledgling from each clutch is also recorded.



Fig.1. Usual POC nest on sand in the upper beach.



Fig.2. POC nest on rock ledge at Rocky Point.



Fig 3: Nesting on a shell-grit bank behind samphire at Remembrance Point, American River.



Fig. 4: Nest on beach wrack at Island Beach



Fig. 5: Nest in paddock at Cape Rouge.



Fig. 6: Nest at a building site at Island Beach. Notice the concrete piers poured about 12 months ago.

Threats

- **Human activities** Since the 1970's, several coastal locations on Kangaroo Island have been subdivided. Holiday homes and to a lesser degree permanent residences have been built. There was a boom in these developments between 2000 and 2010 and is ongoing. A lot of holiday homes are rented out throughout the year. This has led to an increase in numbers of walkers/runners on the beach which, depending on the level of the tide, may affect foraging and incubation of eggs by beach nesting birds. At Island Beach these include Red-capped Plover, Pied Oystercatcher and Hooded Plover. Associated with walkers is the presence of dogs. Most dogs are off lead on the beach despite signs ordering otherwise. Dogs often get put on lead after leaving the beach while others get put on the lead as DGP/JAT approach with binoculars and then are let off again once we have passed. Other people have been abused and or threatened if it is pointed out to the dog owners that dogs should be on lead. Incubating Pied Oystercatchers get off their nest at greater distance in the presence of dogs than just walkers alone. There has been also increase in water sports such as kayaking, wind surfing, sailing and other boating activities. Recreational boat fishers return to shore and discard the cleaning of their catch in the shallows or on the beach. Seabirds such as Pelicans, Silver and Pacific Gulls are attracted to this. In the last couple of years there has been an increase in people driving on the beach outside the boat ramp area while drones and fat bike tracks have also been noted. At the height of this year's summer holiday season, 53 boats and yachts were moored off Island Beach but has now dropped to the usual level of 1 or 2. The number of kayaks, small yachts and tinnies on the beach were not counted at the time but was quite significant. Small number of sunbakers occur and also large groups of people playing outdoor sports, sitting in beach shelters or just partying. At least one Pied Oystercatcher nest was abandoned, both in this breeding season and last breeding season due to the presence of large groups of people near their nest.
- **Native animals** On Kangaroo Island Rosenberg's Goanna occurs in large numbers adjacent to beaches. These are known predators of beach-nesting birds. Schulz in 1987, watched a goanna east of Rocky Point (presumably Brown's Beach) homed in onto a Hooded Plover nest and despite various distraction displays by the parents, swallowed the 3 eggs. Goanna tracks are often seen at monitored sites. Peter Hastwell considers Goannas a significant factor in both Hooded Plover and Pied Oystercatcher nest failure at his sites at Nepean Bay (see Peter's report in this Newsletter).

Tiger snakes while rarely seen are probably quite common in the dunes and adjacent scrub.

Other tracks often seen are kangaroo and wallaby tracks where they enter the beach during the night to feed on beach wrack and/or to drink. Their tracks on the upper beach parallel to the vegetation are often seen and any eggs in this area may be under threat by trampling.

Ripening Leucopogon, Myoporum and Rhagodia berries also attract large numbers of Silver Gulls, Ravens and Grey Currawongs to vegetation adjacent to the beach. Also, groups of Magpies occur along Island Beach. Silver Gulls and Pacific Gulls usually occur in numbers at Island Beach and during the nonbreeding season. POCs are not disturbed by these and may even roost nearby. However during the breeding season Pied Oystercatchers have been occasionally seen being aggressive to both Pacific Gulls and Silver Gulls. DGP has observed a pair of POCs attack a White-bellied Sea-eagle at American River. The nest in the paddock at Cape Rouge was only discovered when a group of Magpies flying overhead was attacked by both the guard and the incubating birds. By noting where the incubating bird had landed we

were able to find the nest. Thus, it can be inferred by these reactions that POCs see these birds as possible predators.

- **Feral Animals** Cats occur at Island Beach and no doubt at other sites and their tracks in the sand can be seen occasionally on beaches. Similarly rodent tracks have also been recorded.
- **Global Warming and Sea Level Rise** Visually, over time, the spit at Strawbridge Point has lost sand and has built up further east. This has resulted in many birds now foraging in deeper water. Also, there appears to have been a loss in samphire and algae/seagrass on the associated flats. Additionally, the heat wave in the summer of 2019/2020 coinciding with low dodge tides where the flats were exposed for long periods of time. This may have caused a reduction in food sources for the Pied Oystercatchers. Predicted increases in storm surges will increasingly threaten nests and reduce the area able to support successful nesting . in the 2020/21 breeding season, 8 nests from 5 pairs at Island Beach were washed away. Nests in other areas were also washed away.



Fig. 7. Egg washed away and half buried by a storm.



Fig. 8. Dune erosion at Strawbridge Point. (Although this has occurred at least over the past 20 years, about 3 m. of dune got washed away last winter.)

Acknowledgements

Dr Grainne Maguire for supplying South Australian Oystercatcher records from BirdLife Australia's Database, Dr Keith Jones for sharing of knowledge and numerous discussions, Les Montanjees for sharing knowledge of Baudin Beach and Christmas Cove, Peter Hastwell for sharing knowledge of Nepean Bay , Kathie Stove and Cheryl and Graham Casey for their observations.

NE Gulf St. Vincent (Samphire Coast)

This region is arbitrarily divided into two areas; firstly, the Southern Samphire including the Port River, Barker Inlet, Bird Island and St. Kilda, and secondly, the North Samphire, north of St. Kilda around to Mac's Beach, near Ardrossan, and includes the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary.

Southern Samphire Coast

When regular monitoring began in 2014, consistently high numbers of both Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers were recorded for the central shore areas of the Port River, including Gillman and Snowden's Beach (W. Syson, D. Potter, pers. obs.). However, at around March, 2018, both species virtually disappeared from this region. We think they may have moved northwards to the Northern Samphire or further afield. Interestingly, since October, 2020, we have seen small numbers of Pied Oystercatchers returning to forage at low tide at the Gillman beach (see below), but Sooty Oystercatchers haven't returned in any numbers. New banding and flagging projects will greatly assist in further understanding these movements.



Pied Oystercatchers foraging at low tide at Gillman, central Port River, December, 2020.
Photos by Keith Jones

Northern Samphire Coast

In August, 2020, a comprehensive report was published by Birdlife Australia on the changes in numbers of shorebirds throughout this region between 2012 and 2020 (Lees et al, 2020). Both Pied and Sooty Oystercatcher are included and the results will be reported in the next Team Oystercatcher Newsletter in August, 2021.

Sthn Eyre Peninsula (Pt. Lincoln and Coffin Bay)

- **Report of a flagged Pied Oystercatcher at Port Lincoln.**

On Oct 28, 2020, Petra Hanke and Chris Scholz sighted black flagged "S2" at Fisherman's Point in the Lincoln National Park in the SW corner of Spencer Gulf (see photo). A hurried txt message to Maureen Christie revealed that the bird had been flagged on June 28, 2014 at Third Creek, Thompson Beach, in NE Gulf St. Vincent an estimated straight line distance of about 210 km away. Obviously, its flight path is unknown, as is the time it took to travel to its new site. Interestingly, Petra and Chris reported that the bird was one of a pair that were foraging at low tide on the beach.



Flagged Pied Oystercatcher S2 sighted at Fisherman's Point, Lincoln National Park by Petra Hanke and Chris Scholz on 28 Oct, 2020. Photo through scope and camera taken by Chris Scholz.

Foundation for SA Shorebirds

This Foundation has recently been established to financially support researchers, community groups, citizen scientists, artists/writers and media producers to carry out projects which will enhance our understanding about the conservation status of both resident and migratory shorebirds around South Australia's coast. More information and details on how to apply for grants can be found on the Foundation's web-site: www.sashorebirds.org.

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