

TEAM OYSTERCATCHER NEWSLETTER No. 6, March, 2022



Welcome to our 6th Team Oystercatcher Newsletter !

Amid the uncertainties associated with the covid-induced restrictions to our activities, we've managed to maintain our surveys in all our usual SA regions. This newsletter updates our observations over these past 8 months since our last newsletter in August 2021.

As in our past Newsletters, we begin in the South-East of the state and make our way via the Coorong, SE Fleurieu, Western Fleurieu, Sthn & Nthn Samphire and finally to Kangaroo Island. Finally, we provide an update on projects partly funded with the Foundation for SA Shorebirds. Some of the highlights in this newsletter include:

- 1) In both the Coorong Lagoon and the adjacent Ocean Beach, between the 2000's and the last two years, summer counts of Pied Oystercatchers (POCs) have dropped substantially;
- 2) POCs move between the Murray Estuary and the Goolwa Ocean Beach depending on the flow of water through the Barrages, tidal amplitude and food availability;
- 3) Snapper Point (Aldinga Reef Aquatic Reserve) provides an important foraging and roosting site for Sooty Oystercatchers (SOCs) on the western Fleurieu coast;
- 4) For more than half of the past 9 years, the numbers of both Oystercatcher species on the Samphire coast represented more 1% of their global populations, thereby deeming this area as a Ramsar-defined important area for these species;
- 5) On Kangaroo Island, breeding success for POCs this past season (2021/22) was lower than the previous 2 years, mainly due to high tides with or without storms.

In future newsletters, we look forward to contributions from other interested persons / groups from the Yorke & Eyre Peninsulas. Please contact Keith Jones, Newsletter Editor at docjones@bigpond.net.au.

SOUTH-EAST SOUTH AUSTRALIA (Granites to Victorian Border)

Since 2004, members of FOSSE (Friends of Shorebirds South East, Inc), have bi-annually (November & April) monitored Hooded Plover numbers and nesting at more than 12 SESA sites from the Granites (north of Kingston) to the Victorian border. But it's only been since November 2018 that both species of Oystercatchers were added to their list of monitored resident shorebirds. It's too early to unravel any trends for our species; however, with ongoing monitoring it should be possible in the future to do so, as well as investigating if these trends compare with those in our other SA regions.

COORONG LAGOON and OCEAN BEACH

Birdlife Australia volunteers from SA successfully completed the summer Coorong count of wetland and shorebirds between Jan 14 and 16th, 2022. Several commercial Coorong fishers and Coorong National Park Rangers greatly assisted with their boats and vehicles. For the count, the Coorong Lagoon was divided into 31 survey blocks, with 2 – 3 volunteers per block counting either from land or boat. Four volunteers in two ORVs counted all birds along the Coorong Ocean Beach between Tea-Tree Crossing and the Murray Mouth. At the time of the survey, due to the floods coming down the Darling and upper Murray, more than 30 mega-litres per day of freshwater was flowing through the barrages, resulting in relatively high water levels throughout most of the lagoon. This resulted in restricted foraging and roosting areas for many of the birds. The full tally of all bird species counts will be available from Birdlife Australia in the coming months; however, we report here, only on the Oystercatcher counts.

Throughout the lagoon, POCs were observed either as pairs or in small roosting flocks of up to 15. Several pairs showed distractive behaviour suggesting nesting or young chicks within the Lagoon. In the Murray Estuary near the mouth, normally an area of relatively high POC numbers, only a total of 8 (4 pairs) were observed. This area is closest to the barrages, and the lack of suitable foraging and roosting areas may have forced the usually relatively high numbers of birds in the estuary at this time of the year to move to the Ocean Beach at Goolwa, as discussed further into this newsletter. A total of 78 POCs were observed within the Coorong Lagoon, higher than the count of 51 last year, but more than half the average count during the 2000's (see table below). No SOCs were observed within the Lagoon.

It was a different story on the Coorong Ocean Beach. This high energy beach is a challenging one to survey, not only due to its length (100 km, 9 hours to survey!), but also because of the soft sand caused by high tides and the heavy use of mainly recreational ORVs, making driving treacherous. We counted 192 Pied Oystercatchers as well as one recently fledged bird and 2 chicks. In similarity with the lagoon, many of the birds were paired, some showing distractive behaviour. Also, flocks of up to 28 birds were seen roosting, mainly near the water's edge.



Pied Oystercatcher chick (a) and family (b) on Coorong Ocean Beach, Jan 15, 2022.

Photos: Mary-Ann Van Trigt



This count of 192 POCs is slightly down on last year’s count of 204 birds; but both counts are well below those taken during the 2000’s, when an average of 402.9 birds were counted along the same stretch of beach (see table below, note, s.e.s are standard errors around the averages).

Period	Pied Oystercatchers		Sooty Oystercatchers	
	Coorong Lagoon	Coorong Ocean Beach	Coorong Lagoon	Coorong Ocean Beach
2000 – 2008*	141.8 (s.e.9.0)	402.9 (s.e.8.5)	7.7 (s.e. 2.9)	2.2 (s.e.2.0)
2021, 2022	64.5 (s.e.4.4)	196.5 (s.e.2.9)	2.0 (s.e. 1.7)	7.5 (s.e. 0.8)

* Data presented in Wainwright & Christie, 2008.

One highlight of the survey, was the sighting of a flagged POC (black on white engraved H7) with its partner at about the mid-point of the route. It’s been discovered that this bird had been flagged on 5th Feb, 2013 as a young bird at Brown’s Bay, near the Victorian border, by the Victorian Wader Study Group (VWSG). This is a duration of 8 years and 346 days and we estimate that the straight-line distance between flagging and re-sighting sites is NE 252 km.

Flagged Pied Oystercatcher (H7) at Coorong Ocean Beach, Jan 15, 2022.
Photo: Mary-Ann Van Trigt



We counted a total of 11 SOCs, and these were mainly near to the Murray Mouth. Also, we counted human activities, resulting in 31 active recreational shore (line) fishing rods, as well as 30 Off-road vehicles (ORVs). Additionally, there were 2 ORVs associated with commercial Pipi harvesting operations. This beach is clearly now, one that has both significant recreational and commercial fishing usage. Thus, there is a heightened need for all beach nesting birds to be increasingly protected, especially during their nesting and rearing seasons. The current vehicle closure to protect Hooded Plover breeding sites between Tea-tree Crossing and the Murray Mouth extends from October 24 to December 24th; however, as seen from the last two January bird counts, POCs continue to nest and rear their young well into January and are therefore, they are not fully protected.

SE FLEURIEU COAST

We’ve now entered the 11th year of monthly counts of Oystercatchers along this part of the coast from the Murray Estuary to Middleton Point. Over the last 6 or so months, the POCs have moved from the Murray Estuary during winter and early spring to predominantly the

eastern Goolwa Ocean Beach (Barrage and Beacon 19 sites) in spring and summer, with the single sighting of a juvenile in the more western sites of the surveyed area (Middleton Beach). This seasonal shift in their distribution could partly be due to currently high Pipi numbers on the Goolwa Beach (Nick Whiterod, pers. com.) as well as the recent high flows of freshwater through the barrages, diminishing foraging and roosting areas within the estuary. Interestingly, this February survey saw numbers returned to the Murray Estuary, and it's suspected that this may have been due to a very low dodge tide allowing birds more access to their usual foraging sites within the estuary.



Resting Oystercatchers (both species) and recreational Pipi harvesters on Goolwa Beach, December, 2021
Photo: Keith Jones

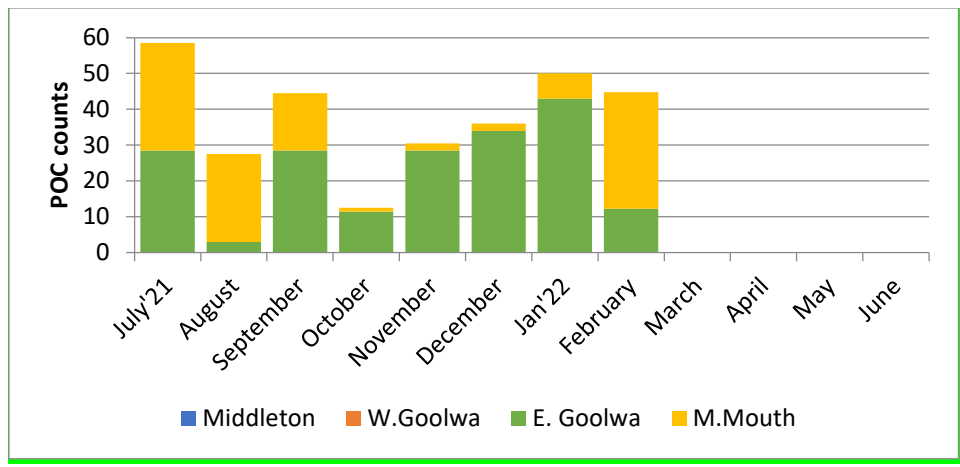


Fig. 1 : Chart of numbers of POCs counted at all SE Fleurieu sites, July 2021 – Feb, 2022.

It's interesting to note that, in this past season (July, 2021 - Feb, 2022), according to Birdata, there have been two reports of flocks of POCs flying from east to west on the south coast to the west of Middleton Point. In August, 2021, David and Sue Thorn saw a flock of 9 adults flying westwards along the Waitpinga Beach, and in November, 2021, Birdata reported a flock of 12 POCs flying westwards just past the Hindmarsh River Estuary. Also, in August, 2021, a single bird was reported by Roslyn Shirlaw near the causeway, Victor Harbor. Also, in February '22, a single POC was observed resting amongst a flock of 6 SOCs at Basham Beach (Birdata record). These sightings of POCs this far west of Middleton, are considered

unusual; however, without banding information, we can only surmise where these birds would be travelling to.

POC breeding activity this past season has been low, with only a mating couple observed in October at the edge of samphire habitat on Bird Island, in the Murray Estuary. Subsequently, a scrape, with an adult brooding a single egg was seen on the Bird Island sand spit; however, a week later, the nest had been abandoned. In the 11 years of surveys, nesting activity has never been observed at the edge of sand dunes on Goolwa Ocean Beach. This is due to a) the high level of human activity (ORV's) and b) the abruptness of the dunes to the beach caused by high winter/spring tides, thereby making this habitat unsuitable for nesting. Similar observations have been made for Hooded Plovers.

SOCs occur along most of the South Fleurieu Coast, albeit in smaller numbers than for POCs. In this past season, we've found them at all our sites between the Murray Estuary and Middleton Beach (Fig. 2). Small numbers have also been reported further to the west at Basham Beach, and Victor Harbor (mouth of the Inman River and at Yilki, Encounter Bay) (Birddata & Beach-nesting bird portals). Also, a pair has been foraging and roosting on Granite Island (Roslyn Shirlaw). These latter observations concur with previous years' reports on Birddata; that SOC's occur on all islands along this coast, from the Pages in Backstairs Passage to the islands off Victor Harbor (West, Wright and Granite) and Pt. Elliot (Pullen Island).

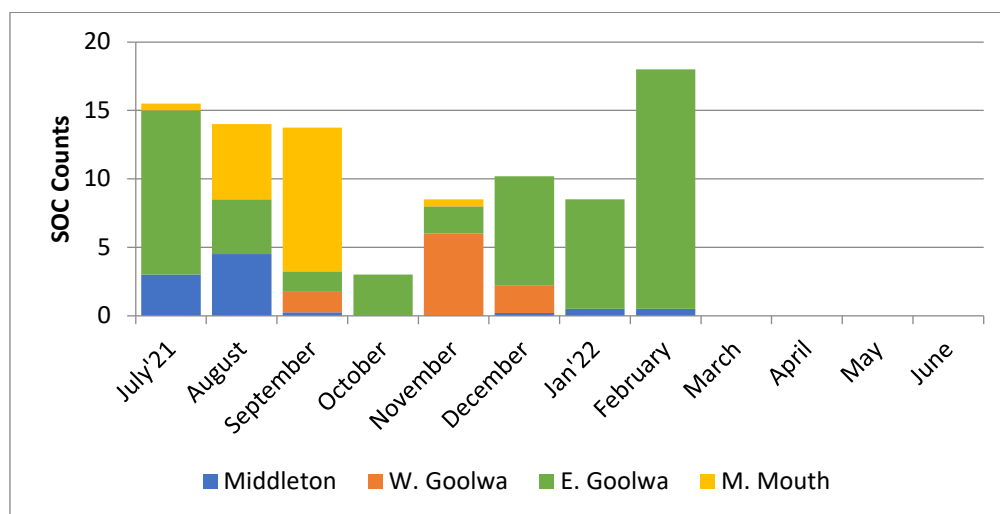


Fig. 2: Counts of SOC's along SE Fleurieu coast, July, 2021 – Feb, 2022.

WESTERN FLEURIEU (SE GULF ST. VINCENT)

SOCs have been observed in small numbers on many of the rocky shores of the Western Fleurieu between Marino Rocks and the Aldinga Reef Aquatic Reserve (Snapper Point), and, at any one time, up to 12 adults/ juveniles on the latter reef. For more than a year now, local volunteer, Barry Simes has now been regularly reporting on them at this site. Highest numbers occurred on the reef during late winter, with numbers dropping during spring months. During this summer, up to 5 birds, mainly young birds, still with black tips to their

bills and pale legs, returned to the reef. The Aldinga Reef appears to be a foraging area for these birds at low tide, with a variety of items preyed on. I've seen them foraging on beach worms in the sandy parts of the reef, and Barry has photographed one with a small rock crab in its bill (see photo). Other rocky sites where SOC's are seen include Ochre Point, near Maslins and Marino Rocks. Interestingly, small numbers have also been sighted foraging on beaches near the Torrens mouth (Jim Moore) and Onkaparinga estuary (R. Flett).

Several young Sooty Oystercatchers amongst beach wrack at Aldinga Reef Aquatic Reserve (Snapper Point) together with Crested Terns and Silver Gull.
Photo: Barry Simes

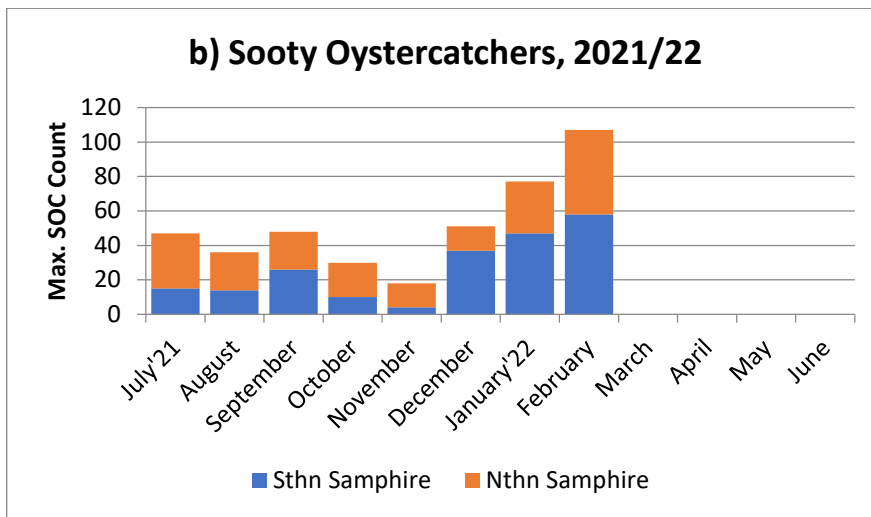
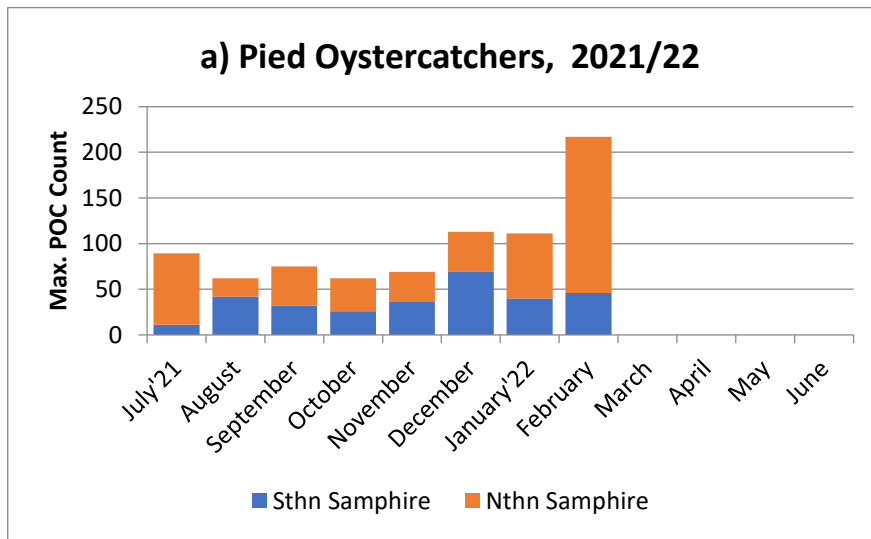


A Sooty Oystercatcher at Aldinga Reef Aquatic Reserve with the tasty morsel of a rock crab.
Photo: Barry Simes

POCs are much less common along this part of the coast, with reports in this past year only of a pair at Sellicks Beach (D. Corbett) in September and a single bird at the Carrickalinga Estuary Beach (P. Stark) in the same month.

THE SAMPHIRE COAST (NE GULF ST.VINCENT)

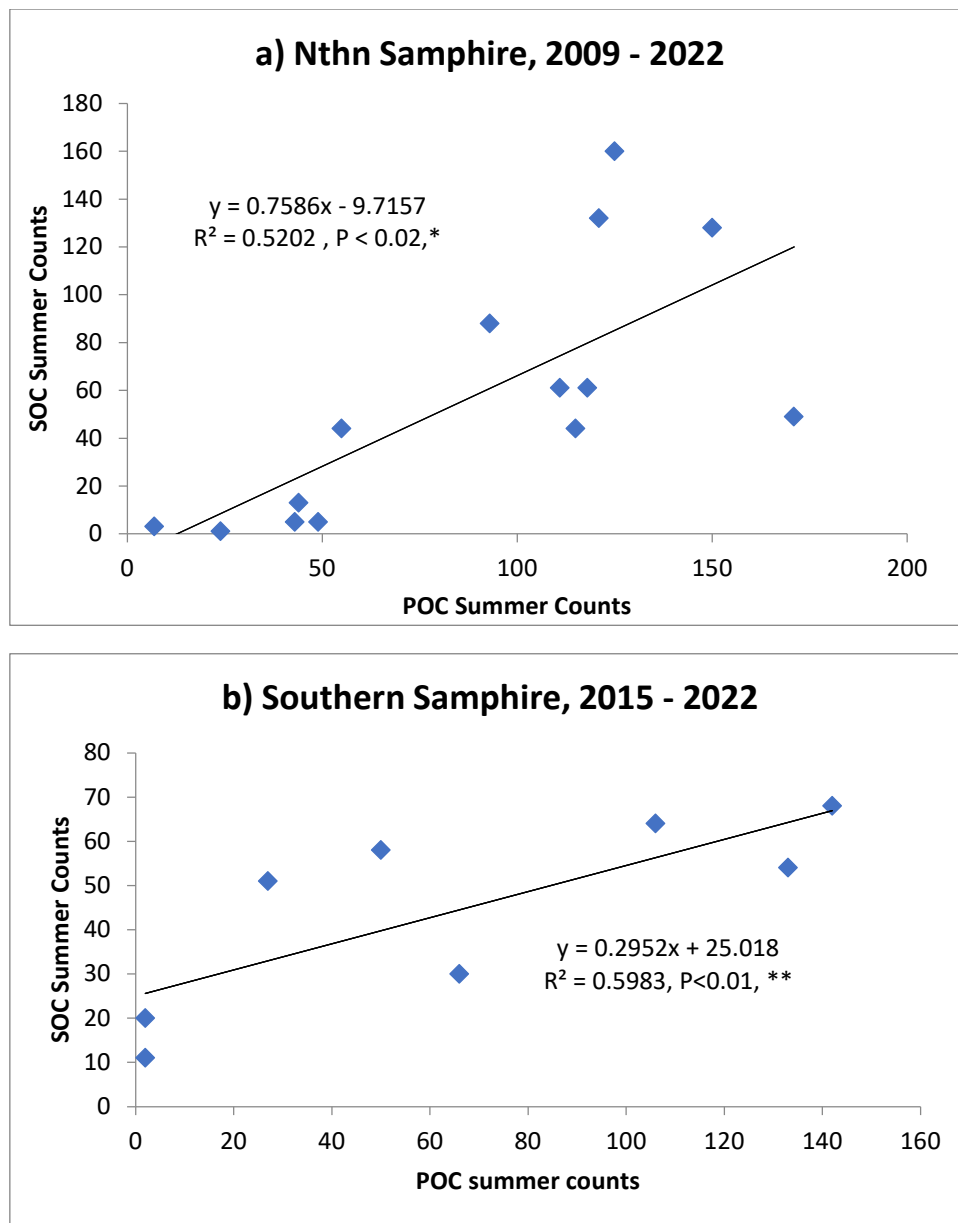
In past newsletters, we've focussed our observations in the southern Samphire from Semaphore Breakwater to St. Kilda and including the whole of the Port River. In this newsletter, we extend our information to include the northern Samphire, taking in the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary, Bald Hill and round to Port Clinton (approx. 100 km). In this last year, using the Birdata for Nthn Samphire and adding our own Sthn Samphire data, we're now able to construct a good picture of numbers over the whole Samphire coast. Figs. 3a & b show the counts of POC and SOC's, respectively, for these last 8 months (July'21 – Feb'22).



Figs. 3a & b: Cumulative Max. Counts of a) Pied and b) Sooty Oystercatchers for Sthn and Nthn Samphire regions, July, 2021 – Feb, 2022.

There are seasonal similarities in counts for the two species, with numbers increasing since December and this was happening in both regions. On average, POC numbers were higher than for SOC (POC mean 99.8, SOC mean 51.8). POCs in the sthn Samphire mainly occurred on Bird Island (Outer Harbour) and within the Port River at Gillman. In the nthn Samphire, high counts occurred at Thompson Beach, Port Prime and the Light River delta. SOC's were mainly found at St. Kilda, Bird Island and the Port Clinton sites, with relatively few within the Port River.

Inspection of summer (Jan, Feb) counts for longer-term data (2009 – 2020) for the Nthn Samphire, reported in Lees et al (2020), and combined with the more recent Birdata (2021, 22), we now observe some interesting tendencies for both species. For example, in years when high numbers of POCs were observed, high numbers of SOC also occurred in the same area, and the correlations were statistically significant (Figs. 4a & b). This was relevant for both Nthn and Sthn Samphire areas.



Figs. 4 a & b: Summer counts of Pied Oystercatchers and Sooty Oystercatchers in a) Northern and b) Southern Samphire areas.

(Note: data available for northern Samphire area is for 2009 – 2022, and for southern Samphire area from 2015 to 2022).

Furthermore, for POCs, we see that in years when their summer counts were relatively high in the northern Samphire, they were significantly lower further south ($r = 0.5914, P < 0.05$). Similarly, when SOC counts in the northern samphire were relatively high, numbers in the southern Samphire were significantly lower ($r = 0.6580, P < 0.05$).

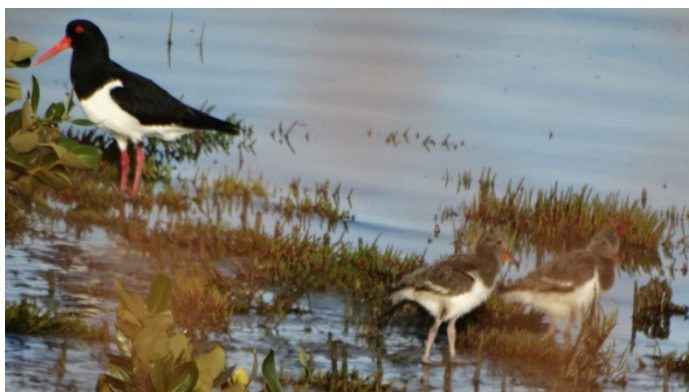
Our observations in these two areas suggest a common environmental factor linking both areas and species, possibly relating to the birds ability to locate optimum foraging habitats in different years, and that the birds are able move between the two areas. Tracking the movements of flagged/banded birds would test this hypothesis.

Finally, according to the International RAMSAR convention, that if an area of wetland has more than 1% of a species’ global population, the area should be deemed as an area of high importance. The most recent published information for the global population sizes of POCs and SOCs (Taylor et al, 2014; Hansen et al, 2014) are 13,000 and 11,000, respectively. The summer count data for both species of Oystercatchers in this Samphire coast indicate that for a high proportion of years between 2015 and 2022, the criteria have been reached (see table below, marked * for the summer when over 1 % of global population was observed).

Year	Summer max. counts of Pied Oystercatcher (* > 130 birds)	Summer max. counts of Sooty Oystercatcher (* > 110 birds)
2015	197 *	112 *
2016	150 *	77
2017	226 *	142 *
2018	216 *	158 *
2019	117	64
2020	123	143 *
2021	138 *	112 *
2022	221 *	107

Observations on breeding activity of Pied Oystercatchers in the Samphire area.

In past years, breeding and nesting activities have been reported in the northern Samphire area, including the sabkhas (high salinity marshes) at northern Thompsons Beach and in the Port Gawler Conservation Park. This year, reports of breeding in the southern Samphire area were received from Bird Island (offshore from Outer Harbour) (Fairy Tern Monitoring Group), and on the western side of Torrens Island. “Scoping” along the western shore of Torrens Island, a pair of young POC chicks (“fluffy balls”) closely attended by parents, was observed in November, 2021. Almost a month later, Park Ranger Darren Kennedy photographed the same pair of chicks, still with an attendant parent (Dec 2, 2022). (See photo, below). Late in January, 2022, both parents and the now 2 fledged young birds were still seen on the island. It is pleasing to see that the young birds had successfully progressed through the most vulnerable stage of their lives.



A pair of POC chicks with a vigilant parent at Western Torrens Island, Dec 2, 2021.
Photo: Darren Kennedy

Although young SOCs, still with black tips to their bills, are seen on different parts of the Sapphire coast, including St. Kilda and Thompsons Beach, it's still uncertain from where they had been reared by their parents.

KANGAROO ISLAND

2021/2022 Pied Oystercatcher Breeding Season on Kangaroo Island

Dave Potter and Jean Turner

Fifty sites were monitored during this breeding season, up from 37 last year. Nine new sites were discovered and were monitored intensively after being found. Cape Rouge Beach, Cygnet River Estuary and Nepean Bay West were monitored more intensively this year so that all previously known sites were monitored at least 8 times during the breeding season, exceptions being D'Estrees Bay (4 times) and Antechamber Bay (3 times). The first clutch was noted on the 18th of August while the last was recorded on the 19th of November. All sites were monitored throughout summer to follow the progress of chicks and to capture any late breeding attempts. A number of eggs laid were recorded as 'unknown' if the nest was in an inaccessible site or fluffy chicks discovered at some sites with no nest previously found. Chicks were recorded as 'suspect' when adult behaviour indicated presence of hidden chicks.

2021 / 2022	Total Eggs Laid	Total no. Chicks Hatched	Total no. of Fledglings	No. of attempts
Site				
Christmas Cove	2	0	0	1
American Beach	2	2	2	1
Baudin Beach	4	0	0	2
Browns Beach				
Site 1	0	0	0	0
Site 2	unknown	1	1	1
Site 3	1	0	0	1
Island Beach				
Site1	2	2	0	2
Site 2	4	0	0	2
Site 3	4	1	1	2
Site 4	4	0	0	2
Site 5	4	0	0	2
Site 6	1	0	0	1
Site 7	0	0	0	0
Site 8	2	1	1	1
Site9	4	0	0	2
Site 10	2	0	0	1
Site 11	1	0	0	1
Site 12	2	0	0	1
Site 13	0	0	0	0
Strawbridge Point Beach				
Site 1	2	0	0	1

Site 2	4	1	0	2
American River				
Site 1(new)	unknown	1	0	1
Site 2	4	0	0	2
Site 3	0	0	0	0
Site 4	2	0	0	1
Site 5	5	0	0	3
Nepean Bay Esplanade West				
Site 1	2	0	0	1
Site 2	1	0	0	1
Site 3(new)	unknown	suspect	0	1
Cygnnet River Estuary				
Site 1 (new)	2	unknown	0	1
Site 2	2	0	0	1
Site 3	2	suspect	0	1
Kingscote Bay of Shoals				
Site 1(new)	3	1	0	2
Site 2	4	2	1	2
Site 3	2	1	1	1
Site 4	0	0	0	0
North Cape Road Beaches				
Site 1(new)	2	2	0	1
Site 2(new)	2	0	0	1
Site 3(new)	2	1	0	1
Site 4(new)	4	0	0	2
Cape Rouge Beach				
Site 1	4	2	0	2
Site 2(new)	0	0	0	0
Site 3	3	1	0	2
Site 4	2	0	0	1
Site 5	4	0	0	2
Site 6	5	0	0	3
D'Estrees Bay				
Site 1	unknown	suspect	0	1
Site 2	2	unknown	0	1
Site 3	unknown	1	0	1
Antechamber Bay-south				
	0	0	0	0

The next table is an overall summary of breeding effort for the general areas monitored. For Brown's Beach if only 1 egg was laid at the second site this would give an overall breeding success of 50%. If the maximum of 3 eggs were laid at the second site this would lead to a breeding success of 25%.

	2021/2022			
Area	Total Eggs Laid / Area	No of Chicks/ Area	No of Fledglings/ Area	% Fledged /eggs Laid
Christmas Cove	2	0	0	0
American Beach	2	2	2	100
Baudin Beach	4	0	0	0
Browns Beach	1+unknown	1	1	25 to 50
Island Beach	30	4	2	6.7
Strawbridge Point Beach	6	1	0	0
American River	10+unknown	1	0	0
Nepean Bay West	3+unknown	unknown	0	0
Kingscote Bay of Shoals	9	4	2	22.2
Cygnets River Estuary	6	unknown	0	0
North Cape Rd Beaches	10	3	0	0
Cape Rouge Beach	18	3	0	0
D'Estrees Bay	2+unknown	1	0	0
Antechamber Bay	0	0	0	0
Total	103 minimum	18 minimum	7	
%		17.5%		6.80%

Thus for 50 nests monitored, a minimum of 103 eggs observed gave rise to 7 fledglings. This is very poor compared to the last two seasons. In 2020/2021, 73 observed eggs gave rise to 22 fledglings (breeding success rate of 30.1%) while in 2019/2020, 46 observed eggs gave rise to 17 fledglings (breeding success rate of 37%).



'a) Pied Oystercatcher nest in sea grass beach wrack with brooding adult at Bay of Shoals, and b) adult and juvenile Pied Oystercatcher at Browns Beach (November, 2021).
Both photos: Jean Turner

While in previous years causes of breeding failures were occasionally noted, this breeding season we attempted to quantify causes.

Cause of Breeding Failure	No.
Bird predation	2
Death or displacement of partner	2
Goanna	6
Human Disturbance	5
Washed Away	18
Unknown	21

High tides with or without storms were the major cause of failure throughout the breeding season. Failure due to human disturbance occurs mid to later in the breeding season. Four years of data at Island Beach suggests that if there is a low frequency of storm surges during the first disturbances associated with long weekends and school holidays increases and before goanna activity begins. Potential for failure due to human disturbance however has vastly increased over the last one and half years due to increased numbers of visitors, increased illegal driving on the beaches, large groups of people spending long hours under beach shelters in proximity to nests, dogs off lead (majority), camping and use of drones.

Cape Rouge Beach has now been fenced off from stock so the risk of sheep trampling eggs or chicks has been eliminated. Human disturbance was minimal. It is interesting to note that breeding success here (zero) was the same as the adjoining area of North Cape Road beaches, which has the same aspect but with high human-related disturbance such as dogs, driving on beaches, camping, fishing etc. However several Red-capped Plover pairs (which were not seen along North Cape Road beaches) did successfully hatch chicks along Cape Rouge Beach. We have noticed along Cape Rouge beach that Red-capped Plovers nest higher up the beach profile than the Pied Oystercatchers, so that Red-capped Plover nests are less prone to being washed away here. The pair of Pied Oystercatchers that have nested previously in the adjoining paddock at Cape Rouge Beach had their first clutch once again in the paddock. This nest failed and the pair appeared to judge the beach was now safe so the second clutch was laid there. Unfortunately this subsequent nest, like several others, got washed away.



Rosenberg’s Goanna at Western Nepean Bay, the cause of a Pied Oystercatcher nest failure. (November, 2021). This last season, Goannas were estimated at causing more than 18% of recorded nest failures.

Photo: David Potter

An interesting phenomenon was seen at one of the territories at Nepean Bay Esplanade West. When we arrived at the nest site, the eggs were gone and a Rosenberg's Goanna was close by being harassed by two very distressed Pied Oystercatchers. Their constant calling brought the adjacent pair, who were feeding in their own territory, to their aid and both pairs joined forces to drive the goanna off, albeit slowly. The neighbouring pair then returned to their own territory.

It was interesting to note that two birds from different pairs that lost their partners in the relatively early part of the season never re-partnered during the rest of the season. Christmas Cove territory has seen two deaths due to vehicle strikes in the last two years, probably during high winds. The birds there often feed on grassy roadside verges or the golf-course across the road. This year's death occurred one or two days before their eggs were due to hatch, but the surviving bird had lost interest. The second bird lost this year was the bird banded as a runner in 1987 and has been observed in the same territory since 2006 when we first began visiting Island Beach regularly. It had successfully raised many chicks. The cause of death is unknown, but may have been due to a passing White-Bellied Sea-Eagle (these often cruise by), a feral cat, or attack by a wandering local dog known to kill chooks.

The next table shows the diversity of choices for nest sites. The majority of nest sites that we monitor occur on sandy beaches and deep seagrass wrack though it can be seen a diverse range of habitats can be used. From data collected over several years a pair in a particular territory has a preferred nesting site, though many pairs are flexible enough to vary their sites within the season if required. Also some territories may be affected by sea level rises induced by the effects of climate change and are now marginal and may only allow breeding in particular years.

Nest Sites	Attempt 1	Attempt 2	Attempt 3	Total
Grassy Paddock or Grassy Roadside	2			2
Building Site	0			0
Sandy Beach	11	7	1	19
Chernier	6	2		8
Dune	3	1		4
Foredune	3	2		5
Island	1			1
Rocky cliffs/groyne	2			2
Salt Pan	1			1
Samphire (amongst or just above)	4	2		6
Wrack	8		1	9
Unknown	4			4
Total Attempts	45	14	2	61
Territories with no attempt	7			7

Sooty Oystercatcher Notes

Kingscote Boat Ramp Rocky Groyne

When we first started monitoring oystercatchers at Reeves Point, both Pied Oystercatchers and Sooty Oystercatchers used to roost there in high numbers at high tide. However the Pied Oystercatchers became aggressive at very high tides when birds were very compressed together with both one another and the Sooty Oystercatchers. In the last few years the Sooty Oystercatchers moved to the rock groyne at the Kingscote Bay of Shoals boat ramp. Here they were not harassed by the Pied Oystercatchers and were able to shelter from the wind no matter what direction the wind blew. Boat comings and goings did not disturb them much. In the last year, Council has made a path on top of the groyne thereby allowing fishers to walk out to fish safely from the top of the rocks. The continued disturbance by people has moved this roosting flock to another location. There has not been an associated increase in Sooty Oystercatchers roosting at Cape Rouge Beach at high tide so their new roosting location is unknown at present.

Feeding Young

A Sooty Oystercatcher nest was found east of the rocky headland at Pennington Bay on Kangaroo Island's south coast. The nest was on a very small pinnacle of an island the top of which was somewhat flattened with a small rocky cave or overhang. Two eggs were laid in a nest underneath this overhang. Any observation by necessity was done looking down from high cliffs at some distance. Any photographs taken were at maximum zoom to get only fair images. The pair fly west into Pennington Bay to feed as any portion of the small rocky platform exposed around the island is subject to rough seas. Judging by the adult's behaviour, chicks did hatch but were not observed; further surveys did not reveal the presence of any chicks. The chicks at this stage were totally cut off by the sea. They may have been washed away. Alternatively potential predators seen in the area were White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Nankeen Kestrel, Pacific Gull and a Hobby which was alerted by the cries of one adult SOC and came to seriously investigate. We were unsure whether we were to blame for the SOC cries but after the Hobby had left we witnessed an incubation changeover.

Twice while monitoring a Hooded Plover nest east of Pennington Bay a Sooty Oystercatcher that had been feeding on the western rocky platform of the beach suddenly took off and flew past me with food in its bill and disappeared around the eastern rocky headland. We surmised that it was taking food to some chicks.

No chick would have been able to forage at the first site mentioned above and by observations at the second site it would appear that Sooty Oystercatcher chicks (in some locations at least) may have to be fed until they are fledged.

Odd Couples

Three years ago Site 1 at Browns Beach was held by a pair of Pied Oystercatchers which successfully raised one fledgling. Since then the territory has been occupied by an "odd

couple” – a Pied Oystercatcher and a Sooty Oystercatcher which have formed a bond. At this stage no attempt at breeding has been recorded.

Since the death of the banded bird at Island Beach, this territory has been taken over also by an odd couple. We are at this stage assuming it is another mixed couple however only simultaneous observations at the two sites will confirm this.

John Matheson in November while undertaking environmental work on Pig Islet in Pelican Lagoon also observed a mixed couple. Unfortunately we have not had the time to further investigate this. Access is only by kayak and stranding with the low tide is a distinct possibility.

Dale Arnott while leading a tour group on the Coral Adventurer to visit various South Australian Islands also noticed a mixed couple at Troubridge Island which she thought may have been breeding.

Collins, Jessop, Minton and Graham (1999) mentions several cases of mixed species pairs of Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers, with breeding occurring in some pairs (eggs recorded) and observation of a possible hybrid at Mud Island in Port Phillip Bay.

Why does this occur when there are large numbers of flocking non-breeding Pied Oystercatchers close by?



The Odd Couple at Browns Beach,
Kangaroo Island, October, 2019

Photo: Ann Houghton

FOUNDATION FOR SA SHOREBIRDS (www.sashorebirds.org).

During 2021/22, researchers and community groups were supported through 4 grants from the Foundation. Although not all projects have direct significance to Oystercatchers, it's believed that all results can have meaningful implications for future research and management on Oystercatchers. The grants include:

1. Foraging Ecology of Red-capped Plovers in the Coorong. Katelyn Markos, Honours Project, University of Adelaide.
2. Oystercatcher presence and behaviour on a popular recreational beach. Emma Vanderzon, Honours project, Flinders University.
3. Hoodies on display – inspiring Conservation. Dr. Meg Cullen, Birdlife Australia. (Arts and education project for Yorke Peninsula, SA).
4. Engaging remote South Australians in the National Beach-Nesting Bird Conference, Moonta, Yorke Peninsula, May, 2022. Dr. Kasun Ekanayake, Birdlife Australia.

The results of these projects will be posted on the SA Shorebirds web-site (www.sashorebirds.org). Anyone or any community group interested in undertaking future projects can contact me, Keith Jones (docjones@bigpond.net.au). Also, application guidelines are on the web-site.

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