

# TEAM OYSTERCATCHER NEWSLETTER No. 10. March, 2024



**Welcome to the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of Team Oystercatcher Newsletter for March, 2024 !**

In this edition, our regional reports from volunteers are once again presented. This is followed by two articles about Oystercatcher banding; a new banding project on Pied Oystercatchers (POC) on Kangaroo Island, and SA mainland re-sightings of banded POCs during 2023/24. We also report on the launch in February'24 of the new Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth (CLLMM) Research Centre, based at Goolwa, which has implications for future research and citizen scientific monitoring of Pied Oystercatchers in this region. Finally, we update news on SA Shorebird Foundation Grants that are being undertaken in 2023/24.

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## 1. REGIONAL NEWS

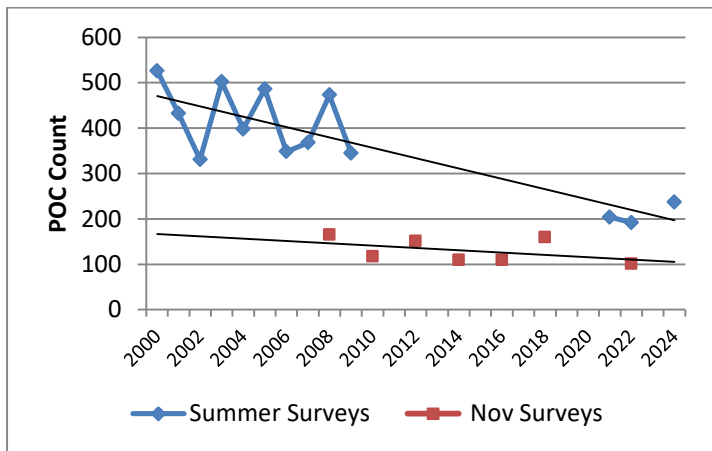
**1a. Coorong – Ocean Beach** Early in 2024, 2 shorebird surveys were conducted by Friends of Shorebirds South East (FOSSE) volunteers, with the assistance of Coorong National Parks Rangers, along 100 km of the Coorong Ocean Beach (Young-husband Peninsula) between Tea-Tree Crossing and the Murray Mouth. The first count was done on Jan 25, 2024 and the second, a fortnight later, on February 8, 2024. Tallies of 263 and 211 Pied Oystercatchers (POCs) were made for the two respective surveys and for Sooty Oystercatchers (SOCs), counts of 0 (zero) and 66, respectively.

Numbers of POCs along this Ocean Beach are traditionally higher than for SOCs, however, the large variation in counts of Sooty Oystercatchers is interesting. SOCs tend to congregated near the mouth of the Murray, whereas POCs occur along the whole of the beach, either in breeding pairs or in small flocks (Fig.1).

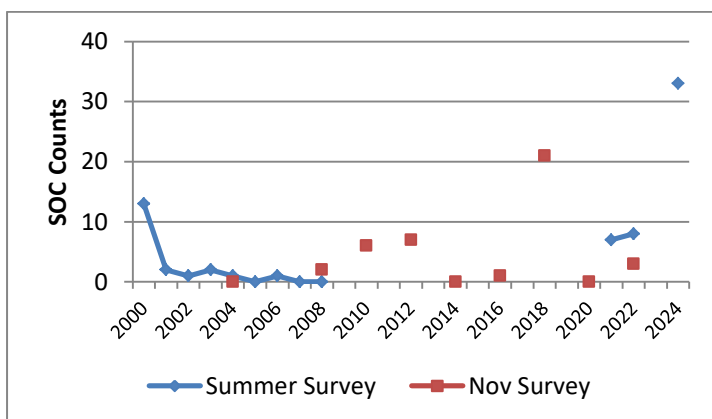
We now have 2 sets of long-term data (2000 – 2024) on Oystercatchers along this Ocean Beach; the Summer surveys (Jan / Feb 2000 – 2008, 2021 – 2024) and the Biennial Hooded Plover Surveys (November, 2008 – 2022). Early data for summer counts (2000 – 2008) were obtained from Wainwright & Christie (2008) and the November survey data are reported in Birdlife Australia’s Hooded Plover Biennial Survey Reports (Adams & McGuire, 2020). Both these surveys show downward trends in numbers of POCs (Chart 1), with a steeper trend in the summer survey.



**Fig. 1.** Small flock of POCs at Coorong Ocean Beach, Birdlife Australia Shorebird count, January, 2021. Photo: K. Jones



**Chart 1:** Trends in POC numbers on the Coorong Ocean Beach, for the summer (2000 – 2024) and November (2008 – 2022) surveys (data collected by Birdlife Australia and FOSSE) Note, no Summer survey done in 2023 due to forecasted catastrophic weather restrictions.



**Chart 2.** Numbers of SOCs from Summer (blue) and November (maroon) Ocean Beach Surveys, 2000 – 2022.

Note, both in the two charts, the POC and SOC counts for 2024 are the mean of the two surveys done in 2024, whereas all other points are from sole surveys done in a particular year. It is difficult to discern any temporal trend in numbers of SOCs from either survey (Chart 2). In some years, numbers are quite high (eg November, 2018 & Jan/Feb, 2024), and there are other years, when SOCs were not counted at all (eg Nov, 2014, Jan/Feb, 2005, 2007 & 2008). A good example of the variability is the different counts of 0 and 66 in 2024, two weeks apart.

With the downward trends in POCs it is critical to maintain a monitoring program for this area, as well as investigate possible reasons for the continuing decline in these numbers. The possible causes are endless, including predation by feral animals (foxes, feral cats), more human disturbance due to the increase in popularity of ORVs, environmental changes (more storm surges at the POC nesting times) or changes in food availability, forcing the birds to move elsewhere.

The 2024 summer count of Oystercatchers within the Coorong Lagoon was done late in February, and the results and long-term trends for this part of the Coorong will be reported in the next Newsletter.

**1b. SE Fleurieu coast** Since the first surveys in 2011/12 between Middleton Point and the Murray Mouth Estuary, we continue to observe large seasonal fluctuations in numbers of both POCs and SOCs, especially along the Goolwa and Middleton Ocean Beaches. Since the 2022 Murray floods, which resulted in relatively high numbers of especially POCs on the ocean beaches, numbers have dropped significantly by 80%, especially during the spring and summer months of 2023/24. For SOCs, numbers in this current year have also dropped by 50 % compared with 2022/23. Interestingly, the numbers of both species within the estuary are currently (2023/24) higher than for the same period in 2022/23. A full report of the fluctuations in their numbers throughout 2023/24 will be presented in the next Newsletter in Sept, 2024.

In recent years, both species have been reported by volunteers to the west of Middleton Point and as far as Waitpinga Beach. These observations have been made both on the mainland coast as well as adjacent islands. SOCs are the main species observed at mainland sites, including Bashams Beach, Watson's Gap, Encounter Bay and Victor Harbor. POCs have occasionally been reported from Victor Harbor and Waitpinga Beach. SOCs are exclusive to the adjacent offshore islands, with breeding pairs of SOCs and chicks reported on Granite Island in 2022 and 2023 (Fig. 2) and more recently, on Seal Rocks in January, February, 2024. SOCs are regularly reported in small numbers on the Pullen Islands, offshore from Port Elliot.



**Fig. 2: Family of Sooty Oystercatchers on Granite Island.** Juvenile is at the upper right, with black colour to its bill-tip and pale feet. Adult male (centre) has a shorter bill than the female (lower) Photo: R. Shirlaw, November, 2023

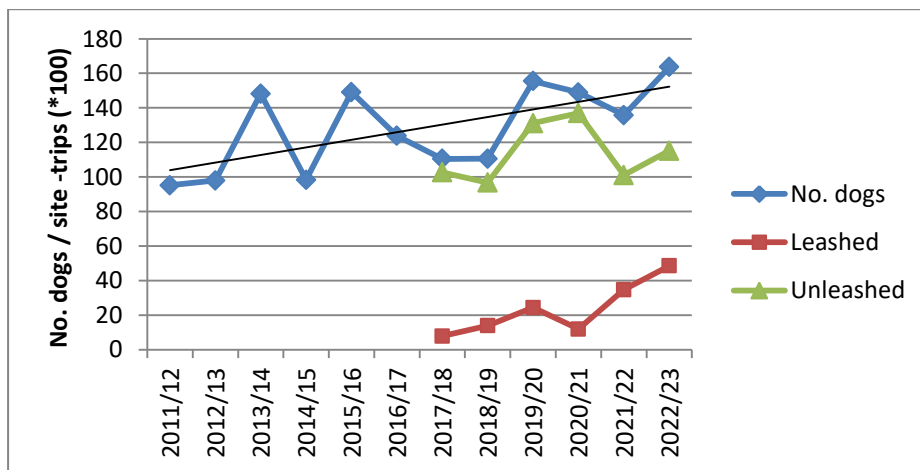
Breeding pairs of POCs have rarely been observed on the SE Fleurieu coast; however, in this current breeding season (2023/24), Kerri Bartley (Birdlife Australia's Fleurieu coastal bird coordinator) has

seen a scrape with two eggs on the spit just east of the Murray Mouth and near the Fairy Tern breeding colony (Fig. 3). Back, two years ago, a pair of POC eggs was observed on the sand spit on Bird Island, immediately inside the Mouth; however, in both cases, on returning to the sites, no eggs were observed, suggesting that either predators or human disturbances may have caused their disappearances. Adult Pacific Gulls, Ravens and the tracks of feral foxes have been observed at these sites. It should be noted that over the past 12 years, no breeding by POCs nor SOCs have been reported along the Goolwa and Middleton ocean beaches.



**Fig. 3.** A pair of Pied Oystercatcher eggs in a scrape on the spit, east of the Murray Mouth, Young-husband Peninsula, Coorong. Note prints of adult Pied Oystercatchers around the scrape. Photo: K. Bartley, November, 2023

Finally, in addition to counting the Oystercatchers on the SE Fleurieu, other parameters have been regularly monitored, including numbers of beach walkers, pipi gatherers, Off-road vehicles (ORVs) and dogs (on and off leashes). The long-term data on counts of dogs, on and off their leashes provide some interesting observations (Chart 3).



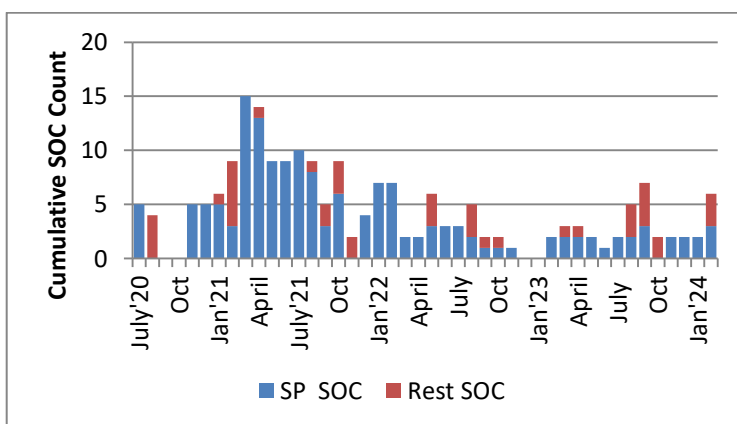
**Chart 3:** Increasing total numbers of Dogs counted on the Ocean Beaches (2011/12 – 2022/23), and since 2017/18, the numbers of dogs on and off leashes. (Survey methods of these beaches are described in previous newsletters.)

Over all the years, the total numbers of dogs on the beaches has trended upwards (blue line), and since 2017/18, the numbers of leashed dogs (maroon line) has also increased, whereas, the numbers of unleashed dogs has remained about the same (green line) over the same period. Without interviewing the dog walkers, especially those with leashed dogs, it is difficult to fully explain these different trends. However, it should be noted that in recent years, with the increasing presence of breeding pairs of Hooded Plovers (HP) on the Middleton and western Goolwa Beaches, more educational signage and the fencing of breeding areas, the dog walkers are likely to be more aware of the need to protect beach-nesting shorebirds.



**Fig. 4.** Small flock of resting POCs, Murray Mouth Estuary. June, 2018. Photo: K. Jones

**1 c. Western Fleurieu coast.** Volunteers from Team Oystercatcher and BNB Hooded Plover groups monitor Oystercatchers on the rocks and beaches between Fishery Beach (near Cape Jervis) in the south to Marino Rocks in the north. SOC's are the more numerous Oystercatcher species on this part of the Fleurieu coastline, with POCs only occasionally reported. The site where highest numbers of SOC's have been seen is at Snapper Point (Aldinga Aquatic Reserve) (Chart 4).



**Chart 4:** Cumulative monthly numbers of SOC's reported on the western Fleurieu coast at Snapper Point (Blue) and the rest of the coast (red) between July, 2020 and February, 2024. Note: The figures represent maximum counts in each month.

Other sites where SOC's have been observed include Fishery Beach (near Cape Jervis), Stoney Beach just south of Lady Bay, Carrickalinga Beach, Blanche Point, Ochre Point, Onkaparinga River mouth,

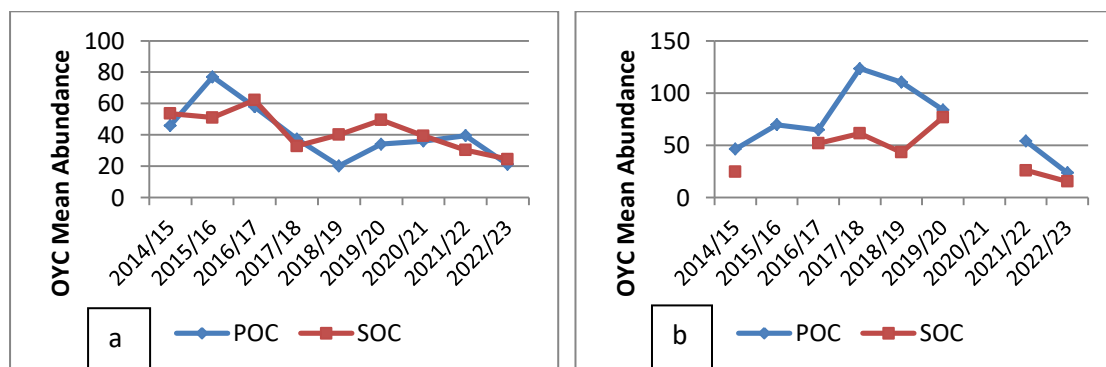
Halletts Cove, O’Sullivan’s Beach and Marino Rocks. It can be seen that since early 2022, the number of sightings of SOCs at Snapper Point has dropped, however, the small numbers of sightings for the rest of the western Fleurieu has remained at about the same. It is unclear the reason for the drop in numbers of SOCs at Snapper Point, as data on the average numbers of walkers and dogs (leashed and unleashed) is lower in the later period (Table 1). The average numbers of un-leashed dogs has been higher than leashed dogs by 81 % during both survey periods. These figures may be representative for weekdays, but not for weekends or public holidays, when numbers of walkers and dogs are notably higher, as observed for other SA beaches.

**Table 1: Average numbers of walkers, leashed and unleashed dogs at Snapper Point during periods of relatively high numbers of SOCs (March, 2021 – Feb, 2022) and lower numbers of SOCs (March, 2022 – January, 2024). Note: all surveys are carried out fortnightly on Wednesdays mornings.**

| Survey Period           | Number of surveys | Average No. Walkers / Survey | No. Leashed Dogs / Survey | No. Unleashed Dogs / survey |
|-------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| March, 2021 – Feb, 2022 | 31                | 3.42                         | 0.45                      | 2.00                        |
| March, 2022 – Jan, 2024 | 52                | 2.27                         | 0.33                      | 1.42                        |

On the Western Fleurieu, POCs are much rarer than SOCs, with a total of 8 birds reported since July, 2020. Single pairs of adult POCs have been reported from Sellicks Beach in June’ 2021 and at Snapper Point in November, 2022 and September 2023, respectively, as well as individual birds observed at O’Sullivan’s Beach and Carrickalinga Beach.

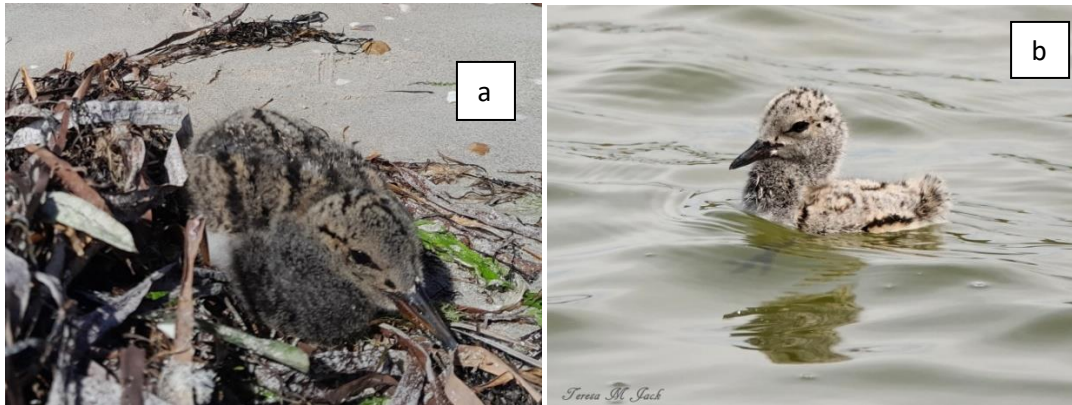
**1 d. The Samphire Coast.** We have divided the Samphire coast into two parts: Southern Samphire, including Semaphore, North Haven, all the Port River, Bird Island and St. Kilda, and the Northern Samphire, including Port Gawler, Light River delta, Port Prime, Thompsons Beach, Port Parham, Bald Hill, Port Clinton and Price Saltfields. Based on data reported since 2014/15 (Lees et al, 2020) and more recent data collected by DP, JT, KJ, and the many volunteers who report their observations on Birdata (Birdlife Australia), we are now able to piece together annual trends in numbers of POCs and SOCs in each region.



**Charts 5 a & b:** Trends in mean annual abundance of POCs (Blue) and SOCs (Maroon) in A, Southern Samphire and B, Northern Samphire coasts, 2014/15 – 2022/23. Note, there are no data in B for SOCs in 2015/16 and POCs and SOCs in 2020/21.

For the Southern Samphire coast there have been significant declines for both species, especially since 2017/18, occurring mainly within the Port River ecosystem (central Port River: Gillman,

Snowdens Beach and SW Torrens Island). In the Northern Samphire area, declines have also been seen, especially in the last two years, but, the overall declines since 2014/15 have not been as severe for the Southern Samphire. In the first six months of 2023/24, these declines were still apparent in both parts of the Samphire coast. During the 2023 breeding season, POC chicks have been reported from Bird Island (Outer Harbour) and Price Salt fields (Figs. 5 a & b) and almost fledged POCs at the Price Salt fields (Fig. 6).



**Figs. 5 a & b:** Pied Oystercatcher Chicks at a: Bird Island (Outer Harbor) October, 2023. (photo: G. Johnson) and b: Price salt fields November, 2023. (photo: T. Jack).

**Fig. 6:** Adult and almost fledged juvenile Pied Oystercatchers at Price Salt fields, November, 2023 (photo: T. Jack).



**1.e. Kangaroo Island Report By David Potter and Jean Turner.**

**1.e.i. Results of the 2023/24 Breeding season for Pied Oystercatchers.**

**Summary of Pied Oystercatcher Pairs Monitored in 2023/2024**

A total of 78 Pied Oystercatcher breeding sites, including Peter Hastwell’s 5 sites on Min Oil Beach, were monitored this season, up from 69 breeding sites last season. Bales Beach and Hanson Bay were only able to be monitored twice this season. Vivonne Bay was monitored three times and D’Estrees Bay five times. All other sites were monitored 8 or more times this season, generally every 10 to 14 days. A new site at Nepean Bay Esplanade East was monitored 4 times and three sites at Dover Farm in the Bay of Shoals west of Kingscote were only discovered in February 2024 and monitored twice. Peter Hastwell regularly monitored five sites along Min Oil Beach. Jane Renwick provided some information on two of the American River sites while Mike Haby supplied information on the Emu Bay site. Wren Lashmar submitted an observation for the Cape Rouge Beach Paddock site when we were unable to keep up. Breeding results for each pair monitored are provided further below under Pied Oystercatcher Breeding Site Results.

## Summary of 2023/2024 Results

|                          | 2023/2024 |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| Pairs Monitored          | 78        |
| Clutches Laid            | 84        |
| Eggs Laid                | 143 min.  |
| Chicks Hatched           | 31        |
| Chicks Fledged           | 22        |
| %Chicks/No. of Eggs      | 21.7%     |
| % Fledglings/No. of Eggs | 15.4%     |

The actual number of eggs laid is an approximation as 2 sites were inaccessible to check, being high up in dunes; some nest sites were only discovered after being predated upon; and the Dover Farm sites were only discovered very late in the season.

## Pied Oystercatcher Breeding Effort for each area in 2023/2024

| Breeding Area (2023/2024)              | Total Eggs Laid/Area | No. Chicks/Area | No. Fledglings/Area | No. Pairs |
|--|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------|
| Christmas Cove                         | 0                    | 0               | 0                   | 1         |
| American Beach                         | 4                    | 0               | 0                   | 1         |
| Baudin Beach                           | 2                    | 1               | 1                   | 1         |
| Brown Beach                            | unknown              | 0               | 0                   | 3         |
| Island Beach                           | 29                   | 6               | 4                   | 13        |
| Strawbridge Point Beach                | 8                    | 1               | 0                   | 2         |
| American River                         | 10                   | 4               | 3                   | 4         |
| Nepean Bay West                        | 6                    | 0               | 0                   | 4         |
| Nepean Bay-Min Oil Rd                  | 13                   | 2               | 2                   | 8         |
| Nepean Bay-Min Oil Rd - Peter Hastwell | 7 at least           | 1               | 1                   | 5         |
| Brownlow                               | 7                    | 4               | 3                   | 3         |
| Kingscote-Bay of Shoals                | 10                   | 2               | 2                   | 4         |
| Dover Farm                             | Unknown (at least 1) | 1               | 1                   | 3         |
| Cygnets River Estuary                  | 4                    | 2               | 1                   | 3         |
| North Cape Road                        | 13 at least          | 2               | 2                   | 5         |
| Cape Rouge Beach                       | 10                   | 2               | 1                   | 7         |
| Emu Bay-Beach 2 (Mike Haby)            | Unknown 2 at least   | 2               | ?                   | 1         |
| D'Estrees Bay                          | 13                   | 1               | 1                   | 8         |
| Bales Beach                            | 2 at least           | unknown         | unknown             | 1         |
| Vivonne Bay                            | 0                    | 0               | 0                   | 1         |
| Hanson Bay                             | 0                    | 0               | 0                   | 1         |
| Antechamber Bay                        | 2                    | 0               | 0                   | 1         |
| <b>Total</b>                           | 143 (minimum)        | 31 (minimum)    | 22                  | 78        |
| <b>%Chicks Hatched/No. of Eggs</b>     |                      | <b>21.7%</b>    |                     |           |
| <b>%Fledglings/No. of Eggs</b>         |                      |                 | <b>15.4%</b>        |           |



A lot of breeding effort went into producing 22 fledglings. All areas suffered from some storm-driven high tides causing clutch loss. A large number of pairs (18 of 78) did not attempt nesting at all, perhaps due to inadequate nutrition for egg-laying associated with the storms, or because their normal nest-laying habitat was not available. A few pairs were flexible enough to choose alternative sites. However, some sites are marginal for breeding even in good seasons.

### **Causes of Breeding Failure**

Where possible the authors recorded disturbances and cause of breeding failure for each clutch or brood they monitored. Causes of breeding failure in 2023/2024 are listed below, using the same categories as previous breeding seasons.

| <b>Cause of Breeding Failure</b>         | <b>2023/2024</b> |
|--|------------------|
| Bird predation                           | 0                |
| Death or displacement of 1 partner       | 0                |
| Displacement by a POC+SOC pair           | 0                |
| Goanna                                   | 8                |
| Human disturbance (nest driven over)     | 1                |
| Washed away                              | 14               |
| Unknown                                  | 31               |
| Death of chicks                          | 10               |
| No breeding attempt                      | 18               |
| Sheep Trampling                          | 1                |
| Dune Collapse                            | 2                |
| Infertile eggs (incubated but unhatched) | 2                |

A high number of the breeding failures have an unknown cause. Some of this may be a result of the less than ideal period between monitoring (10 to 14 day intervals). Weekly intervals would be much better for detecting causes of failure. However, we monitor as often as physically possible for the number and distribution of breeding pairs. The chances of seeing traces of animal predation (bird/reptile/mammal), and observing losses due to tidal inundation decrease with time due to covering of nests by wind-blown sand.

Tidal inundation and goanna predation have been major threats this season as in the past several years. However, as mentioned above, losses to goannas may be underestimated. Goanna predation is particularly high early in the season when the goannas first become active and comb the fore-dunes and beaches for food (washed up carcasses etc.). Later in the season goannas seem to spend more time in the bush than on beaches.

Potential mammal predators of eggs and chicks include feral cats, mice, rats and possums. While the cat eradication program has vastly reduced the number of cats on the Dudley Peninsula, they are still a problem on other parts of the island as indicated by occasional prints on the beach and dunes. Possum prints and occasionally rat and mice prints are also seen near nests in some locations.

Passerine egg and chick predators such as Australian Magpies, Grey Currawongs and Raven species frequent the beaches foraging for food. In fact Ravens have been seen feeding on the exposed tidal flats 100m from the shore at Island Beach. Overhead, aerial predators such as White-bellied Sea-eagles, Wedge-tailed Eagles, Nankeen Kestrels, Peregrine Falcons and perhaps younger Ospreys have been seen disturbing breeding birds and may pose a serious threat.

The Island Beach “odd couple” pair consisting of 1 Pied Oystercatcher and 1 Sooty Oystercatcher seems to have split up and while no breeding was observed this season in the site previously held by this odd couple, a pair of Pied Oystercatchers has been observed frequently there this season.

One pair nests in a sheep paddock due to no available beach habitat at high tide. Once again they lost their clutch to sheep trampling. Only one direct loss to human disturbance was noted, where the nest was driven over, crushing the eggs. Two nests were laid in vehicle tracks this season and the incidence of illegal driving on beaches is increasing.

Accommodation at beachside settlements appears to have increased in the last couple of years, leading to more human activity on the beach during the spring and early summer nesting period. An increased number of beach walkers results in incubating birds spending more time off the nest. Similarly the number of walkers with dogs on or off their leash seems to have increased. Some dog owners even walk their dogs to the beach on a leash, then let the dogs off to roam free on the beach. Increased fishers and boat launching may also disturb some pairs, while boats being retrieved attract potential predators like Silver Gulls, Pacific Gulls and Pelicans seeking food. In the non-breeding season Pied Oystercatchers will roost happily amongst these birds, but during the breeding season Pacific Gulls and Silver Gulls in particular are recognized as a threat.

There were considerably more chick deaths this year, the majority occurring before fledging. However two fledglings went missing, presumed dead, before they reached full independence from their parents. While the causes are unknown, it has been observed this year, as in previous years, that after a couple of months of close care some parents pay less attention to the chick they are looking after, with an associated drop in the chick’s condition.

#### Month First Clutch observed

For pairs monitored by the authors, the month of first clutch laid is summarised below.

| Season    | August | September | October | November | December | January | Total Pairs Monitored |
|-----------|--------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|---------|-----------------------|
| 2023/2024 | 5      | 27        | 5       | 9        | 1        |         | 74                    |

Pairs were monitored frequently enough from July onwards to have noticed their first scrapes, nests and incubations. From 6 years of observations on Kangaroo Island most first clutches are laid in September and October. However this year some pairs delayed their first clutch to November, possibly due to the cold weather and very high tides reducing prey availability and foraging time, which may have prevented females from gaining condition required for egg laying.

#### Pied Oystercatcher Nest Site Habitat 2023/2024

The authors recorded nest habitat or substrate for all breeding attempts of all pairs they monitored.

| Nest Site Habitat | Attempt 1 | Attempt 2 | Attempt 3 | Habitat Total | % use of Habitat |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------|------------------|
| Grassy paddock    | 1         |           |           | 1             | 1.2%             |
| Roadside          |           | 1         |           | 1             | 1.2%             |
| Sandy Beach       | 25        | 11        | 4         | 40            | 49.4%            |
| Chernier/Samphire | 8         | 2         |           | 10            | 12.3%            |
| Dune              | 3         |           |           | 3             | 3.7%             |
| Foredune          | 4         | 1         |           | 5             | 6.2%             |
| Island/Islet      | 1         |           |           | 1             | 1.2%             |
| Rocks             | 3         | 1         | 2         | 6             | 7.4%             |
| Lagoon edge       | 1         |           |           | 1             | 1.2%             |

|                        |           |           |          |           |       |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-------|
| Wrack                  | 6         | 4         | 2        | 12        | 14.8% |
| Unknown                | 1         |           |          | 1         | 1.2%  |
| <b>No. of Clutches</b> | <b>53</b> | <b>20</b> | <b>8</b> | <b>81</b> |       |

Nearly half of the nests this season were laid on the upper beach dry sand . Other important nest sites were chernier /samphire areas and dry seagrass wrack. Where there is little or no sand at high tide e.g. Brownlow, Kingscote and Cygnet River Estuary, chernier/samphire habitats and rocks are the major nesting sites. In rocky areas the high tides actually protected nests from human disturbances usually found on sandy beaches. Some pairs seem to prefer deep seagrass wrack to nest on even when alternatives nest habitats are available.

### Pied Oystercatcher Breeding Site Results

| Breeding Season 2023/2024<br>(by breeding pair site) | Total No. Eggs<br>Laid | Total No.<br>Chicks | Total No.<br>Fledglings | No. of Clutches |
|--|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Antechamber Bay - south                              | 2                      | 0                   | 0                       | 1               |
| Antechamber Bay - north                              | 0                      | 0                   | 0                       | 0               |
| Christmas Cove                                       | 0                      | 0                   | 0                       | 0               |
| American Beach                                       | 4                      | 0                   | 0                       | 2               |
| Baudin Beach   | 2                      | 2                   | 2                       | 1               |
| Crabby Jacks   | 0                      | 0                   | 0                       | 0               |
| Browns Beach - Mad Mile East                         | unknown                | 0                   | 0                       | 1               |
| Browns Beach - Mad Mile West                         | 0                      | 0                   | 0                       | 0               |
| Island Beach - Rocky Point                           | 0                      | 0                   | 0                       | 0               |
| Island Beach - Willoughby                            | 2                      | 2                   | 1                       | 1               |
| Island Beach - Cassini                               | 0                      | 0                   | 0                       | 0               |
| Island Beach - Seal St                               | 4                      | 0                   | 0                       | 2               |
| Island Beach - Boat Ramp                             | 6                      | 1                   | 1                       | 3               |
| Island Beach - Flinders Grove                        | 2                      | 0                   | 0                       | 1               |
| Island Beach - Nepean Drive East                     | 1                      | 0                   | 0                       | 1               |
| Island Beach - Nepean Drive Mid                      | 1                      | 0                   | 0                       | 1               |
| Island Beach - Nepean Drive West                     | 2                      | 2                   | 2                       | 1               |
| Island Beach- Golf Course Corner                     | 4                      | 1                   | 0                       | 2               |
| Island Beach- GCCorner W-1                           | 3                      | 0                   | 0                       | 3               |
| Island Beach-GCCorner W-2                            | 2                      | 0                   | 0                       | 1               |
| Island Beach-GCCorner W-3 /Lagoon?                   | 2                      | 0                   | 0                       | 1               |
| Strawbridge Point Beach-N                            | 2                      | 0                   | 0                       | 1               |
| Strawbridge Point Beach-S                            | 6                      | 1                   | 0                       | 3               |
| American River - opp. Picnic Point                   | 2                      | 0                   | 0                       | 1               |
| American River-Remembrance Point                     | 4                      | 0                   | 0                       | 2               |
| Ballast Head Beach House South                       | 0                      | 0                   | 0                       | 0               |
| Ballast Head Beach House                             | 2                      | 2                   | 2                       | 1               |
| Ballast Head Cannery                                 | 2                      | 2                   | 1                       | 1               |
| Nepean Bay West PO (PH)                              | 0                      | 0                   | 0                       | 0               |
| Nepean Bay Mid West PO (PH)                          | 6                      | 0                   | 0                       | 2               |
| Nepean Bay Mid PO (PH)                               | 1 at least             | 1                   | 1                       | 2               |
| Nepean Bay Mid East PO (PH)                          | ?                      | ?                   | 0                       | 1               |
| Nepean Bay East PO (PH)                              | 0                      | 0                   | 0                       | 0               |
| Min-Oil Rd - Jantz East                              | 4                      | 1                   | 1                       | 2               |
| Min-Oil Rd - Jantz                                   | 2                      | 0                   | 0                       | 1               |

| <b>Breeding Season 2023/2024<br/>(by breeding pair site)</b> | <b>Total No. Eggs<br/>Laid</b> | <b>Total No.<br/>Chicks</b> | <b>Total No.<br/>Fledglings</b> | <b>No. of Clutches</b> |
|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Min-Oil Rd - Telstra Track East                              | 2                              | 0                           | 0                               | 1                      |
| Min-Oil Rd - Telstra Track                                   | 1                              | 1                           | 1                               | 1                      |
| Min-Oil Road - Telstra Track West                            | unknown                        | 0                           | 0                               | 1                      |
| Min-Oil Road - Boat Ramp                                     | 0                              | 0                           | 0                               | 0                      |
| Min-Oil Road - Oyster Lease West                             | 4                              | 0                           | 0                               | 2                      |
| Min-Oil Road - Oyster Lease East                             | 0                              | 0                           | 0                               | 0                      |
| Nepean Bay - Esplanade West                                  | 0                              | 0                           | 0                               | 0                      |
| Nepean Bay - Chernier  | 0                              | 0                           | 0                               | 0                      |
| Nepean Bay - Samphire  | 0                              | 0                           | 0                               | 0                      |
| Nepean Bay - Esplande East                                   | 6                              | 0                           | 0                               | 3                      |
| Cygnnet River -Estuary Road                                  | 2                              | 0                           | 0                               | 1                      |
| Cygnnet River - Samphire                                     | 0                              | 0                           | 0                               | 0                      |
| Cygnnet River - Estuary                                      | 2                              | 2                           | 1                               | 1                      |
| Brownlow - Brownlow Avenue                                   | 5                              | 2                           | 2                               | 3                      |
| Brownlow - NorthEast Terrace                                 | 0                              | 0                           | 0                               | 0                      |
| Brownlow-Yatch Club  | 2                              | 2                           | 1                               | 1                      |
| Bay of Shoals - Reeves Point West                            | 2                              | 0                           | 0                               | 1                      |
| Bay of Shoals - Mangrove                                     | 2                              | 0                           | 0                               | 1                      |
| Bay of Shoals Boat Ramp East                                 | 4                              | 0                           | 0                               | 2                      |
| Bay of Shoals Boat Ramp West                                 | 2                              | 2                           | 2                               | 1                      |
| Dover Farm 1   | unknown                        |                             | 0                               | unknown                |
| Dover Farm 2   | unknown                        | 2                           | 1                               | unknown                |
| Dover Farm 3   | unknown                        |                             | 0                               | unknown                |
| 267 North Cape Road  | 2                              | 1                           | 1                               | 2                      |
| 313 North Cape Rd  | 2 at least                     | 0                           | 0                               | 2                      |
| North Cape Rd - Cassinia Boat Ramp                           | 6                              | 0                           | 0                               | 3                      |
| North Cape Rd - 419  | 3                              | 1                           | 1                               | 2                      |
| North Cape Road - Last Boat Ramp                             | unknown                        | 0                           | 0                               | 1                      |
| Cape Rouge - Paddock   | 4                              | 0                           | 0                               | 2                      |
| Cape Rouge - Melaleuca                                       | 0                              | 0                           | 0                               | 0                      |
| Cape Rouge – Fence West                                      | 2                              | 2                           | 1                               | 1                      |
| Cape Rouge - Fence East                                      | 0                              | 0                           | 0                               | 0                      |
| Cape Rouge - Windmill  | 2                              | 0                           | 0                               | 1                      |
| Cape Rouge - Point   | 2                              | 0                           | 0                               | 1                      |
| Cape Rouge - Point West                                      | 0                              | 0                           | 0                               | 0                      |
| Emu Bay - East   | unknown                        | 2                           |                                 |                        |
| D'Estrees Bay - North of Shacks                              | unknown                        |                             | 0                               |                        |
| D'Estrees Bay - Wrights Cottage                              | 4                              | 0                           | 0                               | 2                      |
| D'Estrees Bay - Wreckers                                     | 4                              | 0                           | 0                               | 2                      |
| D'Estrees Bay - Wheatons Beach                               | 5                              | 1                           | 1                               | 3                      |
| Bales Beach  | 2                              | ?                           | ?                               | 1 at least             |
| Vivonne Bay  | 0                              |                             | 0                               |                        |
| Hanson Bay   | 0                              |                             | 0                               | 0                      |

(PH) = sites monitored regularly by Peter Hastwell

### **1.e.ii : Banding of Pied Oystercatchers**

An experienced team of 7 members of the Victorian Wader Study Group (VWSG) and Friends of Shorebirds South-East (FOSSE) came to Kangaroo Island in December 2023 to capture and band Pied

Oystercatcher adults and suitable chicks. Four local volunteers assisted. This project is supported by a grant from the South Australian Shorebirds Foundation and will help us learn more about the survival, movements, longevity and breeding success of Pied Oystercatchers on Kangaroo Island.

Chicks must be of a certain size - at least 3 weeks old but not yet fledged - to be captured and banded. Despite challenging weather conditions 5 chicks were banded and fitted with engraved black leg flags. Unfortunately there was no luck catching adult birds this time. All 5 banded chicks have now fledged and have been seen regularly out foraging with their parents. However they will be more difficult to distinguish once they join a larger non-breeding flocking group.



Above: Banded twins “Black 33” and “Black 34”, foraging near Bay of Shoals Boat Ramp 1 week after banding.

Photo: D Potter

Left: Pied Oystercatcher chick being banded near Bay of Shoals Boat Ramp, 11-12-2023.

Photo: J Turner

The photos above show chicks from the Bay of Shoals (Kingscote) Boat Ramp pair, with black flags engraved in white - 33 and 34 - on their right legs and unique engraved metal bands on their left legs. These chicks were 4 to 5 weeks old at the time of banding. Other chicks banded are “Black 31”, “Black 35” and “Black 36”. Please keep an eye out for them as they start to move around KI and maybe even travel to the mainland. Sightings of these young flagged Pied Oystercatchers and any other flagged shorebirds can be reported via the Australian BirdMark web site:

<https://www.birdmark.net/index.php>. Full details of the banded chicks (date, GPS location) and pictures of Chick 31 being banded and released are seen in the Appendix, page 18 (Editor).

### **1.e.iii: Brief notes on Sooty Oystercatchers**

In past seasons large flocking groups of Sooty Oystercatchers have been seen at Reeves Point and Cape Rouge Point, with smaller flocks at Island Beach West/Strawbridge Point Beach. During winter when there is less human disturbance a small flocking group can also be seen at the American Wharf. However, this season has seen numbers of Sooty Oystercatcher decrease in the main flocking areas. Small flocks have been seen this season at D’Estrees Bay, Bales Beach, Point Ellen and Hanson Bay. Adults were often seen foraging at the beach east of Pennington Bay and then flying further east with a morsel in their beaks, obviously to where their chick was waiting.



Fledglings have been seen at a private access beach east of Pennington Bay and at Hanson Bay. No Sooty Oystercatcher breeding was recorded this season on the eastern Pennington Bay headland where nesting has occurred in previous years - maybe due to the regular presence of Peregrine Falcons and Nankeen Kestrels at that site.

## 2. BANDING NEWS FROM THE SA MAINLAND.

**2.a. Re-sightings of banded Pied Oystercatchers.** During the first 8 months of 2023/24, volunteers have reported 5 flagged POCs in our regions, with one (Black 07) at least three times ( Figs. 7 a,b,c and Table 2).



**Figs. 7 a, b & c:** Some flagged and banded Pied Oystercatchers reported in 2023/24 from the SA Mainland. a: POC black Flag 07, Goolwa Beach, 24 Sept, 2023; b: POC Black Flag 41, Goolwa Beach, 24 Sept, 2023 and c: POC White on Green bands, left leg, 5 January, 2024 at Murray Mouth. All photos by K. Bartley.

Since 2011/12, a total of 18 banded/flagged POCs have been re-sighted by Team Oystercatcher volunteers on the Coorong and SE Fleurieu coasts. Fifty percent (9 birds) were originally caught, banded and flagged in the SE SA, 39 % (7 birds) from Victoria and 11 % (2 birds) from Gulf St. Vincent. These results may only reflect the relative number of birds banded in each of these regions. Without further banding programs more to the west of the Murray Mouth, it's problematic as to

how representative these figures are to the origins of all POCs recruiting to the Coorong and SE Fleurieu coasts.

**Table 2: Re-sightings of Pied Oystercatchers during July, 2023 – February, 2024 on Coorong Ocean Beach and SE Fleurieu Coasts.**

| Species and flag details                                     | Date & Location of original capture and release  | Date & Location of recent Re-sightings  | Notes (Distance travelled, approx. age at re-sighting)   |
|--|--|---|--|
| Pied Oystercatcher, black flag on right leg, white 07 code   | November, 2020, Point Danger, SE SA. Age: chick. Caught and flagged by VWSG                      | September, 2023. Goolwa Beach. Reported by K. Bartley (Fig. 7a)                                     | Multiple re-sightings in SE SA between 2020 and May, 2023. First re-sighting in the SE Fleurieu. |
| Pied Oystercatcher, Black Flag on right leg, white 07 code   | As above.  | January, 2024, Coorong Ocean Beach. Reported by FOSSE.  | Distance between Goolwa Beach and Coorong Ocean Beach, approx. 2.5 yrs old                       |
| Pied Oystercatcher, Black Flag on right leg, white 07 code   | As above   | February 2024, Coorong Ocean Beach. Reported by FOSSE.  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> re-sighting in past 8 months.  |
| Pied Oystercatcher, Black Flag on right leg, white 41 code   | January, 2022. Nene Valley, SE SA. Caught and flagged by VWSG Unknown age at capture.            | September, 2023. Goolwa Beach. Reported by K. Bartley (Fig. 7b)                                     | Re-sighted in the SE SA till March, 2023. First sighting in SE Fleurieu, 6 months later          |
| Pied Oystercatcher, Black Flag on right leg, white 30 code.  | 11 December, 2022, Beachport South-East SA, flagged by VWSG                                      | February 8, 2024, Coorong Ocean Beach. Reported by FOSSE  | 15 months duration since initial capture   |
| Pied Oystercatcher, green on white plastic band on left leg. | Earlier than 2007, Port Phillip Bay, Victoria. Caught and banded by VWSG Unknown age at banding. | January, 2024, East spit at Murray Mouth, Young-husband Peninsula. Reported by K. Bartley (Fig. 7c) | Multiple re-sightings at the Murray Mouth since at least 2012, now at least 17 yrs old           |

As noted in section 1 e.ii, all future re-sightings of banded/flagged Oystercatchers should be reported to the Birdmark website (<https://www.birdmark.net/index.php>). In return, Birdmark will provide a detailed history (Sites and dates of capture/banding and re-sightings) of the birds in a timely manner.

### **3. THE COORONG, LOWER LAKES and MURRAY MOUTH (CLLMM) RESEARCH CENTRE.**

In February, 2024, the CLLMM Research Centre, supported by the Goyder Institute for Water Research was launched at Goolwa, South Australia. The purpose of the Centre is to develop the evidence base, capacity and capability that will identify future management actions to support the biodiversity and ecosystem of this part of the State. A number of meetings have already been held involving First Nations and other local communities in the design delivery and dissemination of knowledge to inform decision making of the region.

Research Priorities for Waterbirds, including resident nesting and migratory shorebirds have been identified. The priorities include:

1. **Waterbird Telemetry.** Tracking waterbirds provides detailed information on local habitat use and improves our understanding of how birds move dynamically throughout the CLLMM system. Prioritised bird species include Fairy Terns, Caspian Terns, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Common Greenshank, **Pied Oystercatcher**, Chestnut Teal, Black Swan and Magpie Goose.
2. **DNA-based investigation of waterbird food resources.** The availability of macroinvertebrate prey in the CLLMM is an important component of habitat quality for shorebirds, and varies over the seasonal cycle and environment conditions. Invertebrate prey include Annelid Worms, Amphipods and bivalve molluscs, and small fish for Terns.
3. **Shorebird body condition monitoring through community science.** The physical condition of shorebirds as a direct measure of prey availability and accessibility and is one indicator of the capacity of the CLLMM to support healthy numbers of shorebird populations.
4. **Conservation modelling for key waterbird species.** Priority species include Fairy Terns, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Black Swans.
5. **Colonial nesting species within the lower lakes.** Understanding the conditions that benefit colonial breeders could provide justification for environmental water delivery to the lower lakes. Priority species include Pied Cormorants, Royal Spoonbills and Australian White Ibis.
6. **Human disturbance of Shorebirds.** Research to quantify the impacts of Vehicle disturbance on beach nesting birds and Game Duck Hunting frequency and effort is poorly understood, and in concert with fine-scale GPS-based telemetry for key species the research may provide insights into how hunting and Off-road vehicle (ORV) activities disrupt roosting, nesting and foraging of waterbirds.
7. **Restoring terrestrialised habitats to wetlands.** Increasing the availability and quality of foraging habitats for shorebirds is an important management goal. Several wetlands in the CLLMM provide opportunities for evaluating the success of different restoration activities.

The Research Centre will be collaborating with the three SA Universities (Adelaide, Flinders and South Australia) as these groups have skilled researchers to carry out the projects outlined above. Also, citizen science volunteers, under the auspices of Birdlife Australia, Birds SA, the Foundation for SA Shorebirds and the First Nation community will greatly support these projects. Further information about the Centre is available on its website: [cllmmresearchcentre.org](http://cllmmresearchcentre.org).

#### 4. SA SHOREBIRD FOUNDATION NEWS.

For 2023/24, three grants have been awarded to applicants. The projects are:

1. **Grant No. 2021-02. A Social Marketing Intervention to increase Compliance with Beach Regulations.** Recipient: Leanne Butterfield, PhD Candidate, Flinders University. 2023/24 is the second of this 3 year grant. The initial year (2022/23) focussed on understanding the ecology of beach birds (beach-nesting and migratory shorebirds and seabirds (eg cormorants), including observing the foraging behaviour and reactions of these birds to human disturbances. It comprised 164 surveys along the western Fleurieu coast between Maslins and Sellicks Beaches, some of which are closed and others open to vehicle use. Secondly, Leanne developed a questionnaire to assess; 1) patterns of beach use, knowledge of and compliance with beach regulations and personal values of beach users; and 2) beach users' views about future ways of a) using the beach, b) effectively communicating beach regulations and c) producing effective signage. The questionnaire is being released during 2023/24 to beach users and will be followed by interviews of selected users.



2. **Grant No. 2023-01. Kangaroo Island: Banding together to conserve the Hooded Plover.**  
Recipient: Renee Mead, Birdlife Australia. This is the first year of a 2 year project to band Hooded Plovers on Kangaroo Island. Since 2018, some banding of the Nationally vulnerable Hooded Plover has occurred on KI. However, this project aims to learn much more about their population demographics and movements on the Island with more banding by a dedicated group of licenced banders, targeting pairs of birds that are monitored by Friends of Hooded Plover KI. Banding Hooded Plovers has the benefit of connecting volunteers to the birds. A field trip was undertaken in late October, 2023, resulting in a total of 14 Hooded Plovers being banded and flagged. Sites included the NE and south coast beaches of KI. A training workshop was also held to increase local community awareness of the plight of KI's Hooded Plover population. A second banding trip is being planned later in 2024.
  
3. **Grant 2023-02. Banding Australian Pied Oystercatchers on Kangaroo Island.** Recipient: Maureen Christie AM, Friends of Shorebirds SE (FOSSE). This is a two year project, with 2023/24 being the initial year. A summary of the December 2023 banding trip by licenced Victorian Wader Studies Group (VWSG) is summarised on pages 12 - 13 (Chapter 1.e. ii). A second trip is being organised for March 2024, to explore existing and additional sites where other catching methods (canon nets and noose traps) may be applied. A further catching trip is being planned for 2024/25.

Finally, the SA Shorebirds website ([www.sashorebirds.org](http://www.sashorebirds.org)) contains final reports of all grants awarded by the Foundation. Also, there are copies of all Team Oystercatcher Newsletters and publications of research on Oystercatchers in South Australia.

## 5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

The continued dedicated monitoring by many volunteers from Team Oystercatcher, Shorebirds 2020, Birdlife Australia Hooded Plover volunteers, Friends of Shorebirds SE (FOSSE), Friends of the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary (FAIBS) is gratefully acknowledged. The Victorian Wader Studies Group (VWSG) and Birdlife Australia BNB teams of licenced banders are especially thanked for their banding work on Pied Oystercatchers and Hooded Plovers. Special thanks go to David Potter and Jean Turner for their long-term monitoring of breeding Pied Oystercatchers on Kangaroo Island and the many discussions I've had with them. I also thank Maureen Christie AM and Jeff Campbell (FOSSE) for allowing me to report the Jan & Feb, 2024 Oystercatcher Counts along the Coorong Ocean Beach. Finally, I thank Dr. Tom Prowse (University of Adelaide) and Dr. Nick Whiteod (Research Manager of CLLMM Research Centre) for our discussions on Oystercatchers.

## 6. REFERENCES.

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## 7. APPENDIX.

**Details of POC Chicks (“runners”) caught, banded and flagged on Kangaroo Island in December, 2023 by VWSG.**

| Date of Capture   | Location of Capture   | Flag Codes                              | Notes   |
|-------------------|---|---|---|
| 8 December, 2023  | “Boat Ramp” Site, Island Beach<br>GPS: -35.7959, 137.8041                 | Black Flag 31 on upper right leg        | Captured by fine mesh landing net, (see Fig. 8a).           |
| 11 December, 2023 | Bay of Shoals, west of Boat Ramp.<br>GPS: -35.6385, 137.6218              | Black Flags 33 & 34 on upper right leg. | Siblings. Captured by fine mesh landing net, (see Page 13). |
| 11 December, 2023 | “Telstra Track” Site, Western Cove, MinOil Rd.<br>GPS: -35.7394, 137.6673 | Black Flag 35 on upper right leg.       | Captured by fine mesh landing net.                          |
| 13 December, 2023 | Site 276, North Cape Rd<br>GPS: - 35.6134, 137.5759                       | Black Flag 36 on upper right leg.       | Captured by hand, chick hiding under Nitre Bush.            |



**Figs 8 a, b & c:** a : POC Chick 31 about to be released at Island Beach; b: Chick 31 being escorted away by parent and c: Parents and flagged chick 31 on Du Couedic Drive, Island Beach, 8 days after capture and flagging. Photos a & b: S. Campbell; photo c: K. Jones