Fact Sheet

Hooded Plovers ('Hoodies') in Belfast Coastal Reserve

The Hooded Plover (*Thinornis rubricollis*) is a small shorebird found along the ocean beaches of Southern Australia. It is a threatened species that is hanging on in Belfast Coastal Reserve but needs your help.

An adult and a juvenile Hooded Plover. Note the black head, red beak and eye-ring of the adult bird. Juvenile Hooded Plovers lack the black hood.

What is it about Hoodies?

Hoodies are small birds, approximately 20cm in length and weighing around 100g, but they are plucky and punch above their weight; avoiding predators, competing with bigger birds, living and breeding in a harsh, competitive and ever-changing environment on the beach. Despite this, they are in decline and need help to reduce threats to their survival.

The beach is their home

Hooded Plovers live on undisturbed ocean beaches. They can be seen bobbing to feed on tiny invertebrates that live amongst the washed-up seaweed. In Belfast Coastal Reserve, Hooded Plovers depend on the high energy beaches, sandy dunes and basalt outcrops to provide them with a meal, shelter and protection. They may travel along the coast from time to time but are not migratory species.

Threatened status

The Hooded Plover is listed as a threatened species under Victorian and Commonwealth legislation. The survival of Hoodies is under threat as beach use by humans increases. There are estimated to be around only 600 left in Victoria. Significantly, over 50% of the breeding population occurs between Warrnambool and the South Australian border. This makes Belfast Coastal Reserve a critical section of coast for their survival.

Family life

Hooded Plovers nest on the beach between September and April. A Hooded Plover nest is a simple scrape in the sand, often on exposed beach which offers an open lookout for predators. The eggs are small and sand-coloured.

Newly-hatched chicks are smaller than a matchbox. The chicks can run and feed themselves within a few hours of hatching, but cannot fly for five weeks.

Parents will actively protect eggs and chicks from variations in the climate and predators until they can fly. They will leave their offspring when a potential predator approaches, and even pretend to have a broken wing to lure a potential predator away from the nest or chicks' hiding place.

Threats to survival

Nesting on the sand means eggs are highly exposed to being crushed, eaten, destroyed by extremes in temperature and from high tides. An additional threat is repeated disturbance from a passing human or dog. If parent birds are forced off their nests for longer than 30 minutes on extreme weather days, the embryo can be destroyed from heat stress, or taken by a predator. Studies have shown that this disturbance caused by people and dogs is the biggest preventable threat to their survival.

Protecting Hoodies

Hoodie territory ahead

Hooded Plover eggs and chicks are very hard to see and people can step on them without realising it.

Luckily, they have their own community volunteer network dedicated to helping them. The fenced-off areas you may see on the beach have been erected by volunteers supported by BirdLife Australia and Parks Victoria, to advise visitors a nest is in the area. They are only installed when Hoodies in that area are exhibiting breeding behaviour.

Help give Hoodies a chance!

Hoodies are in decline and they need your help. Please:

○ Follow reserve regulations and keep your dog on-lead.

○ Give a Hoodie nesting site a wide berth and move beyond it quickly. It is an offence to enter, or allow a dog or horse to enter, a signposted nesting site.

○ Keep out of the dunes. Maintaining habitat is crucial to ensuring that Hooded Plovers can breed successfully.

○ Always walk near the water's edge in the tidal area. If the tide is too high, plan your walk for another time of day.

○ Join the **Friends of the Hooded Plover Far West Victoria** to proactively help protect this vulnerable species living on your doorstep.