

Flora & Fauna Guarantee Action Statement

#9

This Action Statement was first published in 1992 and remains current. This version has been prepared for web publication. It retains the original text of the action statement, although contact information, the distribution map and the illustration may have been updated.

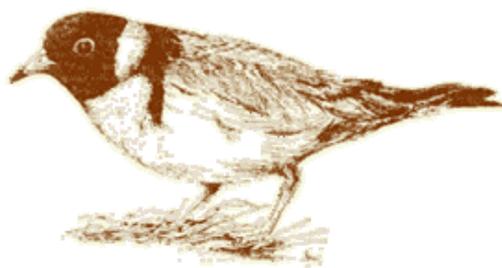
© The State of Victoria,
Department of
Sustainability and
Environment, 2003

Published by the
Department
of Sustainability and
Environment, Victoria.
8 Nicholson Street,
East Melbourne,
Victoria 3002 Australia

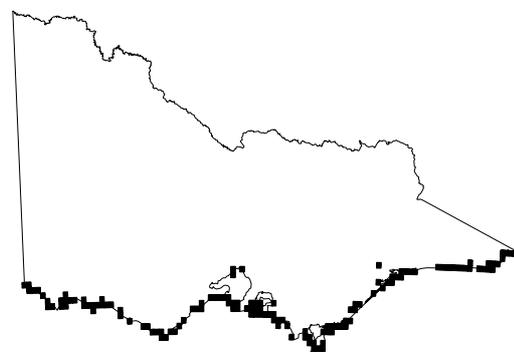
This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.

ISSN 1448-9902

Hooded Plover *Charadrius rubricollis*



Hooded Plover (*Charadrius rubricollis*)



Distribution in Victoria (DSE 2002)

Description and Distribution

The Hooded Plover, *Charadrius rubricollis* (Gmelin), is a medium-size shorebird (20 cm long) readily identified from other waders by its black head, white nape, black hindneck, and white underparts coupled with a black-tipped red beak and red eye ring. The sexes are similarly marked. Immature birds lack the black head and hindneck, these being sandy brown in colour; the bill is brown with an orange wash at the base, and the legs are pale orange.

This bird is found predominantly on ocean beaches; at times on adjacent reef platforms, coastal inlets and lakes. It is most frequently seen in pairs although sometimes flocks of 30 or 40 are seen in Victoria (Blakers et al. 1984). It favours wide beaches with large amounts of beach-washed seaweed, and also creek mouths or inlet entrances with large flat areas of sand (Schulz 1988). In Victoria the Hooded Plover is an opportunistic feeder, eating a

variety of invertebrates, such as crustaceans, molluscs, insects and polychaete worms (Schulz 1984, Schulz 1986, Schulz et al. 1984). The Hooded Plover occurs along the southern Australian coastline (WA, SA, Vic., Tas. and southern NSW). In south-western Australia this species inhabits inland saltlakes more than 100km from the sea (Blakers et al. 1984), but in Victoria it is confined largely to the ocean-shore environment. The reasons for such habitat differences between populations are unclear. The population in Victoria, based on state-wide counts, is about 600 birds (Map shows 1990 counts or 1988 if 1990 counts not taken-Murlis 1988, Lane 1990). The species occurs in variable densities along the Victorian coastline, for example, five birds/km between Port Fairy and Cape Reamer and fewer than one bird/km on the Ninety Mile Beach (Murlis 1988). Over 50% of the breeding population occurs between Warnambool and the South Australian border.

The Hooded Plover occurs along the southern Australian coastline (WA, SA, Vic., Tas. and southern NSW). In south-western Australia this species inhabits inland saltlakes more than 100km from the sea (Blakers et al. 1984), but in Victoria it is confined largely to the ocean-shore environment. The reasons for such habitat differences between populations are unclear. The population in Victoria, based on state-wide counts, is about 600 birds (Map shows 1990 counts or 1988 if 1990 counts not taken-Murlis 1988, Lane 1990). The species occurs in variable densities along the Victorian coastline, for example, five birds/km between Port Fairy and Cape Reamer and fewer than one bird/km on the Ninety Mile Beach (Murlis 1988). Over 50% of the breeding population occurs between Warnambool and the South Australian border. The species favours some areas for overwintering (e.g. Darby Beach, Venus Bay Salt Lakes and possibly Levys Beach). Important areas for the conservation of this bird include national parks and coastal parks such as Discovery Bay Coastal Park, and Wilsons Promontory and Croajingalong National Parks.

Conservation Status

Current Status

Gschulz (1988)	Indeterminate* (Aust)
Baker-Gabb (1991)	Vulnerable

*endangered, vulnerable or rare

Listed under Schedule 2 of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* 1988 (Threatened).

Reasons for Conservation Status

Since European settlement the range of the Hooded Plover in eastern Australia has declined (e.g. contracted from northern NSW). Even where it still occurs this species is now less abundant than formerly (Bransbury 1983, Blakers et al. 1984). Breeding success is very low to extremely low on beaches frequently visited by people and dogs. For example, at Phillip Island in 1982 only one out of 12 breeding pairs successfully raised young; the rest failed due to human disturbance (Schulz & Bamford 1987).

Threats to the species are disturbance by humans and domestic dogs, walkers and horse riders; nest and egg destruction by off-road vehicles; feral predators; and destruction of nest sites through flood or storm damage (see Schulz & Bamford 1987, Buick & Paton 1989).

In its final recommendations, the Scientific Advisory Committee determined that the Hooded Plover is:

- significantly prone to future threats which are likely to result in extinction; and
- very rare in terms of abundance and distribution.

Major Conservation Objective

To protect the existing Victorian population by maintaining habitat and ensuring that the Hooded Plover can continue to breed successfully across its Victorian range. Specifically, to maintain or enhance the breeding success of the species in the following areas: South Australian border to Warnambool, Point Smythe to Cape Liptrap, Sandy Point to

Darby River, Sydenham Inlet to Sandpatch Point and east of Mallacoota. To develop and implement management guidelines to protect breeding birds on popular beaches.

Management Issues

Ecological Issues Specific to the Taxon

Many of the ecological issues of this species are common to other beach-nesting species (see Kelly 1983). In Victoria, the Hooded Plover breeds only on ocean beaches or adjacent sand dunes and low headlands and some islands within the Gippsland Lakes. Its breeding biology is not fully understood, but animals are most vulnerable in the breeding period (Schulz 1989).

The nest is a depression in the sand, typically next to vegetation and half-buried seaweed and other beachcast wrack on the uppermost sections of beaches or in primary sand dunes, at times on low rocky headlands and secondary dunes over 100m inland from the beach. The incubation period (about 30 days) is the longest of any Australian member of the genus *Charadrius*. The young do not fly for at least three weeks, so each clutch is vulnerable for nearly two months. The nesting seasons extends from August to February, which includes the time of peak use by holidaymakers, e.g. sunbathers and surf fishers. The Hooded Plover's habit of leaving a nest site if people approach and usually not returning until people have left the area has an important influence on breeding success.

While the parent is absent the eggs or chicks are vulnerable to predators such as gulls (*Larus* spp.) and ravens (*Corvus* spp.) and to extremes of temperature. Red Foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) and other introduced predators affect the breeding success of this species, but how significantly is not known. Horse-riding parties pose a direct threat to Hooded Plover nests through trampling. Other primary causes of nesting failure are trampling by stock or horses, flooding by spring tides or storm waves, and the destruction of nests by off-road vehicles—a major factor in other states (Buick & Paton 1989).

Winter movements occur in some populations. For example, the non-breeding population in South Gippsland increases (Schulz & Lumsden 1983), but the origin of these additional birds is not known. In far eastern Victorian populations, no such seasonal trends have been noted (Schulz unpubl. data). Oil spills in coastal areas can adversely affect Hooded Plover populations and breeding beaches.

The introduced Sea Spurge *Euphorbia paralias* is spreading along the primary dunes of the Victorian coastline. This plant may be affecting the nest sites of the Hooded Plovers on breeding beaches (author, pers. obs.).

Wider Conservation Issues

There is continuing pressure to open up hitherto remote coastal areas to coastal or beach walks, as has been done along Discovery Bay as part of the Great South-west Walk. This places pressures on populations not previously exposed to large numbers of people. Limiting visitor numbers in sensitive areas should be considered when the birds are breeding. The conservation requirements of the Hooded Plover should be considered in plans for relevant coastal areas; also, measures that reduce human disturbance and protect breeding sites will

enhance the breeding success of other shorebirds—such as the Pied Oystercatcher (*Haematopus longirostris*) and Red-capped Plover (*Charadrius ruficapillus*).

Victoria is the only state in Australia where driving on beaches is illegal. In other states off-road vehicles on beaches seriously affect breeding Hooded Plovers. For example, it has been estimated that up to 87% of all nests in the Coorong region of South Australia were run over by off-road vehicles during the incubation period in the 1985–86 breeding season (Buick & Paton 1989). As the number of off-road vehicles on isolated stretches of coastline continues to grow in other states, the Victorian population may play an important and increasing role in the future maintenance of this species.

Social and Economic Issues

The Hooded Plover is increasingly threatened by the rising levels of public use of ocean beaches throughout Victoria. This is associated with a larger human population, further residential and resort development along the coast, increasing outdoor recreation, and an increasing desire by many people to seek out remote areas within Victoria (Govt of Victoria 1988). Unless the increased beach use is well managed, the threat to the Hooded Plover is likely to increase significantly in years to come.

People illegally collecting shellfish and other marine invertebrates in the intertidal zone may cause food loss for some already stressed Hooded Plover populations. Kelp harvesting (about 30 000 tonnes per year) has been proposed for beaches between Port Fairy and Killarney, but has not proceeded because the harvesting vehicles are likely to disturb shore birds and other features of the environment.

The collection of eggs and chicks mistakenly believed to be abandoned is a minor issue requiring better community education.

Directing the public away from beaches important to the Hooded Plover and other shore birds may be necessary. However, these restrictions will be localised, leaving a large range of beaches available for recreation. Further, any social and economic impacts on beachgoers, and tourism generally, can be minimised by consulting relevant community groups and by incorporating shorebird conservation requirements into plans for nearby resorts, walking tracks, and beaches. Experience with Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) conservation shows that protecting breeding sites by restricting beach access can enhance the tourist values of a particular area and can be easily accepted by most beachgoers. Sensitive use of public viewing facilities can also benefit beachgoers.

Management Action

Previous Management Action

- A number of management actions have benefited or will benefit the Hooded Plover.
- Since 1980 the Australian Wader Study Group, with the support of DCE, has undertaken regular

two-yearly counts of the Hooded Plover population in Victoria. As yet no comprehensive management actions have been initiated across the State.

- Primary dunes at Squeaky Beach, Wilsons Promontory have been fenced off for vegetation rehabilitation (which also protects a breeding pair).
- DCE areas fenced off for Little Tern nesting colonies in East Gippsland have been used by the Hooded Plover.
- DCE staff have been directed to drive management vehicles on the tide-line edge along Beach, Wilsons Promontory National Park.
- The Geelong Region of DCE is currently working with the Geelong Field Naturalists Hooded Plover Group to protect pairs at three sites.
- Rangers in the Dandenong Region have been checking all known nest sites between Fingal Beach and Point Nepean each week since March 1991. Beaches over the same area are surveyed fortnightly during the breeding season and monthly for the rest of the time by DCE staff and volunteers from the Bird Observers Club (Dowling, DCE, pers. comm.).
- There are Red Fox and feral Dog (*Canis familiaris*) control programs along small stretches of the Victorian coastline.
- On the recommendation of DCE and the local conservation society, and in response to other public comment, the Shire of Phillip Island has banned dogs during the breeding season on five beaches used by Hooded Plovers.
- In the Gippsland Lakes, nest sites created opportunistically from dredge spoil have been used by the Hooded Plover (also Pied Oystercatcher, Red-capped Plover and the Little Tern and Fairy Tern (*Sterna nereis*). These sites require maintenance and periodic removal of vegetation as they quickly become overgrown and unsuitable. DCE has submitted proposals for new capital works (1991–2) to create further islands that should benefit the Hooded Plover.
- DCE staff in coastal regions have been trained in contingency plans for oil spills, including the care of injured wildlife.
- The Bird Observers Club of Australia published a brochure, *Seabirds Need Your Help*, which helped people identify sea-coast birds and suggested more responsible behaviour for beachgoers.

Intended Management Action

Monitoring

- Continue to support the two-yearly program of the Victorian Wader Study Group monitoring population across the State. Monitoring will be more intensive in certain areas to obtain more detailed information on the breeding success. In the Portland Region, monitoring will be carried out in June and December and monitoring will continue on Phillip Island. Orbost Region will conduct annual surveys of the numbers of breeding pairs, concentrating on areas intensively

used for recreation that may require remedial action. These data will be collated by DCE in the context of the VWSG study.

- Derive information on significant breeding sites and critical habitat from the monitoring program. Determine appropriate management (planning controls, signposting, fencing) and implement it progressively over five years.
- Encourage local bird observers and field naturalist clubs, friends groups and other interested bodies to begin or continue to monitor local populations, and especially nest sites. DCE in conjunction with the Bird Observers' Club will continue monitoring the Mornington Peninsula between Point Nepean and Fingal Beach.
- Monitor the impact of increasing visitor numbers and the effectiveness of signposting, particularly at Discovery Bay (part of the Great South-west Walk) and Cape Conran-Sydenham Inlet Coastal Park (a centre for horse riding).
- Monitor the Hooded Plover's use of artificial islands with a view to developing more such islands sites in the future.

Liaison with Community

- Encourage the formation of friends groups near important sites (DCE regional officers).
- Produce a public information brochure regarding the importance of coastal areas for beach-nesting birds and proper environmental behaviour for beach-users (Flora and Fauna Division by Oct. 1992).
- Liaison with beach-users and groups such as pony clubs, 4WD associations and angling associations to reduce their impact on breeding birds (DCE regional officers).
- Investigate using signs and information shelters in areas of high visitor use to promote public awareness of the habitat and survival requirements of a range of shorebirds. Experience gained with the Little Tern suggests the need to avoid highlighting one species. Information about precise locations of nests must be restricted because of the risks of vandalism.
- Seek to develop cooperation in minimising the impact on breeding pairs through talks in local schools and national parks, and through local newspapers.

Ranger Presence

- At heavily frequented sites, where breeding pairs are highly susceptible, DCE Rangers will be trained to provide educational information that will reinforce the impact of the signposting and fencing.

Management Vehicles on Beach

- Restrict management vehicles to essential fisheries enforcement, servicing of remote campsites, search

and rescue and environmental monitoring, especially from August to February.

- Vehicles should be driven close to the water's edge, as far as possible from breeding or potential breeding sites.

Habitat Enhancement

- Maintain nesting sites on dredge spoil in the Gippsland Lakes area by periodically removing overgrown vegetation and depositing shellgrit.
- Encourage those responsible for fencing and other dune stabilisation works to incorporate the protection of Hooded Plover nest sites.
- DCE will recognise Sea Spurge as an environmental weed and there will be no plantings of this species in any revegetation work.

Animal Control

- Ensure that conservation of the Hooded Plover is considered in all feral Cat and Red Fox control programs in coastal areas.
- Ensure that there is no unlicensed grazing in coastal reserves and that sheep and cattle do not have access to beaches where the plover is breeding.
- Encourage local authorities to adopt and enforce controls over dogs on beaches during the breeding season.

Research

- Encourage research into the breeding biology, movements and effects of predation on the Hooded Plover in Victoria.
- Encourage research into the effects of the rapid spread of Sea Spurge along the Victorian coast on the breeding success of Hooded Plover. If required, investigate mechanisms for its control.

Not Advertising Beaches

- Keep visitors from areas of remote coastline with high Hooded Plover populations by methods such as not providing readily accessible tracks to these areas.

Planning Controls

- Control commercial activities such as kelp harvesting so that they do not threaten significant nesting sites.
- Ensure that the requirements for the Hooded Plover are incorporated into all site-specific developments and general management plans for coastal areas.
- If appropriate, DCE will declare key breeding areas to be critical habitat.

Other Desirable Management Actions

- Highlight the status of the species, and work with other states towards protecting key breeding areas through national forums, e.g. CONCOM.
- Develop a comprehensive strategy aimed at protecting the shorebirds breeding or sheltering along the Victorian coastline.

- Coordinate an effort to educate the public about the importance of the coastal environment to shorebirds and wading species.

Legislative Powers Operating

Legislation

Wildlife Act 1975: provides protection for the Hooded Plover.

Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988: provides protection for critical habitat if so designated.

Land Conservation (Vehicle Control) Act 1972: provides for control and exemptions for vehicles on beaches (e.g. management vehicles, disabled access).

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978: controls public and commercial use of beaches.

Licence and Permit Conditions

Licences or permits to band or capture individuals from any area in Victoria will only be issued for specific research programs that investigate gaps in the understanding of the biology of the species, such as breeding or movements.

Consultation and Community Participation

The Australasian Wader Study Group have been consulted in the preparation of this Action Statement. Local bird observer and field naturalist clubs, friends groups and other interested bodies have been and should continue to be encouraged to monitor local populations and, where possible, protect nest sites. Information about precise locations of nests may be restricted because of the risks of vandalism.

Implementation, Evaluation and Review

All the coastal regions of DCE will monitor the implementation of relevant action proposals and evaluate their effectiveness in achieving conservation objectives. Where possible, there will be regular monitoring of selected local populations and two-yearly monitoring of the state-wide population under the auspices of the Victorian Wader Study Group and DCE.

This Action statement should be reviewed in 1996.

Contacts

Management

Flora and Fauna Guarantee Officers in all DCE coastal regions (Portland, Colac, Geelong, Melbourne, Dandenong, Yarram, Central Gippsland, Bairnsdale and Orbost).

Biology

Flora and Fauna Division, DCE Heidelberg

Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

Australasian Wader Study Group

Victorian Wader Study Group

Compiler

Martin Schulz

Further information

Further information can be obtained from Department of Sustainability and Environment Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

Flora and Fauna Guarantee Action

Statements are available from the Department of Sustainability and Environment website:
<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au>

References

- Baker-Gabb, D. (1991) List of threatened fauna in Victoria in 1991. Dept of Conservation & Environment, Melbourne. (unpubl.).
- Bird Observers Club (Victoria) (19XX) Seabirds need your help. BOC, Nunawading.
- Blakers, M., Davies, S. J. J. F. & Reilly, P. N. (1984) The Atlas of Australian Birds. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
- Bransbury, J. (1983) A study of the Hooded Plover in the south-east of South Australia. Dept of Environment & Planning, South Australia. (unpubl.).
- Buick, A. M. & Paton, D. C. (1989) Impact of off-road vehicles on the nesting access of Hooded Plovers (*Charadrius rubricollis*) in the Coorong region of South Australia. *Emu* 89: 159-72.
- DSE (2002) Atlas of Victorian Wildlife (Electronic Fauna Database). Parks, Flora & Fauna, Department of Sustainability & Environment, East Melbourne.
- Kelly, P., Draft Management Strategy and review for the Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) in Victoria. Unpublished report, Dept of Conservation, Forests & Lands, Baimsdale. (unpubl.).
- Lane, B. (1990) Hooded Plover survey. RAOU Vic group Newsletter No. 18.
- Lane, B. & Davies, J. (1987) Shorebirds in Australia. Thomas Nelson, Melbourne.
- Murlis, M. (1988) Hooded Plover and Pied Oystercatcher Survey-Victoria, 1988. *The Stilt* 14: 33-6.
- Schulz, M. (1984) The feeding behaviour of the Hooded Plover *Charadrius rubricollis* (Gmelin) in an oceanshore environment. B.Sc. Hons Thesis, Monash University, Victoria.
- Schulz, M. (1986) The Hooded Plover (*Charadrius rubricollis*) as a reef-forager. *The Stilt* 9: 50-5.
- Schulz, M. (1988) The Hooded Plover-a natural beachcomber! *Trees and Natural Resources* 30: 17-18.
- Schulz, M. (1989) Hooded Plover *Charadrius rubricollis* Gmelin 1789, in Browner, J. & Garnett, S. (eds) Threatened Birds of Australia. An Annotated list. Report No 68, Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union.
- Schulz, M. & Bamford, M. (1987) The Hooded Plover ¾ an RAOU Conservation Statement. RAOU Report No 35.
- Schulz, M., Grant, A. & Lumsden, L. (1984) Some aspects of the feeding behaviour and diet of the Hooded Plover, *Charadrius rubricollis* (*Charadriidae*) during the non-breeding season. *The Stilt* 5: 2-8.
- Schulz, M. & Lumsden, L. (1983) Fluctuations in Hooded Plover numbers at Venus Bay in 1981 and 1982. *Bull. Victorian Wader Study Group* 7: 11-12.
- Govt of Victoria (1988) A Coastal Policy for Victoria. Ministry of Planning and Environment, Victoria.