

# Hooded Plover

*Thinornis cucullatus*

PHILLIP ISLAND  
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notes

## Hooded Plovers

The hooded plover is a medium-size shorebird with a black 'hood', white nape, black hind neck and white under parts. They have a black tipped red beak and red eye ring. They are endemic to Australia, with two subspecies, one found in Western Australia and the other found in south-eastern Australia. With around 3000 individuals remaining in south-eastern Australia, hooded plovers are listed as vulnerable in Victoria under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act of 1988* and vulnerable according to the *IUCN Red List 2008*.

## Habitat

On Phillip Island, hooded plovers are seen along southern and western shorelines and more isolated bay beaches on the northern side. They forage on the sand, along the waterline and on intertidal rock platforms. Hooded plovers often like nesting with the indigenous plant hairy spinifex (*Spinifex sericeus*), and can also be seen sheltering on the beach behind clumps of seaweed.

## Diet

Hooded plovers feed by sight using their large eyes and short bills. They are opportunistic feeders, often seen running along the tide wrack in search of food. They eat a variety of invertebrates, such as amphipod crustaceans, molluscs, insects and polychaete worms and plant material including seeds and turions.



## Statistics

**Weight:** 90– 100g

**Length:** ~200mm

**Life:** Up to 20 years

## Breeding

Clutches of one to three fawn and brown speckled eggs are laid from August to March, with the peak laying period in January. On Phillip Island, nest sites can be classified into three types based on geomorphology; stony terrace, primary dune and flat beach. Nests are located above average high tide levels and are usually a depression 'scrape' in the sand and when on stony terraces they are often lined with light coloured grit or seaweed. As pairs defend a territory from other birds, there are usually only one or two nesting pairs per beach. Both parents share incubation for about 28 days and when the eggs hatch, the parents teach the chicks to feed and to quickly find shelter in beach vegetation or tidewrack. Chicks must feed themselves from day one but will stay with their parents until they fledge after approximately 35 days, however they may stay around for some time afterwards.

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## A species on the edge of extinction

The breeding success of hooded plovers is extremely low due to the high risk areas that they breed. Sixty percent of chicks are lost before fledging, of which, fifty percent are lost in the first seven days after hatching. Nests are very difficult to see and are easily damaged and disturbed by beach goers. Hooded plovers are also easily entangled in fishing line and other rubbish left on beaches. Natural forces including high tides, storms, windblown sand and temperature extremes, also affect their survival.

Introduced predators such as foxes, dogs, feral cats and rodents, as well as natural predators including raptors, gulls, ravens and magpies, take not only the hooded plover adults, but also chicks and eggs.

There are three strategies hooded plovers utilize to avoid threats;

**Camouflage:** Parents provide shelter for eggs and chicks with their bodies and wings and often sit very still to avoid detection. The eggs and chicks colouring also blends in with their natural environment.

**Distraction:** If surprised by walkers and/or dogs, the parents will call and perform distraction displays such as feigning a broken wing, to both warn chicks and distract predators. Chicks bob down immediately or seek shelter, leaving them open to exposure, predation or crushing.

Constant disturbance will waste all their valuable energy, putting them further at risk.

**Fleeing:** Parent birds will call to their chicks to hide or lead them away from approaching danger.

## Ensuring survival on Phillip Island

Phillip Island Nature Parks, along with local conservation groups and volunteers have been monitoring the hooded plover population since the 1980's. Recent plans have focused on increasing breeding success and adult survival.

The strategies include;

- Fencing off breeding beaches from wandering sheep and cattle.
- Controlling pest plants and animals especially foxes, dogs and cats.
- Enforcing regulations prohibiting dogs and horses on breeding beaches.

- Public Education Programs. Volunteers are involved in the 'Hooded Plover Watch' program and ranger's patrol beaches during the breeding season.
- Erecting temporary fencing and signage around vulnerable nests to create refuges
- Interpretive signage and school visits
- Population monitoring through nest records and leg banding of chicks
- Online data portal through Birdlife Australia.

Phillip Island is probably one of the few places where hooded plovers are increasing thanks to research and intensive management and public support.



## What you can do

- Read signs thoroughly before you enter an area.
- Don't take your dog into areas where they are not allowed (pick up a 'Where can I walk my dog' brochure from any Phillip Island Nature Parks outlet or Bass Coast Shire Council office).
- When walking, keep below the high tide line and watch where you are walking.
- Do not allow your dog or cat to roam from your property. Keep them in at night and place a collar and bell on them.
- Keep to designated pathways and boardwalks.
- Pick up rubbish such as fishing lines and other plastic from the beach and place rubbish in the bin or recycle.
- If you see dogs, cats or foxes on the loose, please contact Phillip Island Nature Park staff on **(03) 5951 2800**.

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