

Hooded Plover

(*Thinornis cucullatus*)

Species Profile

Animalia - Aves

WEIGHT: 100g

LENGTH: 19 - 23cm

LIFESPAN: Over 20 years

CONSERVATION STATUS: Vulnerable

Hooded Plover

The Hooded Plover (*Thinornis cucullatus*) 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 southeastern 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 2016.

Habitat

On Phillip Island, Hooded Plovers are seen from Cleeland Bight in the east, along the southern and north-western shorelines and Silverleaves. 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.



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.

Threats

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.

Island Ark

Phillip Island is fox-free and the removal of this key threat allows for greater breeding success of Hooded Plovers, but they remain vulnerable to human activities such as habitat disturbance, off-leash dogs, marine debris, plastic pollution and feral cats. You too can help protect Hooded Plovers by being a responsible pet owner, keeping your dog on a leash, walking below the high tide line, reducing single use plastics and participating in beach cleans.

Securing a brighter future

Phillip Island Nature Parks provides a sanctuary for Hooded Plovers. Nature Parks rangers and volunteers protect them through predator control programs, habitat management, education and enforcing regulations prohibiting dogs and horses on breeding beaches. Scientific research and other conservation activities are also conducted to better understand the implications of local and global threats to Hooded Plovers in order to protect them today and into the future.

Hooded Plover guardians help the Penguin Foundation fund important scientific research and conservation work to secure a brighter future for these threatened shorebirds.

Penguin Foundation

penguinfoundation.org.au

