TEAM OYSTERCATCHER NEWSLETTER No. 13. September, 2025

Welcome to our thirteenth edition of the Newsletter ! Much has been happening on our beaches since our March'25 (No. 12) edition was published. Along with our usual regional reports, the potential effect of the micro-algal bloom on Oystercatchers and other marine life is discussed on the SE Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island. There is an update on recent banding trips and re-sightings of flagged birds, and finally, we have a progress report on research projects supported by the SA Shorebirds Foundation. Any comments about the Newsletter or observations on Oystercatchers in your region are welcomed and can be provided to the editor, Keith Jones (docjones@bigpond.net.au).

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1. REGIONAL NEWS

1a. Coorong Lagoon. *Coorong Lagoon Winter Survey*. Between July 31 and August 3, 2025, shore and boat-based counts of all water and shore birds within the Coorong Lagoon (South, North Lagoons and the Murray Estuary) was organised by Julia Roetman, one of Birdlife Australia's South Australian coordinators, and was undertaken by about 15 Birdlife Australia volunteers. We were fortunate in having relatively calm and sunny days for the survey with valuable assistance from several Commercial Lakes & Coorong boat fishers. The results of the counts on Oystercatchers since 2019 are seen in Fig. 1. As has been usually the case, in 2025 Pied Oystercatchers (POCs) were observed from north of Parnka Point to the Murray Estuary (Bird Island) and on both the eastern and

western sides of the Lagoon and often in pairs or small flocks. Low numbers of Sooty Oystercatchers (SOCs) were observed, with a single flock resting just inside the Murray Mouth. The long-term trends since 2019 show slight declines in numbers, but were not significant for either species.

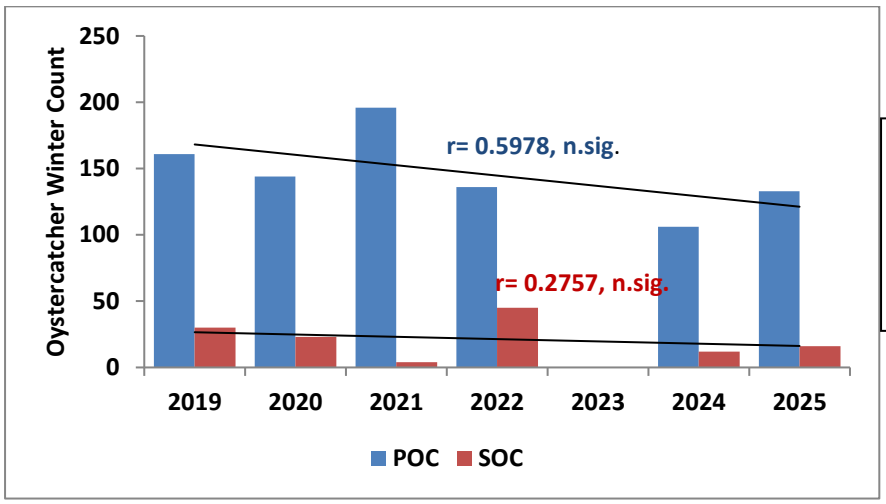


Fig. 1. Trends in Oystercatcher counts from Coorong Lagoon winter surveys, 2019 – 2025. (Note: the 2023 survey not undertaken)

1.b. South-eastern Fleurieu.

1.b.i: November Biennial coastal surveys from the Murray Mouth to Middleton Point. Along with all other coastal Southern Australian regions, a biennial count of Hooded Plovers was conducted in November, 2024 by trained volunteers. All shorebird species, including POCs and SOCs, were counted, and the results for the SE SA and the Coorong Ocean Beach have been reported in our previous Newsletter No. 12. Here, I report on the counts of Oystercatchers from the Ocean Beach at the western end of the Murray Mouth through to Middleton Point, from November, 2008 to the latest survey in November, 2024 (Fig. 2). Since 2008, the counts of POCs have significantly risen; however, for SOCs, the slight rise was not significant. Both species showed reduced numbers in 2024 and for SOCs, this was substantial compared with previous recent years. The results of the 2024/25 biennial counts for all coastal regions of Southern Australia from WA to NSW can now be seen in the latest Beach-Nesting Bird Report (Ekanayake, K. (2025).

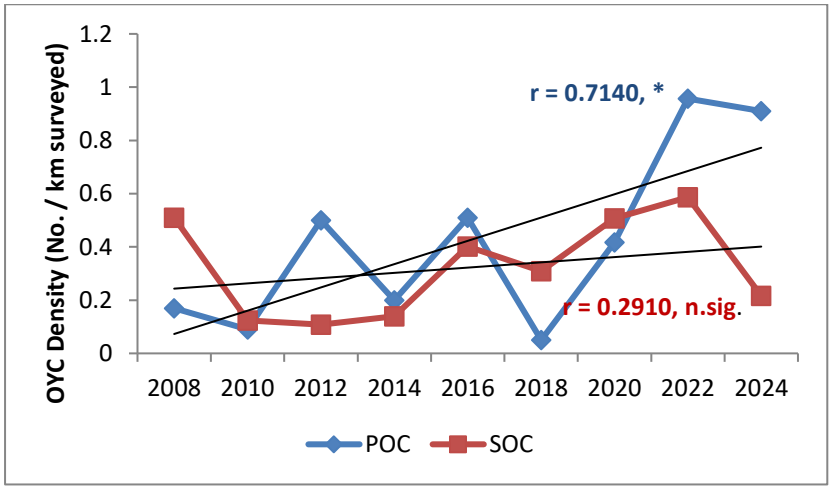


Fig. 2. Biennial counts of Pied (blue) and Sooty (maroon) Oystercatchers along the Ocean Beach from the Murray Estuary to Middleton Point, November, 2008 – 2024. Counts expressed as nos / Km. beach surveyed)

1.b.ii: Monitoring Oystercatcher numbers and human disturbance on Goolwa/Middleton Ocean Beach and the Murray Mouth Estuary from 2011/12 – 2024/25.

1.b.ii.a: Monthly variation in Oystercatcher counts in 2024/25. (Figs. 3 & 4). POCs occurred predominantly within the Murray Estuary in most months, with birds venturing mainly out to the eastern Goolwa Beach, during July'24 – November'24 and in June '25. Small numbers were observed at Middleton Beach and the Western Goolwa Beach from August'24 – October'24 (Fig. 3).

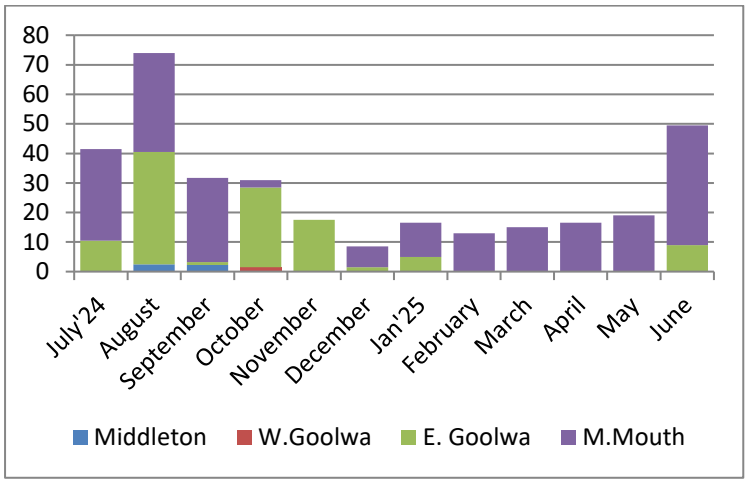


Fig. 3: Cumulative Monthly Counts of POCs in 2024/25.

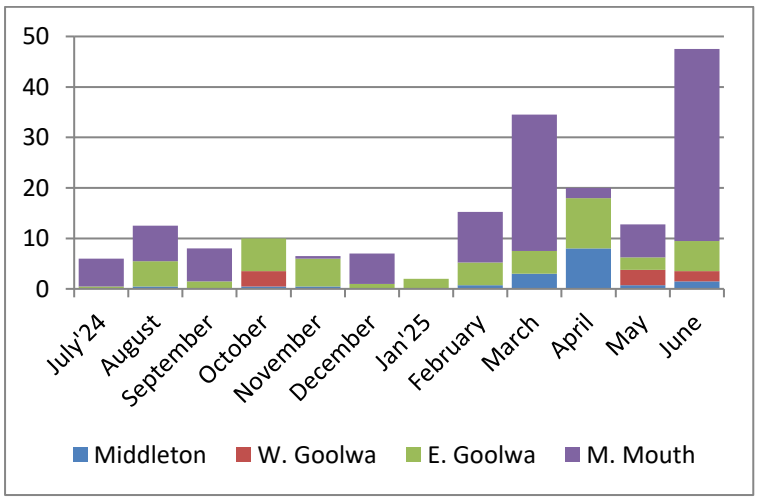


Fig. 4: Cumulative Monthly counts of SOCs in 2024/25.

During 2024/25, SOCs were distributed more evenly than POCs throughout this region, with highest numbers at the Murray Mouth in March'25 and June'25 (Fig. 4).

1.b.ii.b: Variation in annual counts of Oystercatchers between 2011/12 and 2024/25 *(Figs 5 & 6).* For POCs, on both the Ocean Beach and the Murray Estuary, there has been an overall slight, but not statistically significant rise in counts for both areas (Fig.5). On average, more POCs are seen at the Murray Mouth (mean: 18.7, s.e. 2.3) than on the Ocean Beach (mean: 13.8, s.e. 3.5). On the Ocean Beach, we see large inter-annual fluctuations in numbers, with relatively high counts occurring in 2011/12, 2016/17 and 2022/23, appearing to coincide with high environmental Barrage Flows through the Murray Mouth. At the Mouth, POCs numbers have again slightly risen, but not significantly. The highest annual count of these birds at the Mouth was this last year (2024/25), and there appears to be no linkage with Barrage flows.

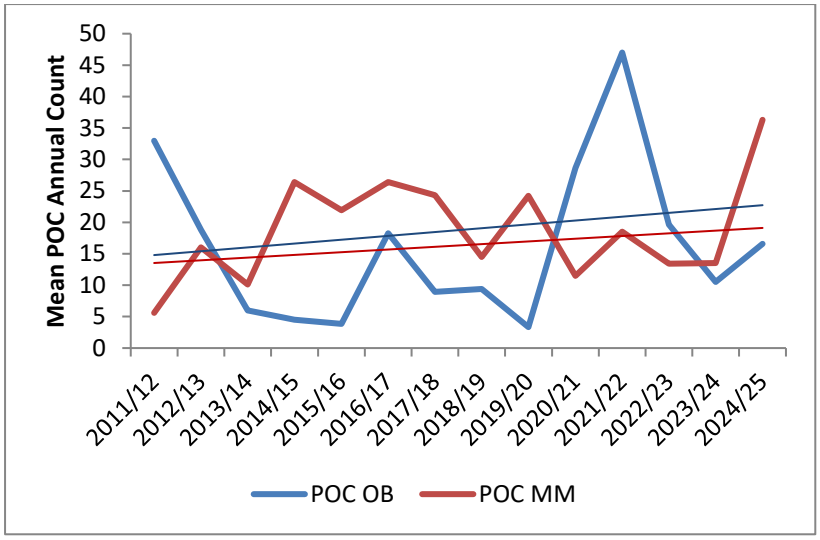


Fig. 5. Mean annual counts of POCs on Ocean Beach (Middleton – Goolwa Beach) (Blue) and the Murray Mouth (Estuary)(Maroon) between 20211/12 and 2024/25.

For SOCs in most years, the mean annual counts on the Ocean Beach were higher (mean: 19.8, s.e.1.9) compared with birds at the Murray Estuary (mean: 3.5, s.e. 0.5). The exception was this last year (2024/25) (Fig.6), when they latter exceeded those on the Ocean Beach . At the Murray Estuary, the mean annual count has increased significantly (r = 0.7400, **), but the slight rise on the Ocean Beach was not statistically significant.

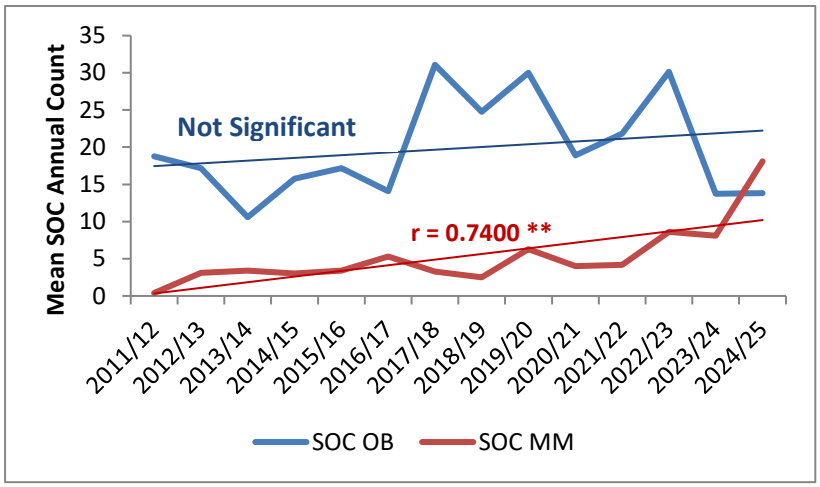


Fig. 6. Mean annual counts of SOCs on Ocean Beach (Middleton – Goolwa Beach) (Blue) and the Murray Mouth (Estuary) (Maroon) between 20211/12 and 2024/25.

1.b.ii.c. Human Disturbance to Oystercatchers by dogs and ORV's. Since 2011/12, the numbers of dogs have been counted at each site, and since 2017/18, the numbers were separated between leashed and unleashed ones (Fig. 7). Between 2011/12 and 2024/25, the total numbers of dogs increased by 53% from 95 to 212. Since 2017/18, the numbers of unleashed dogs has risen by 77.5 % from 102 to 181; however, although smaller, the numbers of leashed dogs have increased more rapidly, from 8 in 2017/18 to 49 in 2024/25, a rise of more than 500%. I suggest that the relatively rapid rise in numbers of leashed logs, compared with unleashed dogs is linked to the rise in awareness by dog walkers about the benefits of leashing dogs to conserve Hooded Plover nests, due to increased fencing and signage. The drop in numbers of unleashed dogs during 2021/22 and 2022/23 could have been due to lesser numbers of people exercising their dogs due to Covid-19 lockdowns.

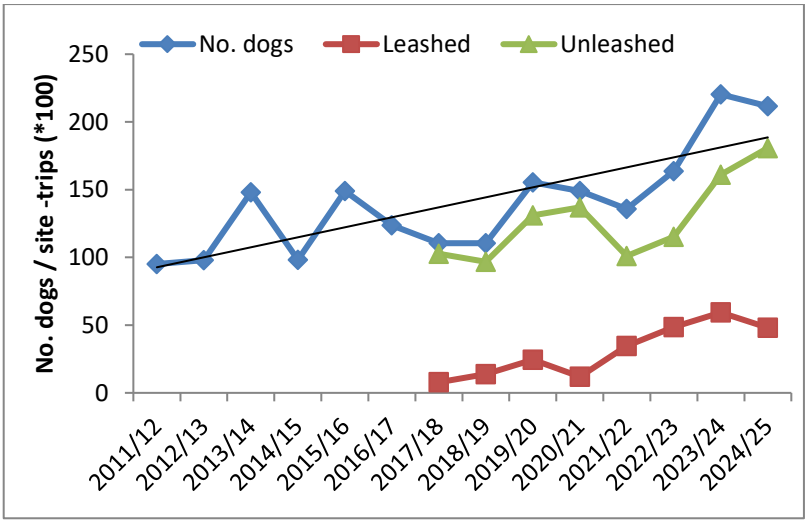
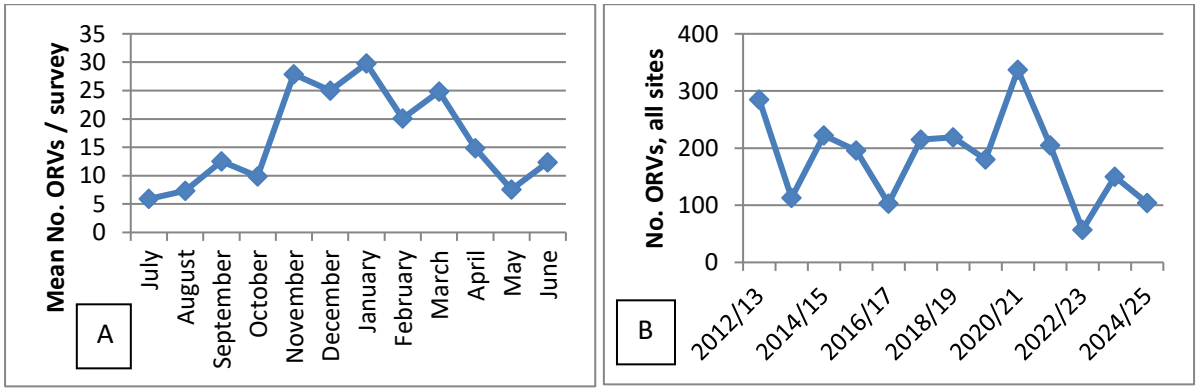


Fig. 7. Total numbers of dogs (blue), unleashed (green) and leashed dogs (maroon) at all sites/trip (*100), 2011/12 to 2024/25.

Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs) are permitted to recreationally use the Goolwa Ocean Beach, from the Goolwa Beach Road Carpark to the Murray Mouth (West), a distance of ~ 12 km. Recreational use includes general beach driving, Goolwa Pipi harvesting, shore-based line fishing, swimming and picnicking. Since 2012/13, at each site when an Oystercatcher count is made, the numbers of moving or stationary ORVs are also counted (Figs. 8 a & b). Three sites (Barrage Beach, Beacon 19 Beach and at the western edge of the Murray Mouth on Sir Richard Peninsula, opposite Sugars Beach) were the main sites where ORV's were observed. On the western edge of the Mouth, vehicles, earth movers and associated pipes that were associated the dredging of the Murray Mouth, were not included in the counts.

Considering the monthly variation in mean counts of ORVs since 2012/13, highest counts occurred between November and March (Fig. 8A). These highest counts coincided with the start of the recreational pipi harvesting season in November, and the Summer and Easter holidays (December – March/April).



Figs. 8 A & B: Monthly mean number of ORV's between Goolwa Beach Road and the western edge of the Murray Mouth (A), and (B), the total annual counts between 2012/13 and 2024/25.

The annual counts of ORV's varied between 57 in 2022/23 and 337 in 2020/21 (Fig. 8B). In recent years, the numbers have varied considerably more than in previous years (2013/14 to 2019/20). In 2020/21, when Covid-19 interstate lockdowns and travel restrictions were in place, highest numbers of ORVs were counted. Lowest count in 2022/23 coincided with closures to recreational pipi

harvesting during most of the season, due to the detection of *E.coli* bacteria in Pipis and water samples. In this last year, 2024/25, since late March'25, the occurrence of a toxic micro-alga, relatively warm water and calm conditions led to a) a significant cockle mortality event (see below), b) dead fish, sharks and rays and invertebrates being washed up and c) health issues to humans using the beaches. These factors possibly contributed to the lower numbers of ORVs using these beaches.

Goolwa Pipi Mortality Event on Goolwa – Middleton Beaches, March, 2025.

Both POCs and SOCs are known to forage for bivalves on the intertidal ocean beaches at Middleton and Goolwa Beaches (Jones, 2016; Vanderzon, 2023).

In late March'25, very large numbers (up to 15 bivalves per sq. metre) of Goolwa Pipis (*Latona deltoides*) and Southern Cockles (*Mactra australis*) were washed ashore from Middleton to Beacon 19 beaches, with SOCs and Silver Gulls observed foraging on the flesh of the cockles as well as other invertebrates at Middleton, and Pipis at Beacon 19 (Figs. 9 A & B). At the same time, fish and rays were also washed up. A green tinge to the beach sand and foam at the water's edge at Middleton Beach suggested that a toxic micro-algal (*Karenia mikimotoi*) bloom had caused the mortality event, as this micro-algae is known to attack the gills of fish, rays and filter-feeding invertebrates.

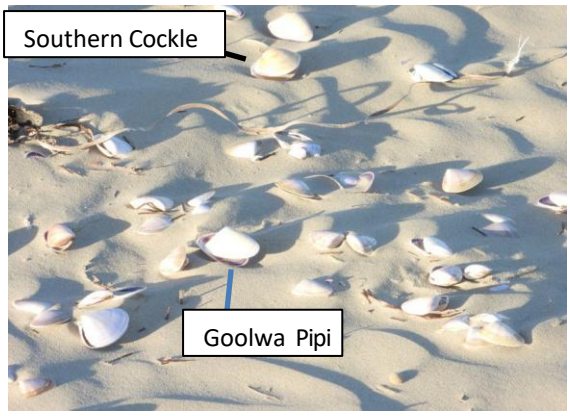


Fig. 9 A: Moribund and dead Goolwa Pipis and Southern Cockles at Goolwa Beach, 8 April, 2025. Photo: K. Jones

Fig. 9 B: Sooty Oystercatchers foraging amongst beach wrack at Middleton Beach on the flesh of Goolwa pipis and other invertebrates on 8 April, 2025. (Photo: K. Jones)

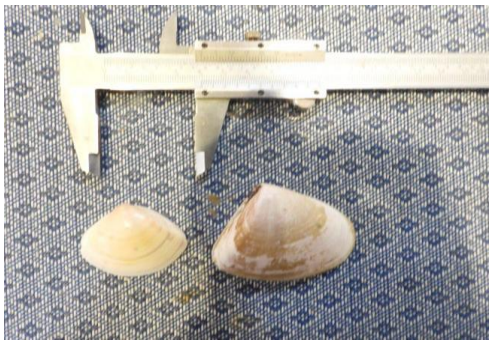
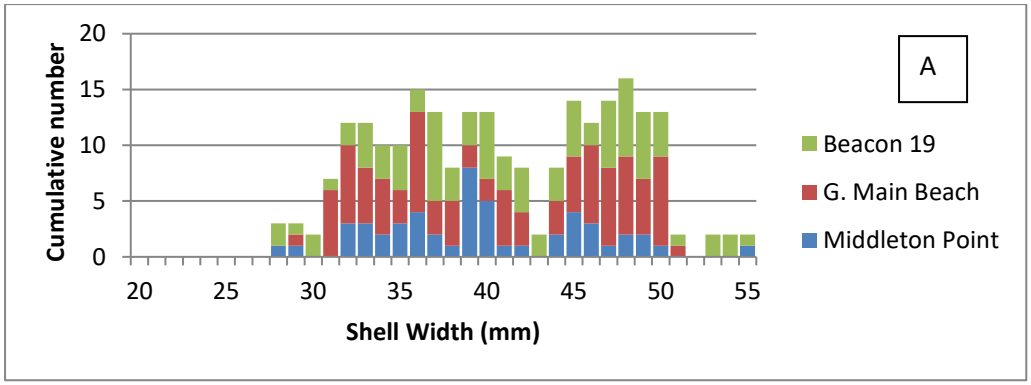
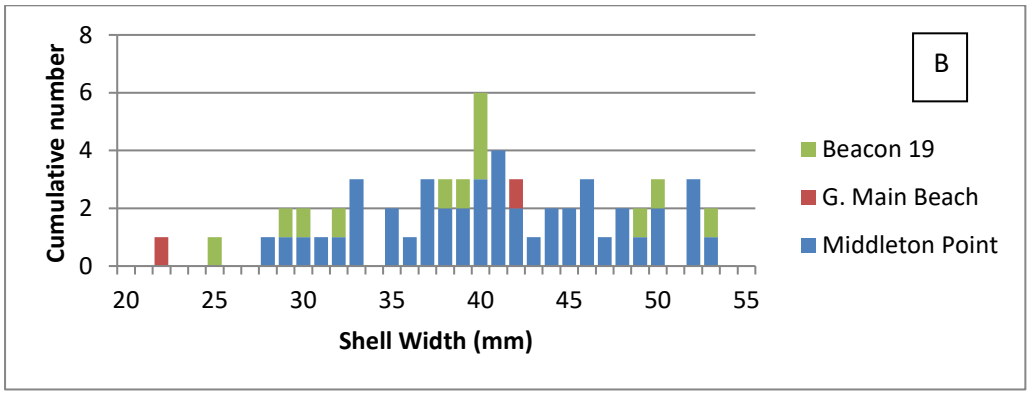


Fig. 10. Southern Cockle (Left) and Goolwa Pipi (Right) Widest width measurements taken in mms.





Figs. 11 A & B: Cumulative Length frequencies of A: Goolwa Pipis and B: Southern Cockles at three sites on Middleton and Goolwa Beaches, May – June, 2025. Sampled from dead bivalves.

Although, cockle mortality events on the Goolwa / Middleton Beaches have been reported previously (1984; Clarke, 1985; 2011; Jones 2016; & 2018; Jones, pers. obs.) and were often associated with relatively calm weather, a dodge tide and warm water conditions, this recent event has been the first one that the micro-algal bloom has been an additional cause. The size composition of samples of Goolwa Pipis and Southern Cockles that had died are seen in Figs, 10 & 11.

The substantial numbers of bivalve cockles succumbing, may have an effect on Oystercatchers and other shore-birds along this part of the coast. Immediately after the cockle kill, we saw relatively high numbers of SOCs, Silver Gulls and Pacific Gulls foraging on the bivalves and other invertebrates. Immediate observations on the birds found no signs of weakness or deaths. Pied Oystercatchers had not been present on the Middleton – Goolwa Beach before the time of cockle mortality. However, the long-term effects of diminished food supplies, may affect the coming breeding season, through insufficient condition to breed, or a reduced clutch size. Also, the birds may move to other more favourable foraging areas. Goolwa Pipis are a relatively fast growing shellfish; they reach 95 % breeding capacity at 33 mm width, ie 1 – 2 yrs of age (Ferguson, 2013), (see Fig. 11A, showing the

vast majority of Pipis sampled would have been reproductively active in the coming breeding season in October, 2025). Fishery-independent monitoring of the bivalve populations along this shore as well as continued monitoring of the Oystercatcher numbers is required to determine how long it will take for the bivalve populations to recover, and what the long-term effects will be for the oystercatcher populations.

1.c: SW Fleurieu Coast (Middleton Point to Fishery Beach, Cape Jervis & adjacent Offshore Islands.
During 2024/25, there has been an increased intensity of Oystercatchers surveys. Since June, 2025, Basham's Beach and all the rocks about Middleton Point are now being surveyed weekly. Big Duck Eco-Tours have carried out Seabird and Oystercatcher Counts on all offshore islands (Pullen, Granite, Seal Rocks, Wright and West Islands on 7 occasions (September'24 – June'25) (Bartley, 2025). Also, Birdlife Australia Volunteers keep regular observations on foraging and breeding Sooty Oystercatchers on Granite Island and the adjacent Encounter Bay coast.

This SW Fleurieu coast, with its extensive rocky habitat more conducive to SOCs, POCs have only rarely been observed. This last year, single breeding pairs of SOCs were reported from Granite, Wright and West Islands with a single chick produced by each nesting pair. SOCs have been observed foraging for limpets on the rocks of these offshore islands, and on the Encounter Bay sandy coastline, they have been photographed foraging for beach worms (Fig. 12).

Fig. 12. Sooty Oystercatcher foraging on a beach worm, near Victor Harbor causeway. August, 2025. Photo: R. Shirlaw.

In late July'25, the volunteers on the Big Duck Eco-tour counted a resting flock or 16 SOCs on the mainland facing side of the Pullen Islands (Fig. 13). In July,24, the SOC flock was also reported on these islands (Birdlife Australia's Birdata Explore data base).

Fig. 13: A resting flock of 16 SOCs on the Pullen Islands, July'25. Photo: R. Shirlaw.

1.d. Western Fleurieu coast (Marino to Cape Jervis. Despite regular fortnight surveys at Snapper Point and other parts of the western Fleurieu, numbers of SOCs continued to decline in 2024/25 (Fig. 14). This decline has been noticed in the more NE part of Gulf St. Vincent coast, as described in Section 1 e (Samphire coast). In this year, a single Pied Oystercatcher was reported from the mouth of the Yankalilla River in December, 2024.

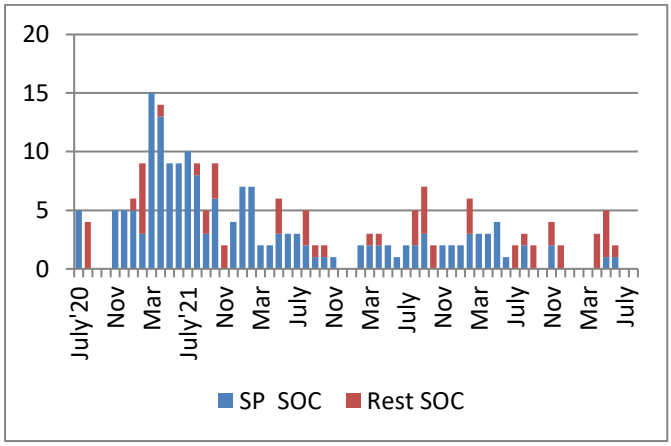


Fig. 14: Cumulative numbers of Sooty Oystercatchers counted at Snapper Point (blue) and the rest of the western Fleurieu coast (maroon).

1.e. Samphire Coast, NE Gulf St. Vincent (Adelaide Metro – Price Salt Fields)

Since 2014/15, both Oystercatcher species have experienced long-term declines in numbers, both in the southern (Adelaide metro – St. Kilda) and northern Samphire coast(North of St. Kilda to Price Salt Fields)(Figs. 15 & 16, resp.). For POCs, the decline has not been statistically significant (Fig. 15), but, for SOCs, it was significant for both areas (Fig.16). This decline in SOCs mirrors that observed further south on the western Fleurieu coast (Fig.14).

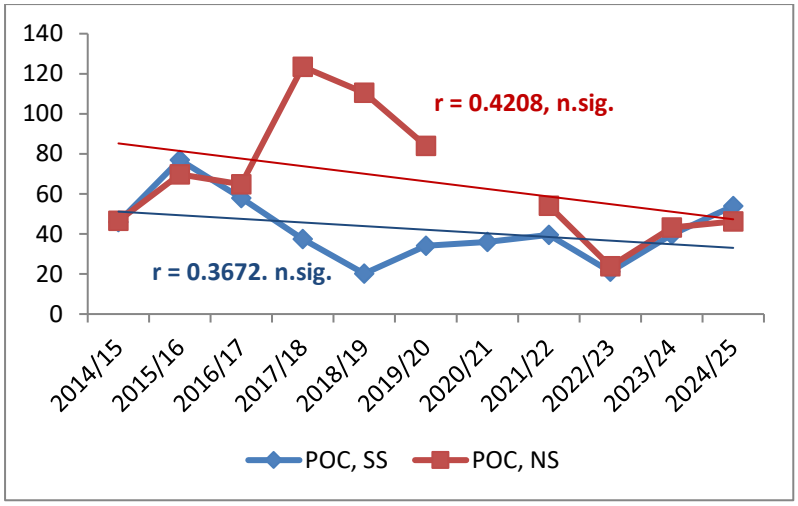


Fig. 15. Mean annual counts of Pied Oystercatchers on the southern (blue) and northern Samphire coast (maroon), 2014/15 – 2024/25. Note: In 2020/21, Northern Samphire was not surveyed.

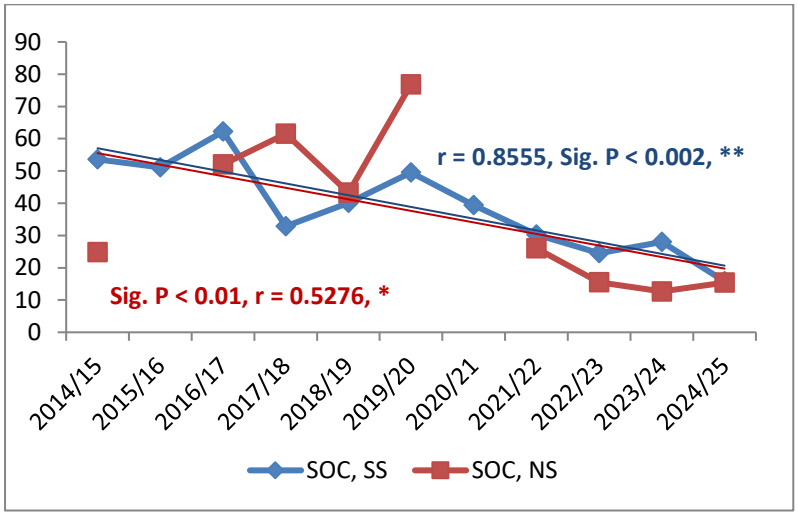


Fig. 16. Mean annual counts of Sooty Oystercatchers on the southern (blue) and northern Samphire coast (maroon), 2014/15 – 2024/25. The northern Samphire coast was not surveyed in 2015/16 and 2020/21.

In 2025, two interesting observations on POCs were made on the Samphire Coast. Firstly, in May'25, on the northern Adelaide metro shore, an adult bird was observed feeding a dependent chick, estimated to be 10 - 15 days old (J. Campbell, pers. com.) (Fig. 17). This lateness in the POC breeding season, (normally October – January), is very unusual. Also, because of high human and feral predator disturbances, POCs breeding along the Adelaide Metro is considered to be a rare event.

Fig. 17: Dependent Pied Oystercatcher chick (10 – 15 days old) being fed by parent on Tennyson Beach, northern Adelaide Metro coast. May' 2025. Photo: Birdlife Australia Volunteer.

Secondly, a flock of more than 40 Pied Oystercatchers (both adults and juveniles) were photographed descending on to the mud flats at Bald Hill, NE Gulf St. Vincent in August, 2025 (Fig. 18). This site is regularly monitored by BirdLife Australia volunteers, who normally only report up to 4 individuals at any one time, so, this sighting is very unusual.

Figure 18: Part of a flock of more than 40 Pied Oystercatchers descending on to the mud flats at Bald Hill, NE Gulf St. Vincent, August, 2025 (Photo: G. Brooks).

1.f. Yorke Peninsula. A number of sites on Yorke Peninsula were visited in August, 2025 to determine whether any of the POCs or SOCs that had been caught and flagged on Kangaroo Island in the past 2 years had moved to Yorke Peninsula, one of the mainland areas closest to KI. The sites visited are seen in Table 1. Although no flagged birds were sighted, it was also a good opportunity to provide counts of birds and add to the information on counts undertaken at the same sites in previous years and months. Data for Feb'19, March'20 and Aug'25 were collected by K.Jones and for the Aug'19 – Aug'24 period, max. counts were sourced from Birdata Explore and the BNB Portal.

Table 1: Max. Counts of Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers on Yorke Peninsula, Feb, 2019 – Aug, 2025.

Species	**Pied Oystercatchers**			**Sooty Oystercatchers**		
Sites, Survey Dates	**Feb/Mar; 2019,20**	**Aug, '19 – '24**	**Aug, 2025**	**Feb/Mar; 2019,20**	**Aug, '19 – '24**	**Aug, 2025**
Pt. Vincent sthn Spit	0	2	2	12	2	0
Stansbury sthn Spit	4	10	2	24	8	5
Coobowie Bay	12	3	2	6	0	0
Sultana Point – Wattle Bay	8	2	2	23	8	15
Sub-total (E,SE YP)	**24**	**17**	**8**	**65**	**18**	**20**
Pt. Turton, Flaherty's Beach, Hardwicke Bay	15	47	20	41	15	5
Parson's, Bluff Beaches	2	0	2	2	0	18
Sub-total (SW YP)	**17**	**47**	**20**	**43**	**15**	**23**
Total YP	**41**	**64**	**28**	**108**	**33**	**43**

1.g. Kangaroo Island – Dave Potter and Jean Turner

Effects of the Algal Bloom The harmful *Karenia mikimotoi* algal bloom was first recorded on the southern Fleurieu Peninsula in March and spread quickly to Kangaroo Island. By late March, numerous dead scale fish, sharks, rays and cuttlefish were washing up on our north coast and south coast beaches, accompanied by the distinctive algal bloom foam and smell.

By early April we were also finding dead and dying bivalves, gastropods and rarely seen marine worms washed up. At Island Beach on the 6th April 2025 we saw several strange Sipunculid worms and thousands of dying Sunset Shells, Date Shells, Wedge Cockles and Sand Cockles, with their flesh exposed, stranded by the receding tide. Pied Oystercatchers at the shore were taking no interest in the dying invertebrates.

Sunset Shell with flesh still inside, Island Beach 6-04-2025. (Photo: J Turner)	Dead Sand Cockle (*Katelysia* sp.) with rotted flesh, Island Beach 9-06-2025. (Photo: J Turner)

By the time of our next Island Beach survey (13th April) a massive cockle kill had occurred. Many of these cockles were in the size range preferred by foraging oystercatchers

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	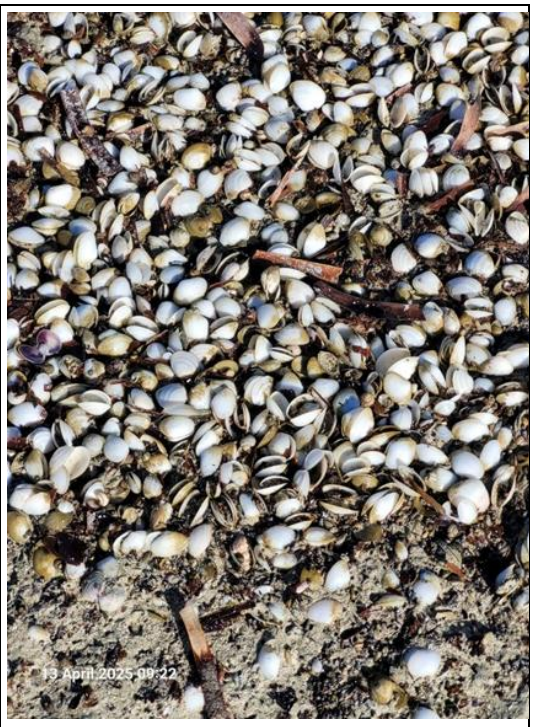
Extent of Cockle deaths on the exposed Island Beach West Spit, 13-04-2025. (Photo: D Potter)	Small dead Cockles washed up on the beach at Island Beach, 13-04-2025 (Photo: D Potter)

From that time on until the middle of June, massive numbers of a diverse range of bivalves and gastropods, crustaceans, worms, and fish, including deep water species, sharks and rays had washed up. From the middle of June only isolated numbers of animals were washed up even though the bloom was still present evidenced by its characteristic foam and smell.

Implications for the oystercatchers may be quite severe. The main food items of Pied Oystercatchers on Kangaroo Island are bivalves and worms. Mud cockles (*Katelysia* sp.) which is the species shown in the photos above is the dominant large cockle occurring in the Bay of Shoals and Eastern Cove. Studies in the 1970s of Mud Cockle in the Bay of Shoals showed that after 4 years only 50% of the population had reached sexual maturity. Thus a vital food source for Pied Oystercatchers may have been drastically impacted by the algal bloom for years to come.

Mussels, another key bivalve foraged by oystercatchers, were also heavily impacted by the algal bloom. These took longer to die and wash up than the cockles, but mussels of all size classes have been stranded along tide lines in large numbers. Sooty Oystercatchers also feed on small crabs and gastropods, which have also been heavily affected by the bloom.

What does the future hold for our Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers? We wonder if there is enough alternative prey to support successful breeding this season. Only time will tell.

Perhaps due to the shortage of marine prey, there have been more sightings of Pied Oystercatchers feeding in grazing paddocks, town parks and grassy roadside verges. At least one vehicle strike resulting in death of a Pied Oystercatcher occurred along the American River Road adjoining Pelican Lagoon.

Part of a group of 60 Pied Oystercatchers, foraging at high tide with Black Swans and Ibis in a grazing paddock opposite Pelican Lagoon, American River. 16-06-2025

(Photo: D Potter)

Storm Damage to nesting habitats

High tides this winter, driven by strong winds and storm surges, have resulted in significant erosion of beaches, dunes and earth cliffs in Pied Oystercatcher breeding territories.

Sand loss on beaches may not be replenished in time for breeding by pairs that prefer nesting on the upper beach dry sand. With less sand and lower than usual beach profiles some nests are more likely to be swept away by extreme tides in spring.

Fore-dune erosion, with associated loss of stabilising grasses and groundcover plants, has caused dune retreat of 2-3m or more in several territories. This has opened up the more stable second dunes to tidal inundation and erosion in some areas, with build-up of loose, unstable seagrass wrack. This may impact on pairs that usually nest on the hard-packed flat top of fore-dune ledges.

Beaches backed by tall dunes have suffered huge damage to dune faces. Undermining by the sea and ongoing wind erosion has created unstable, shear vertical drops of up to 6 metres. This will affect the pairs that prefer to nest on small stable ledges of dune faces, as well as other dune-nesting species such as Hooded Plovers. And the risk with eroding earth cliffs? – incubating birds or their eggs may be crushed by sudden landslides.

Cliff erosion onto Pied Oystercatcher nesting habitat, American Beach, 1-07-2025.

(Photo: J Turner)

With food shortages and a housing crisis, it looks like 2025-26 will be a very challenging breeding season for beach-nesting birds. Any pairs that succeed deserve a gold medal!

2. BANDING NEWS.

2.1. Mainland Observations. Since the reports in the last newsletter No. 12, re-sightings of flagged Oystercatchers have been made at several mainland sites in SA and other parts of Australia (Table 2). Details of original site and date of capture and flagging/ringing were obtained from the data set at BirdMark (https://www.birdmark.net/en).

Table 2: Reported sightings of flagged/ringed POCs and SOCs in the past 6 months in SA and NSW, March – Aug'25.

Species	Initial Flagging details	Flagging Location and date	Age at initial Capture	Most recent Resighting, age	Persons Reporting & straight distance, directional movement (km)
Pied Oystercatcher	Yellow, black code: WM	Barry Beach, Corner Inlet, January, 2015	2 yr old bird	Mouth of Bega River, Sthn NSW, July, 2025, now 12 + yr old adult	S. and D. Thorn, ENE,350 km
Pied Oystercatcher	Red, white code, N9	Stockyard Creek, Westernport, Vic; May, 2011	3 yr old bird	Reevesby Island, SW Spencer Gulf, SA, November, 2024, 14 + yr old adult bird	A.O'Dea, NW, 910 km
Pied Oystercatcher	Black, white code, 07	Danger Point, SESA, Nov, 2020	Chick	Bird Island, Murray Mouth, SA, June, 2025, 4+ yr old adult bird.	P. Barnes, NNW, 300 km

Pied Oystercatcher	Green on White plastic rings, metal band, both on l. tibia	Werribee, Port Phillip Bay, Vic < 2007	?	Bird Island, Murray Estuary, SA, Aug'25, 18+ yr old adult	K. Jones, NW, 550 km
Sooty Oystercatcher	Black, white code, T5	Blackfellows Caves, SESA, Nov' 2018	Adult	Port Ellen, Kangaroo Island, April, 2025, adult	J. Turner & D. Potter, WNW, 350 km
Sooty Oystercatcher	Black, white code, T2	Livingstone Bay, SESA, Nov' 2014	2 yr old bird	Pt. Vincent, Gulf St. Vincent, SA, May, 2025, 13 + yr old adult	Reported from ABBBG data base to M. Christie. NNW, 450 km

Several of these flagged birds have now been at liberty for more than 10 years, and are now considered to be "middle aged" birds, as both species are known to live for more than 30 years. All these birds have travelled more than 300 km; however, these distances should be regarded as minimum distances over their time at liberty, as at least one bird (POC red flag) has returned eastwards to its original capture site at Stockyard Point, Vic from Danger Point, SESA, before travelling, back NW to Reevesby Island in SA.

Fig.19 : Pied Oystercatcher with white/green plastic rings and metal band on left leg, sighted at Bird Island, Murray Estuary, SA, 31 Aug, 2025. Photo: K. Jones

2.2. Kangaroo Island. Banding report by D. Potter and J. Turner.

A survey of shorebirds around the coast of Kangaroo Island (KI) in the mid-1990s (Schulz, 1995) recorded 470 adult Pied Oystercatchers and 247 adult Sooty Oystercatchers.

While Pied Oystercatcher numbers fluctuate seasonally and from year to year, our more recent monitoring of breeding pairs and monthly counts of non-breeding birds at high tide roosts (2017-2025) suggests the population has declined since Schultz's survey. Cumulative mean counts in the known habitat areas shows just over 200 adult Pied Oystercatchers. We have less information about current Sooty Oystercatcher numbers, but monthly counts at known high tide roost sites also suggest a lower population than Schulz (1995) found.

We've often wondered how old our breeding birds are, whether partners stay together from one season to the next, what happens to their fledged offspring and whether and KI birds move from the

island to the mainland. A few banded and flagged Oystercatchers from South East SA and Victoria have turned up on KI, so it's possible some of our birds may go overseas for short exploratory jaunts or permanent moves to new breeding territories.

To find out more, we enlisted the advice and help of the Victorian Wader Study Group (VWSG) and Friends of Shorebirds South East (FoSSE), to start an oystercatcher banding program on KI, enabling us to follow the movements and life histories of individual birds. With support from the South Australian Shorebirds Foundation a small group of VWSG and FoSSE volunteers has made four visits, in December 2023, March 2024, December 2024 and May 2025, to assess oystercatcher breeding and roosting sites and band birds. The banders have been very generous with their time, knowledge and enthusiasm!

Number of birds banded to date by VWSG

	Pied Oystercatchers	**Sooty Oystercatchers**
December 2023	5 (all chicks)	Nil
March 2024	Nil (site assessment for cannon-netting)	Nil
December 2024	16 (9 chicks,6 adults, 1 fledged juvenile)	Nil
May 2025	54 (adults and fledged juveniles)	29 (adults and fledged juveniles)

Through long-term monitoring and re-sightings of banded birds, the VWSG banding program will assess:-

- Population status and demographic trends for oystercatchers on KI;
- Threats faced during the breeding season and at overwintering sites (e.g. sea level rise, human disturbance);
- Breeding distribution and breeding success of KI oystercatchers;
- Movement of oystercatchers from different age groups – juvenile, sub-adult, adult into and out of the KI "population"; and
- Major threats to oystercatcher survival on KI.

While the banding in 2023 and 2024 mainly targeted chicks, a complete family consisting of 2 adults and 2 chicks was banded at Island Beach in 2024. Four other adult birds with chicks were also captured and banded. The 2025 banding focused on adult and juvenile birds in flocking groups at high tide roosts.

The May 2025 banding trip targeted three of the four known Pied Oystercatcher flocking groups; using a capture technique, known as "cannon-netting". This highly skilled, specialist operation enables multiple birds to be captured on the shore at one time. It requires a larger team of experienced banders, to safely retrieve, band, check and release the birds as quickly as possible.

A lucky observation of roosting birds, with 3 flagged KI Pied Oystercatchers in the frame, 16-06-2025.

(Photo: D Potter)

The cannon-netting team was very successful, banding 54 Pied Oystercatchers, boosting our total of flagged Pieds to 75. At one site Sooty Oystercatchers commonly roost with their Pied cousins, resulting in the capture and banding of 29 Sooties as well. Two previously flagged Pied Oystercatchers were recaptured.

So far at least 180 re-sightings of flagged KI oystercatchers have been recorded and entered into the VWSG BirdMark database. This data is shared with the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme database.

Re-sightings of flagged oystercatchers, on KI or the mainland, can be reported to BirdMark at: https://www.birdmark.net/en

Details required include date, location, leg flag colour, letters/numbers engraved on flag, engraving colour and leg with flag (right/left). If possible attach a photograph of the bird showing the leg flag.

Alternatively, re-sightings on KI can be emailed to kioystercatchers@gmail.com Please include details as above, with a photograph showing the leg flag, and observer's name for entry into BirdMark.

Many thanks to the people and organisations who have made this banding program possible:-

- VWSG and FoSSE volunteers, Flinders University researchers, University of Adelaide researchers, Green Adelaide staff, KI DEW staff and local BirdLife Australia volunteers for organising, undertaking and assisting with the banding project;

- The SA Department for Environment and Water and the SA Animal Ethics Committee for permits to VWSG to capture and band oystercatchers on KI;
- KI Council for permission to VWSG to cannon-net and band birds at Council-managed beaches;
- Property owners and sharefarmers who kindly allowed private land allowed access to one site; and
- The South Australian Shorebird Foundation for funding volunteer travel and accommodation.

Breeding season monitoring is done under BirdLife Australia's Scientific and Animal Ethics permits.

3.FOUNDATION FOR SA SHOREBIRDS UPDATE.

The activities of recipients to Foundation grants in 2024/25 have been reported in the previous newsletter, No. 12. Also, the recent May'25 KI POC banding trip by VWSG and FoSSE has been reported in this Newsletter (page 16). Several of the current projects, including the Birdlife Australia, KI Hooded Plover banding trips and the Flinders University project to develop a social marketing intervention to increase compliance of beach regulations will be completed will be completed in 2025/26, and we await their final reports. The first year of PhD project by Emma Vanderzon on the ecology of Oystercatchers in SA is now completed with an additional two years of work to be carried out.

4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

The expertise and knowledge about catching and banding Oystercatchers on Kangaroo island by two volunteer groups, Friends of Shorebirds SE and the Victorian Wader Studies Group(VWSG) is gratefully acknowledged. I also thank Julia Roetman (Birdlife Australia coordinator for the Coorong winter survey, and Kerri Bartley (Birdlife Australia coordinator for the offshore Tern surveys) for organising these surveys, and the numerous volunteers who under took the surveys. Big Duck Eco-tours is also thanked for providing the platform for the offshore island surveys. Roslyn Shirlaw, Jacinta Dickins and Sue and David Thorn have provided valuable observations on Oystercatchers along the southern Fleurieu coast, Barry Simes and Sue and Ash Read (Western Fleurieu) and Mary-Ann Van Trigt and team members of the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary (Samphire Coast) are also acknowledged. Over the years, discussions about Oystercatchers with Maureen Christie, Jeff Campbell, Dr. Roz Jessop, Tony Flaherty, Peter Barnes, Ann O'Dea and Professor Marcel Klaassen (Deakin University) have been most useful. Finally, but not least, the long-term monitoring and detailed observations of Oystercatchers and associated intertidal marine life on Kangaroo Island by Dave Potter and Jean Turner inspires us all to a greater understanding about the ecology of the these birds.

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Fig. 20. Part of a flock of 60 Pied Oystercatchers, at Swift Bay, NW Western Australia. Photo taken on 1 July, 2025 by A. O'Dea.