

TEAM OYSTERCATCHER NEWSLETTER No. 14. March 2026



Welcome to our fourteenth edition of the Newsletter! In this edition, we summarise the regional trends in numbers of Oystercatchers during the first 9 months of 2025/26 and update recent re-sightings of banded Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers in South Australia. This year has been an exceptionally dry one, with minimal environmental flows through the Barrages at the Murray Mouth. We use our 2011/12 – 2024/25 long-term data on OYC numbers on the SE Fleurieu coast to explore their linkages with two important environmental variables, Barrage Flow and Pipi biomass on the Coorong Ocean Beach. On Kangaroo Island, David Potter and Jean Turner update their monitoring of breeding success of Pied Oystercatchers for the 2025/26 season and the KI Oystercatcher banding work, and finally, we report on progress of projects funded by the Foundation for SA Shorebirds.

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1. REGIONAL NEWS

- a) **Coorong Lagoon and Coorong Ocean Beach.** In February 2026, Birdlife Australia organized the summer wetland and shorebird count in the Coorong Lagoon and Ocean Beach. These summer surveys have been ongoing since the early 2000's and provide valuable trends in numbers of resident and migratory shorebirds. Between Feb 5 -8, the shore and boat-based survey of 31 blocks assigned to the lagoon was undertaken by 2 Birdlife Australia staff, 10 volunteers with the assistance of 4 commercial fishers. On Feb 9th, the Birdlife Australia staff, in conjunction with Coorong National Park Rangers, surveyed the Ocean Beach between Tea-Tree Crossing and the Mouth for all shorebirds, including Oystercatchers. The data collected from these surveys are currently being collated and results will be provided in the next edition of this newsletter.

- b) **South-East Fleurieu Coast.** The mean counts of Pied Oystercatchers in this current year (2025/26, July'25 – March'26) has been the second lowest since monitoring began in 2011/12, with a slight, but not significant downward trend over this period (Fig. 1). Pied Oystercatcher numbers do tend to fluctuate interannually, more markedly than for Sooty Oystercatchers. There is a significant upward trend in Sooty Oystercatcher numbers over the same period ($P < 0.01$, $n = 15$).

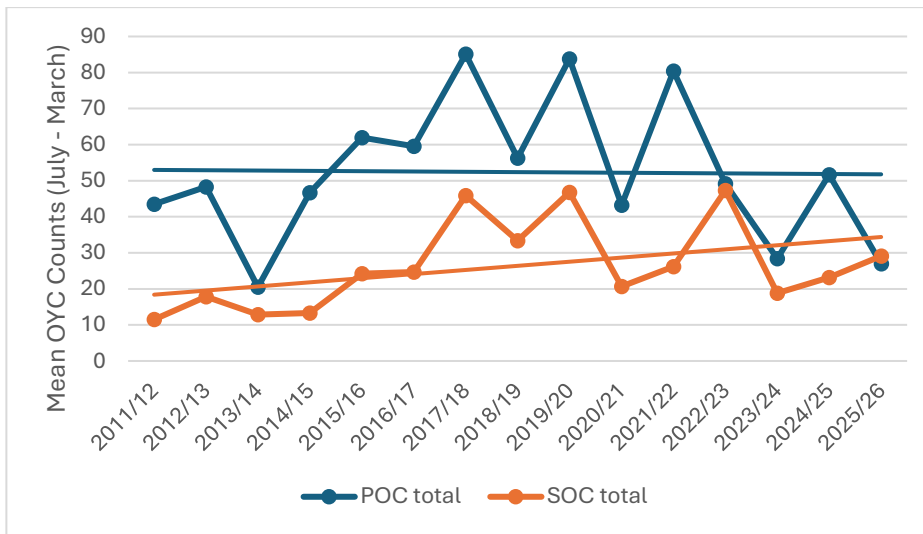


Fig. 1. Average Counts of Oystercatchers (July – March of each year) for all 10 sites, on Ocean Beach and the Murray Estuary, 2011/12 – 2025/26.

The second lowest count of Pied Oystercatchers in this current year has been due to relatively low numbers observed on the Ocean Beach between the Beacon 19 and Middleton Point sites, compared with other years. In the Murray Estuary, POC counts in 2025/26, were also relatively low, being the third lowest of all years (Fig. 2).

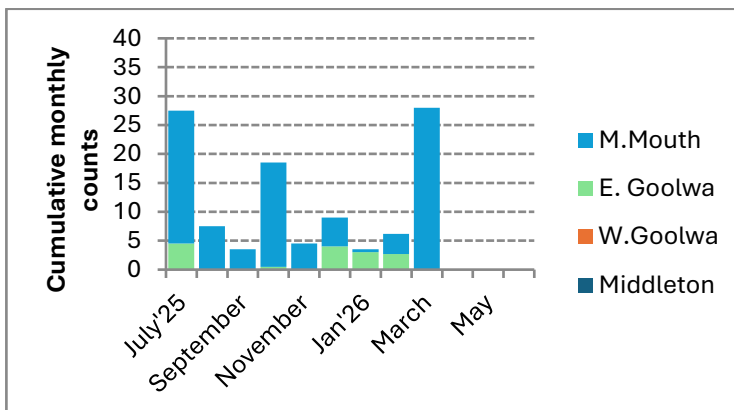
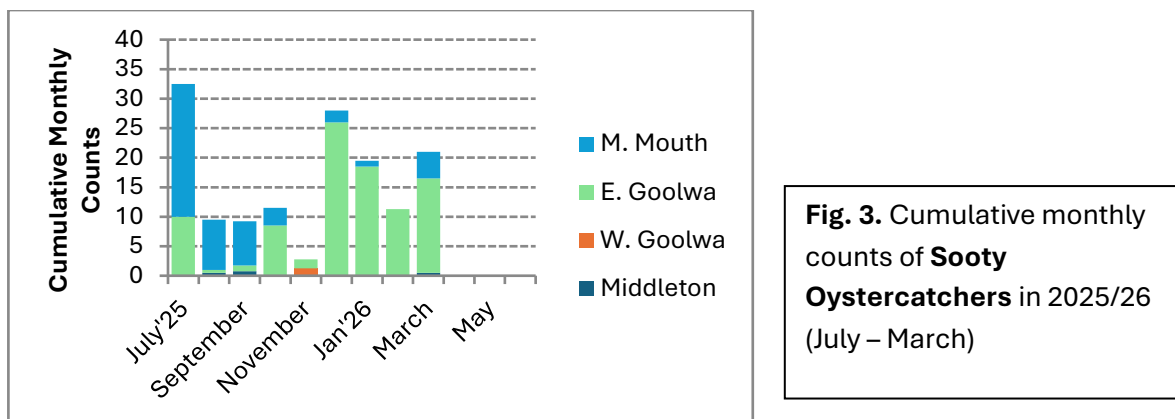


Fig. 2. Monthly counts of Pied Oystercatchers (July'25 – March'26) at all sites from Middleton Point to the Murray Estuary.

In 2025/26, Sooty Oystercatchers were observed at three sites, predominantly at the Murray Estuary and Eastern Goolwa Beach, and minimally at the western Goolwa Beach and Middleton Point (Fig. 3).



We now explore the movement of both species between the Murray Estuary and the Ocean Beaches. Observations on the Eurasian Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) have demonstrated that when access to their foraging habitat is curtailed due to flooding or storm surges, the oystercatchers are forced to move to other areas (Lambeck et al, 1996). Here in South Australia, we have observed that, due to coastal storm-surges, Pied Oystercatchers are known to shift their foraging habitat, feeding on alternative food sources in adjacent grassy areas (e.g. Kangaroo Island, Jones et al, 2016, Potter and Turner, Team Oystercatcher Newsletter, No. 13, p. 14).

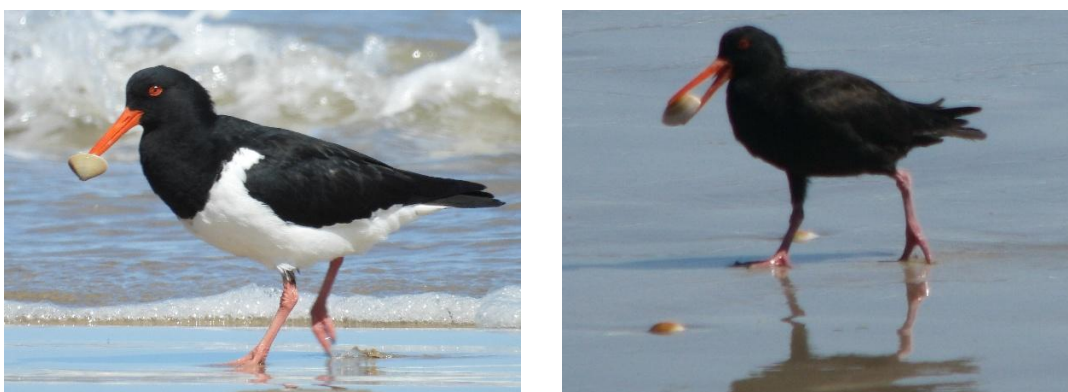
For our Oystercatchers on the SE Fleurieu, for both species, the annual numbers in the Murray Estuary are slightly negatively correlated between the Estuary and the Ocean Beaches, suggesting in years of high barrage flow, both species will congregate more on the Goolwa Beach, than within the estuary and vice versa; however, the correlations are not significant (Table 1). However, the results may also be confounded by other factors, such as relative food availability.

Table 1. Correlations for Pied and Sooty Oystercatcher, between mean annual numbers in the Murray Estuary and the western Ocean Beach, 2011/12 - 2024/25.

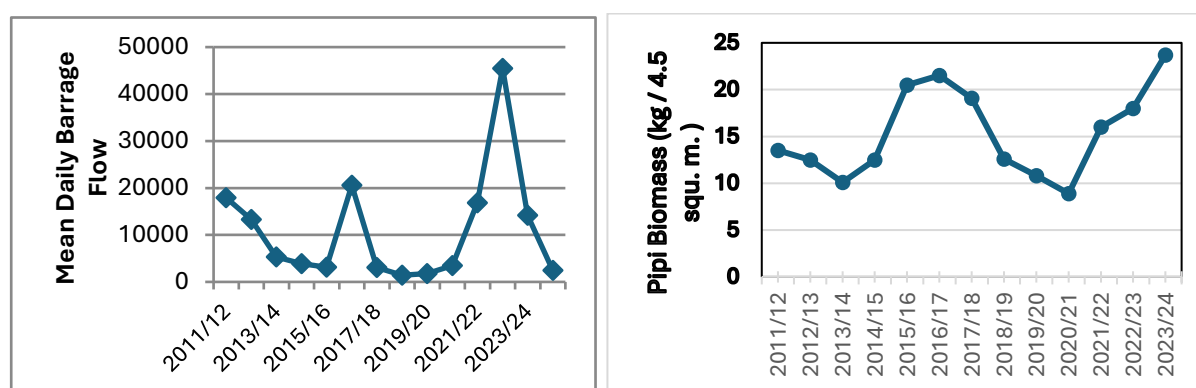
Species	Correlation Coefficient (r) and level of significance.
POC Estuary v's Ocean Beach, n = 14	- 0.30499, 0.25 > P > 0.10, n.sig.
SOC Estuary v's Ocean Beach, n = 14	- 0.11653, P > 0.25, n.sig.

Next, we explore the possible relationships between POC and SOC abundances and two environmental variables; a) annual environment flows through the Barrages (ie Barrage Flows), and b) Goolwa Pipi biomass along the Coorong Ocean Beach. Numbers for the current year have not been included because the full year has not elapsed as well as the confounding effects of the significant drop in Pipi biomass due to the Algal Bloom after March 2025 (Jones, 2025, Team Oystercatcher Newsletter, No. 13, p. 6). Data for Barrage flows is derived from DEW barrage flows (Murray-Darling Basin Authority, 2026). Goolwa Pipi Biomass has been estimated from fishery independent surveys of Goolwa Papis on the Coorong Ocean Beach (east of the Murray Mouth) and undertaken by SARDI Aquatic Sciences since 2008/09. The method of surveys and calculating mean annual Pipi biomass are described in Ferguson & Hooper, 2025. The published data extends as far as 2023/24. Data for 2024/25 are currently being

analysed. We have chosen to investigate this correlation because of our observations on the foraging behaviour of both species associated with Goolwa Pipsis on the western Ocean Beach (Figs 4a & b).



Figs. 4a & b: (a) Pied Oystercatcher and (b) Sooty Oystercatcher foraging on Goolwa Pipsis on Goolwa Beach. Photos: (a) Sept 2023, K. Bartley; (b) March 2018, K. Jones.



Figs 5a & b: a: Mean Daily Barrage Flow (ML / day) (2011/12 – 2024/25) and b: Mean Annual relative Goolwa Pipi Biomass (kg / 4.5m²) on Coorong Ocean Beach (2011/12 – 2023/24).

Barrage flow (Megalitres / day) has fluctuated markedly over the survey period, with relatively high flows occurring in 2011/12, 2012/13, 2016/17 and 2021/22 to 2023/24 (Fig. 5a). This most recent extended flow was characterised by extensive floods throughout the lower Murray System, resulting in significant widening of the Murray Mouth and large quantities of European Carp washing through the barrages. Subsequently, the dead carp washed up on the Goolwa Beach and as far west as Kangaroo Island.

Goolwa Pipi relative biomass (kg / 4.5 m²) has also markedly fluctuated, with relatively low biomass observed in 2013/14 and 2020/21, and peaks in 2016/17 and 2023/24 (Fig. 5b). Single correlation analyses have been carried out between these two environmental variables and abundances of our two oystercatcher species, separately for counts on the Ocean Beach and in the Murray Estuary (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlations and levels of significance between a) Barrage flows and b) Goolwa Pipi Biomass and mean annual numbers of Oystercatchers on the Goolwa Ocean Beach and the Murray Estuary, 2011/12 – 2024/25.

Species, Location	Variable	
	Barrage Flow (mean daily ML/yr) (2011/12 – 2024/25, n = 14)	Goolwa Pipi Biomass (kg/4.5 m ²) (2011/12 – 2023/24, n = 13)
POC Ocean Beach	$r = + 0.4029, 0.1 > P > 0.05, n. sig.$	$r = - 0.0686, P > 0.25, n. sig.$
POC Murray Estuary	$r = - 0.3178, P > 0.1, n. sig.$	$r = + 0.2993, P > 0.1, n. sig.$
SOC Ocean Beach	$r = +0.1995, P > 0.25, n. sig$	$r = - 0.0364, > 0.25, n. sig$
SOC Murray Estuary	$R = +0.0746, P > 0.25, n. sig$	$r = + 0.4428, 0.05 > P > 0.025., Sig *$

For POCs and Barrage flows, a positive correlation, but just less than a level of significance, was seen for the POCs on the Ocean Beach and a negative, but again not significant correlation for POCs in the Murray Estuary. We also observed this when POCs numbers on the Goolwa Ocean Beach were negatively correlated with the POCs numbers in the estuary (Table 1). We infer that Barrage flow has had a slight effect on the shift of birds between the Estuary to the Ocean Beach. For SOC, both on the ocean beach and in the estuary, the effect of barrage flow was not significant.

Both OYC species in the estuary showed positive correlations with Goolwa Pipi Biomass on the Coorong Ocean Beach (east of the Mouth), with the SOC showing a significant positive correlation. These correlations suggest that birds in the Estuary spend time on the eastern Ocean Beach foraging on Papis, and in years of relatively higher biomass, higher numbers of birds will forage there. In contrast, correlations for both species on the Ocean Beach to the west of the mouth and Pipi biomass on the Coorong Ocean Beach (east of the mouth), were negatively, but not significantly correlated (Table 2). Other factors on the western side of the Mouth may have greater influences on OYC numbers, for example, human disturbance. Also, the inter-annual variation in Goolwa Pipi biomass on the western Ocean Beach may differ with that on the eastern Coorong Ocean Beach. Fishery Independent surveys on Pipi biomass on the Goolwa Beach re-commenced in 2025/26 by the CLLMM Research Centre (Figs 6 a & b) and these surveys will explore any potential differences between the two Ocean Beaches.



Fig 6 a: Measuring the Pipi catch as part of the CLLMM Research Centre's fishery independent Pipi survey on the Goolwa Beach, October 2025. Pipi measurers: Ngarrindjeri Rangers, Jaru West and Cam Clarke. (Photo: Dr. Nick Whiterod)



Fig. 6 b: The CLLMM Team of Ngarrindjeri Rangers, Jaru West and Cam Clarke, and community members, Diedre Nieuwenhuis and Jill Barwick working with CLLMM Research Centre's Dr. Nick Whiterod to undertake the Pipi surveys, October 2025. (Photo: Dr. Nick Whiterod).

c) SW Fleurieu Coast. Into this current year (2025/26), weekly OYC surveys have continued at Middleton Point and Bashams Beach by volunteer, Jacinta Dickins. Her surveys include the collection of environmental data (cloud cover, beach wrack, wind direction and speed as well as tidal state), adult and juvenile Oystercatcher numbers, human activities (no. people, fishers, leashed and unleashed dogs) and potential predators (gulls, ravens and magpies). Results for the full year of 2025/26 will be presented in the next Team Oystercatcher Newsletter.

Further to the west, around Encounter Bay and Granite Island, volunteer Roslyn Shirlaw closely monitored a breeding pair of Sooty Oystercatchers on Granite Island during October to December 2025. In similarity in 2024, the pair successfully hatched and reared a single chick. Roslyn photographed the parents feeding the chick with worms and the flesh from broken gastropods (sea snails). The chick is estimated to have fledged at around 64 days, since first being observed as a recently hatched bird Oct 10, 2025 (Figs. 7a & b).



Figs 7a: On Granite Island, an adult SOC feeding its young chick on 10 October 2025 (photo: M. David), and **Fig. 7b:** Successfully fledged chick, 64 days later with female adult SOC on Dec 13, 2025 (photo: R. Shirlaw).

This year, Sooty Oystercatchers, previously caught and flagged on Kangaroo Island, were observed at Encounter Bay and Granite Island, and the observations are included in Section 2a (Banding News, p.18).

d) SW Fleurieu Coast. Beach-nesting bird volunteer, Barry Simes reports that the numbers of Sooty Oystercatchers at Snapper Point (Aldinga Reef Aquatic Reserve) have continued to be very low in this past year (Fig. 8). Looking at the past 12 months (April'25 – March'26), approximately equal numbers of SOC's were reported at Snapper Point (10) compared with the rest of the western Fleurieu coast (11) by other volunteers. There have been no reports of POCs on this coast for the past 12 months.

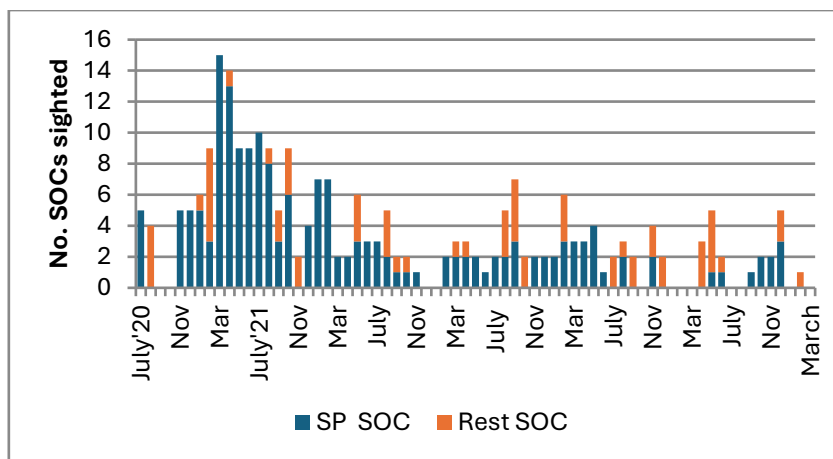


Fig. 8: Monthly Numbers of Sooty Oystercatchers reported on the western Fleurieu coast between Cape Jervis and Marino Rocks, between July 2020 and March 2026. (Blue for Snapper Point and Red for the rest of the w. Fleurieu coast).

Since July 2021, the number of people, leashed and unleashed dogs have also been recorded by Barry. Using maximum monthly count data for each parameter, we see that the proportion of leashed dogs is relatively low (21.4%) compared with unleashed dogs (Fig. 9).

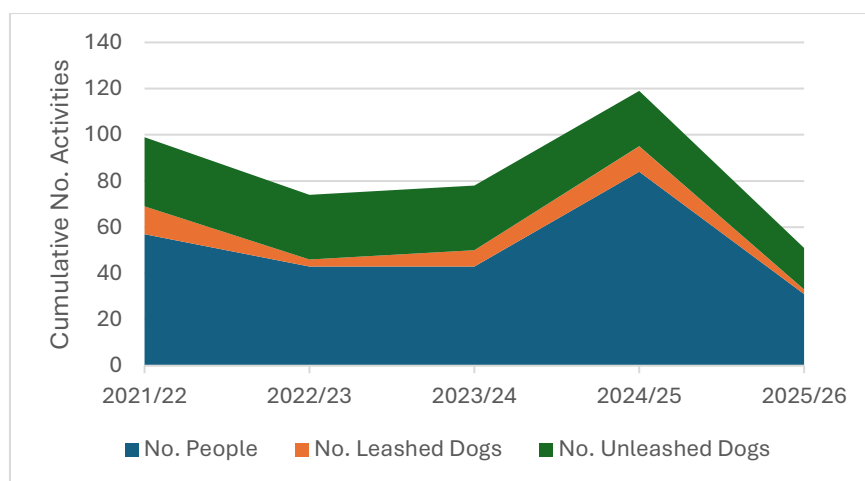


Fig. 9: Annual maximum counts of persons and leashed and unleashed dogs at Snapper Point, 2021/22 – 2025/26. NB: the data for 2025/26 covers 9 months (July'25 – March'26).



Fig. 10: Pair of Sooty Oystercatchers at Snapper Point, Western Fleurieu, April 2022 (Photo: B. Simes)

e) Samphire Coast, NE Gulf St. Vincent. The previous Newsletter (No. 13) reported slight declining, but not significant trends since 2014/15 in numbers of POCs for both the Northern Samphire coasts (Fig. 15 in No. 13 newsletter). However, for SOC's the downward trends for both regions were significant (Fig. 16). Since July' 2025, the 9 months of monitoring has seen rises in numbers of both species on the northern Samphire coast, but, drops in mean numbers for both species on the southern Samphire coast (Table 3). In the next Newsletter (No. 15) to be published in Sept'26, the full year's counts will be reported and compared with previous years' counts.

Table 3. Mean Counts of POCs and SOC's for the Northern and Southern Samphire coasts for July'25 – March'26.

Species	Region	Mean Count
Pied Oystercatcher	Northern Samphire	64.2
Pied Oystercatcher	Southern Samphire	33.6
Sooty Oystercatcher	Northern Samphire	37.3
Sooty Oystercatcher	Southern Samphire	14.3

f) Kangaroo Island. i) Long-term trends in counts in key sites – Keith Jones, David Potter, Jean Turner and Peter Hastwell. In this section, we investigate the seasonal and long-term annual trends in counts of both species at key sites on the NE coast of KI (Bay of Shoals, Nepean Bay, and Island Beach). The counts cover the period from 2015/16 to February 2026. The Nepean Bay site covers a 4 km coastal beach adjacent to the Nepean Bay Conservation Park, undertaken by Peter Haswell. The Bay of Shoals covers sites between Reeves Point and as far north as Cape Rouge, undertaken by David Potter and Jean Turner, and at Island Beach, 4 sites from Rocky Point to Strawbridge Point by David Potter and Jean Turner.

Pied Oystercatchers

Seasonal Trends. For all regions marked seasonal variation in counts were observed, although the seasonal low counts differed between regions (Figs 10 a, b & c).

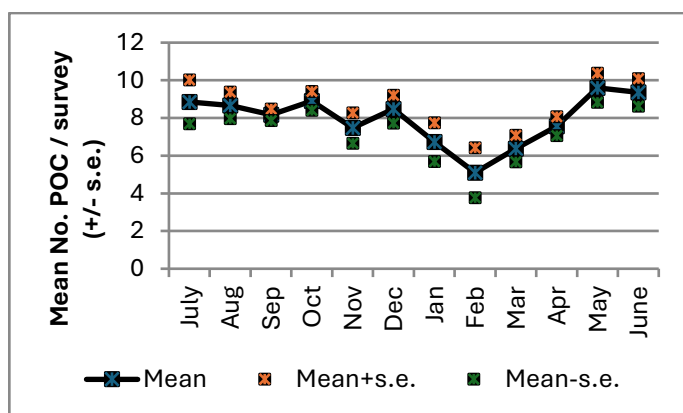


Fig 10a: Mean (+/- s.e.) Seasonal Counts of POCs at Nepean Bay, 2015/16 – 2025/26.

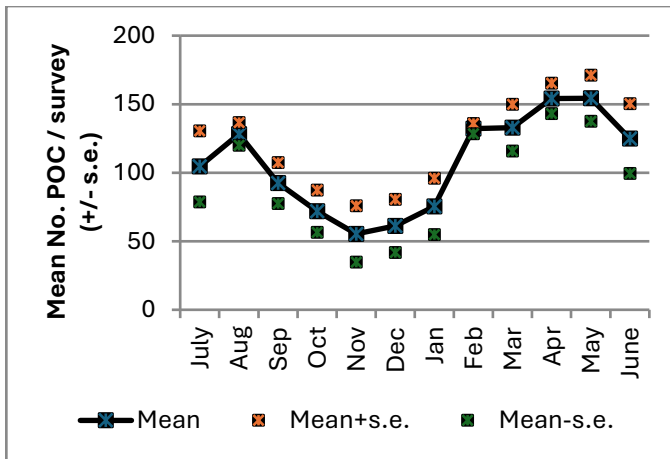


Fig 10b: Mean (+/- s.e.) Seasonal Counts of POCs at **Bay of Shoals**, 2015/16 – 2025/26.

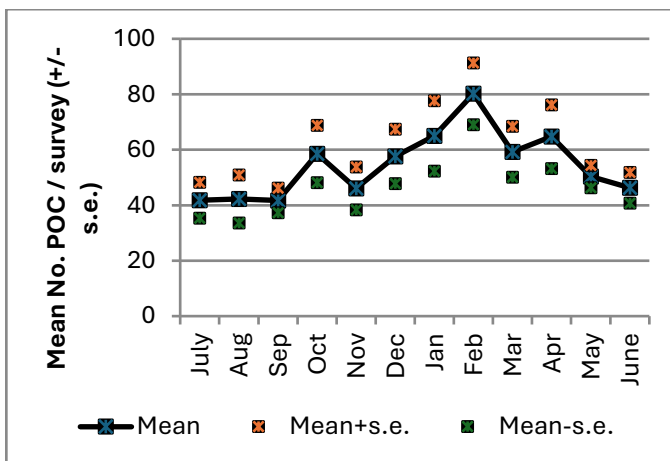


Fig. 10c: Mean (+/- s.e.) Seasonal Counts of POCs at **Island Beach**, 2015/16 – 2025/26.

For each region, the relatively tight standard errors (+/- s.e.) around each monthly mean abundance indicates little inter-annual variation. The differences in troughs of low numbers could relate to timing of movements away from the regions. In the future, this hypothesis may be able to be tested by inspection of timing of movements of banded birds between regions.

Inter-annual trends. There are different inter-annual trends in abundances of POCs between different regions (Figs. 11a, b & c).

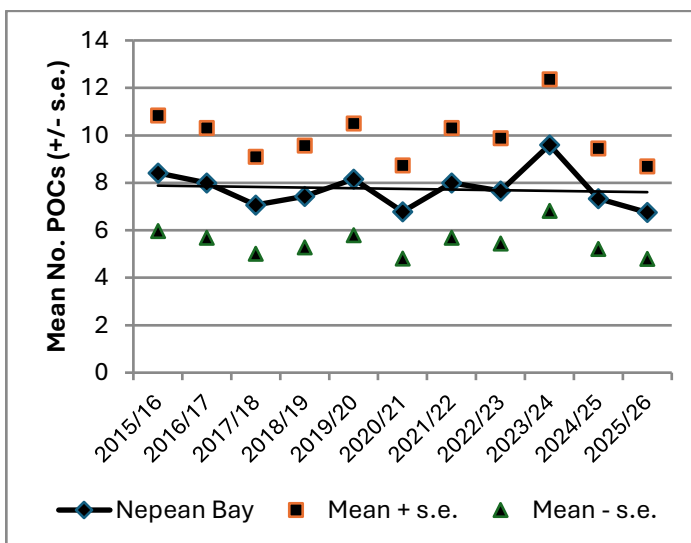


Fig. 11a: Mean No. (+/- s.e.) of POCs at **Nepean Bay**, 2015/16 – 2025/26. NB; 2025/26 covers July'25 – Feb'26 only. **Non-significant slight downward trend**

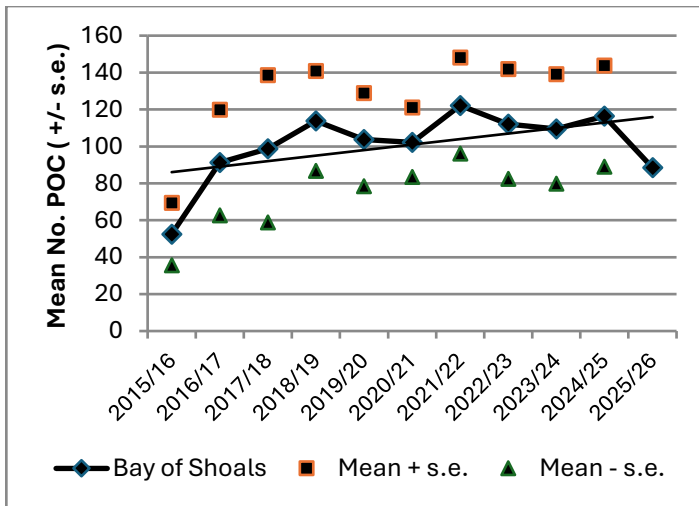


Fig. 11b: Mean No. (+/- s.e.) of POCs at the **Bay of Shoals**, 2015/16 – 2025/26. NB: 2025/26 covers July'25 – Feb'2026 only. **Significant rise in trend ($0.05 > P > 0.025$) ***

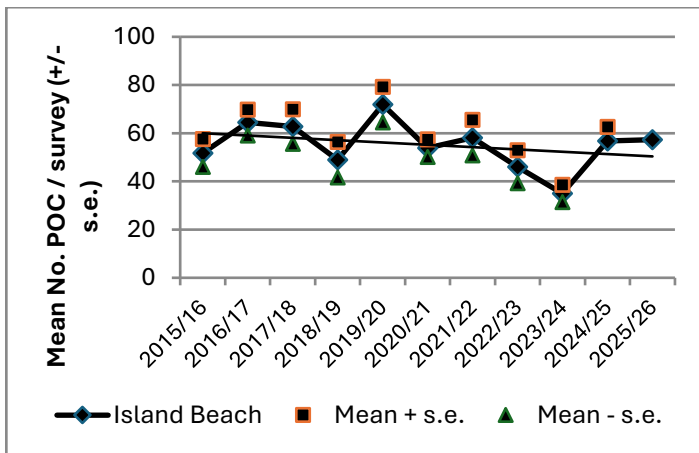


Fig. 11c: Mean No. (+/- s.e.) of POCs at **Island Beach**, 2015/16 – 2025/26. NB: 2025/26 covers July'25 – Feb'2026 only. **Slight downward, non-significant trend.**

It should be noted that the numbers in each region comprise both breeding pairs in territories as well as flocking birds. The highest numbers seen at the Bay of Shoals reflects greater numbers of flocking birds at Reeves Point and Cape Rouge, compared with those in other regions. For Nepean Bay, the relatively small numbers reflect a shorter survey area as well as only breeding pairs.

Sooty Oystercatchers

Seasonal trends. No Sooty Oystercatchers were observed for the Nepean Bay region, so we only review the Bay of Shoals and Island Beach (Figs 12 a & b).

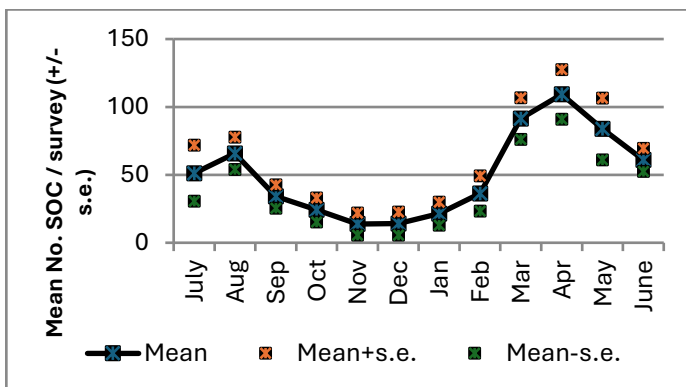


Fig. 12a: Seasonal trends in Mean numbers (+/- s.e.) of SOC at **Bay of Shoals**, 2015/16 – 2025/26.

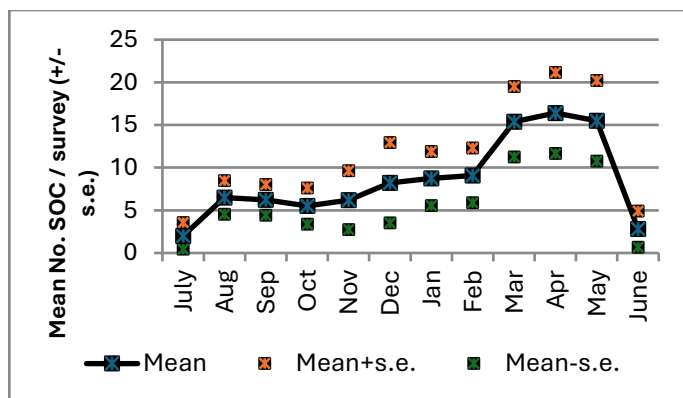


Fig. 12b: Seasonal trends in Mean numbers (+/- s.e.) of SOC's at **Island Beach**, 2015/16 – 2025/26.

For both regions, SOC numbers peaked at similar months (March – May) and was consistent for all years. There was slightly greater inter-annual variation at Island Beach compared with the Bay of Shoals, but generally, much higher numbers at the Bay of Shoals.

Annual trends in abundances.

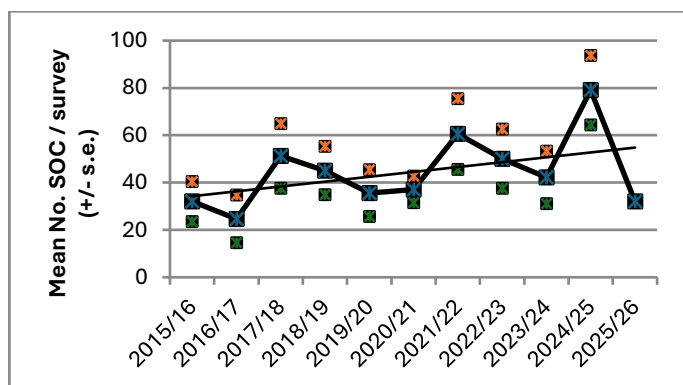


Fig. 13a: Trend in mean nos. (+/- s.e.) of SOC's at **Bay of Shoals**, 2015/16 – 2025/26. NB: 2025/26 only covers July'25 – Feb'26. **Non-significant upward trend.**

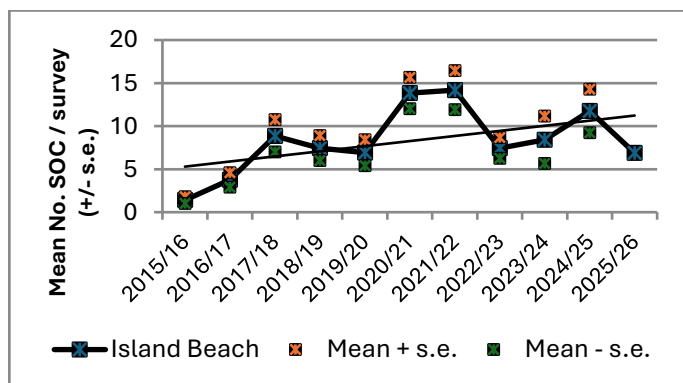


Fig. 13b: Trend in numbers (+/- s.e.) of SOC's at **Island Beach**. NB: 2025/26 covers July'25 – Feb'26 only. **Significant upward trend (0.05 > P > 0.025).**

The drop in numbers in 2025/26 (July'25 – Feb'26) in both regions, should not be discussed prematurely, because, as we observe from the seasonality data ((Figs. 12 a & b), highest numbers usually occur later in the year. Therefore, a truer indication of the abundances in this current year should only be reviewed once all data are obtained.

ii) Kangaroo Island Report for the 2025/2026 Breeding Season by David Potter and Jean Turner. A total of 85 breeding territories were monitored this season, 4 less than last year (Table 4). Thanks to local volunteers who provided valuable additional observations for some sites: Peter Hastwell recorded breeding at a Min-Oil Beach site, Trish Mooney monitored the Brownlow Avenue beach pair in Kingscote; Alex Comino monitored a new nest location in Kingscote; Wren Lashmar added to Cape Rouge Beach observations; and Fred and Fleur Peters sent updates on the Nepean Bay Esplanade East pair.

Table 4: Summary of Pied Oystercatcher Breeding, 2025/2026

Pairs monitored	85
Clutches laid	70
Eggs laid	121
Chicks Hatched	36
Chicks Fledged	21
% Chicks /No. of eggs	29.75%
% Fledged/No. of Eggs	17.36%

Grouping Pied Oystercatcher breeding territories into “areas” (Table 5) allows breeding season outcomes to be compared between different parts of the Kangaroo Island coast.

Table 5: Pied Oystercatcher Breeding Effort for each area, 2025/2026

Area	No. of Pairs/Area	No. of Clutches/Area	Total Eggs Laid/Area	No. of Chicks/Area	No. of Fledglings/ Area
Antechamber Bay	1	1	2	0	0
Christmas Cove	1	1	2	1	0
American Beach	1	1	2	2	1
Baudin Beach	1	1	2	2	2
Brown Beach	3	2	4	2	1
Island Beach	13	10	18	7	2
Strawbridge Point Beach	2	1	3	2	1
American River	6	6	11	4	4
Min-Oil Rd Beach	10	5	7	0	0
Nepean Bay (Settlement)	4	2	3	1	0
Cygnnet River	4	3	4	3	1
Brownlow to Kingscote	4	2	4	2	1
Kingscote (Bay of Shoals)	4	2	3	1	1
Dover Farm	10	6	12	3	1
North Cape Road	5	10	16	0	0
Cape Rouge Beach	7	8	15	3	3
Emu Bay	1	0	0	0	0
D’Estrees Bay	4	8	12	2	2
Bales Bay	3	0	0	0	0
Vivonne Bay	0	0	0	0	0
Hanson Bay	1	1	1	1	1
Total	85	70	121	36	21
% Chicks Hatched/No. of Eggs					29.75%
%Fledged/No. of Eggs					17.36%
%Fledged/No. of Chicks					58.3%

The number of clutches laid this season declined slightly (70 compared with 76 last season), as did the number of eggs recorded (121 compared with 133 last season). These differences seem consistent with the reduced number of breeding sites monitored. Nineteen repeat clutches were recorded after failed first attempts, comprising 16 second attempts and 3 third attempts. Seventeen pairs fledged chicks on their first breeding attempts and four pairs fledged chicks on their second attempts. None of the third attempts succeeded. Thirty-one of the pairs monitored made no breeding attempts this season.

Surprisingly, more chicks hatched in 2025-26 than the previous season: 36 chicks compared with 28. Despite this hatching success, the number of chicks that fledged this season was lower: 21 fledged, compared with 26 fledged in 2024-25. The overall breeding success rate, measured as the percentage of chicks fledged per number of eggs laid was 17.36%, slightly lower than 19.85 % in 2024-25. However, the percentage of chicks fledged from chicks hatched declined to 58.3% this season, a noticeable drop from 96.3% in 2024-25. This season is the third lowest ratio of fledged juveniles to chicks hatched since we began monitoring 8 seasons ago.

The Baudin Beach Pied Oystercatchers were one of only two pairs to successfully fledge both chicks this season. Snapshots from the family album follow.



Baudin Beach Pied Oystercatcher incubating on nest in dune vegetation, 30/09/2025. (J Turner)



Baudin Beach Pied Oystercatcher guarding recently hatched chicks, 21/10/2025. (J Turner)



Baudin Beach Pied Oystercatchers, a lesson in foraging on the beach, 27/10/2025. (J Turner)



Baudin Beach Pied Oystercatchers: 2 fledged juveniles still at home with Mum and Dad, 8/01/2026. (J Turner)

Causes of Breeding Failure

Storm surges and extreme high tides have increased over the last few years. As a result, the erosion and loss of upper beach sand, foredune ledges and dunes has increased this season. On some beaches, dramatic

collapse of foredunes and dune faces has caused complete loss of (and washing away of) stabilising dune vegetation, making some nesting sites quite perilous. Overall, storm erosion has flattened some beach profiles, making nests on upper beaches more vulnerable to tidal wash.

The first clutches this season were recorded in mid-August, a similar time to previous seasons (Table 6). However, more pairs than usual delayed early nesting. Similar numbers of pairs laid their first clutches mid-way through the season, in September and October, but more pairs than usual deferred egg laying until November. This may be associated with storm surges and extreme high tides early in the breeding season impacting nest habitat and reducing foraging access at some sites.

Table 6: Month First Clutch Observed for Pairs

Breeding Season	Month of First Clutch				
	August	September	October	November	December
2025/2026	3	16	20	11	1
2024/2025	8	17	20	2	1

(Note: number of pairs breeding differs in each season; and some nests are not found)

In some areas, storm surges also caused massive deposition of seagrass wrack right up to and over the foredunes. Wrack deposition continued into late summer at some sites: this later deposition may be due to effects of the algal bloom on the seagrass beds. While some pairs regularly nest on consolidated dry seagrass wrack, freshly deposited loose wrack seems unsuitable for nesting.

Not only were nesting sites covered by loose, unstable wrack at the crucial time, but opportunities for high tide foraging at these wrack-covered sites were reduced. Consequently, some breeding birds were forced to travel beyond their breeding territories to access suitable feeding areas and thus may have taken longer to reach breeding condition.

With cooler conditions in spring, Goanna tracks appeared on beaches about one month later than usual, thus reducing the risk and impact of Goannas early in the season. Only one clutch of eggs was recorded as lost to Goanna predation this season, compared with seven clutches last season (Table 7).

One Pied Oystercatcher pair has nested in consecutive years on a small rock pinnacle at Kingscote Yacht Club beach but did not breed there this season. This may be due to past nest interference by cormorants roosting on the same small pinnacle, or increased nutrients at the nest site. This season the pinnacle was covered in lush growth of ryegrass, including over the old Pied Oystercatcher nest scrape, which may have deterred the breeding pair. Coincidentally, a new breeding site was found this season, further north at Todd Street beach Kingscote, where the pair nested on clay soil below the cliffs. Maybe the Yacht Club beach pair has moved away from the disruptive cormorants?

Table 7: Causes of Egg Loss, 2025/2026

Goanna	1
Washed Away	22
Dune Collapse	0
Roll-out	1
Unknown	21
Human Disturbance (trampled)	1

Table 8: Pied Oystercatcher Nest Habitats, 2025/2026

Dune	4
Foredune	10
Rocks/Pinnacle	2
Beach	28
Rocks	0
Cliff Face	1
Chernier/Samphire	6
Wrack	7
Paddock	2
Scrub	1
Island	0
Unknown	4

The Nepean Bay Esplanade East pair have some unconventional choices of nest site (Table 8). Their first nest of 2025-26 was under Sheoak trees in coastal vegetation above the beach. Unfortunately, this clutch was lost to Goanna predation. Their second nest was in the grassy parkland in the centre of Nepean Bay settlement. That nest succeeded thanks to tremendous support from the Nepean Bay community. One chick hatched but unfortunately disappeared before fledging.



Nepean Bay Esplanade East Pied Oystercatchers: First nest site, failed due to Goanna predation, 10/10/2025. (J Turner)



Nepean Bay Esplanade East Pied Oystercatchers: Second nest site, Nepean Bay parklands, succeeded with management, 12/11/2025. (J Turner)

What about the algal bloom?

Now for the Elephant Seal in the room ... what impact, if any, did the algal bloom have on breeding success?

After witnessing the mass die-off of cockles, other bivalves, gastropods and marine worms in April 2025 (Team Oystercatcher Newsletter No. 13, September 2025) we recorded ongoing die-off of bivalves and gastropods throughout winter. Dead sharks, stingrays, fish and other marine creatures also continued to wash up through winter and spring, suggesting collapse of entire food webs and likely secondary effects on coastal birds and shorebirds.

We expected that Pied Oystercatcher breeding may be seriously impacted this season, with pairs either delaying breeding, having reduced breeding success, or failing to breed altogether. A greater proportion of pairs did not breed this season, compared with last season (36.5% in 2025-26, compared with 28.1% in 2024-25). Some pairs seemed to delay breeding (Table 6), perhaps taking longer to gain the condition required for breeding. Egg numbers were good, although in their first attempt, one pair laid a clutch of two very undersized infertile eggs. Overall breeding success, measured as percentage of chicks fledged to eggs laid was only slightly lower than last season, but the percentage of fledged juveniles to chicks hatched was nearly half last year's result.

However, we don't know if these differences between the two breeding seasons were due to the algal bloom affecting the abundance and quality of prey; reduced foraging opportunities during extreme high tides; reduced access to prey where foraging areas were covered by wrack; or depletion of intertidal prey populations by sand erosion, movement and deposition. Maybe it's a combination of these and other factors not yet considered?

In previous seasons we have observed that once breeding commences, both birds of a pair seem to remain and forage within their breeding territories, a pattern that continues through incubation to hatching, chick rearing and fledging. This season, there was often only one partner of the pair in the territory, either incubating or minding chicks without the help of a guarding partner.

Travel outside the breeding territory to forage seems to have impacted particularly on pairs which hatched two chicks. Normally when there are two chicks, each parent takes responsibility for one chick, and the family stays together within their territory. This season one parent has frequently been left guarding both chicks while their partner is absent, foraging elsewhere. We suspect this has contributed to the loss of

second chicks in many clutches, and hence the lower ratio of fledged juveniles to chicks hatched (Table 5).

Another thing we noticed this season is that chicks appeared smaller than usual at benchmark stages throughout their growth. This may be due to reduced availability of prey, poorer feed quality/energy value of the prey, or more limited opportunities for supervised foraging while one parent was away feeding elsewhere.

On the positive side, the perceived and actual effects of the algal bloom on people, combined with cooler, stormy spring weather, seemed to reduce the level of human presence and disturbances on beaches. And those effects may have helped off-set any direct impacts of the algal bloom on our Pied Oystercatcher breeding pairs. We can't be sure.

Overall, despite the extra challenges of the season, Kangaroo Island's Pied Oystercatchers have had a better-than-expected breeding season in 2025-26, and that's something to celebrate!

Protecting our POCs into the Future

Breeding Pied Oystercatchers on Kangaroo Island and elsewhere around South Australia will have a raised profile next season, thanks to a generous Community Grant from BirdLife Australia. Friends of the Hooded Plover Kangaroo Island received \$4039 to produce public awareness signs for Pied Oystercatchers and Red-capped Plovers breeding in locations impacted by high levels of human disturbance. The new "Pied Oystercatcher Nesting Area" and "Pied Oystercatcher Chick Feeding Zone" signs have been customised for each of four rural Landscape Board regions, Eyre Peninsula, Yoke Peninsula, South-East SA and Kangaroo Island.

Kangaroo Island Wildlife Network then kindly offered their support to protection of KI birds, generously funding 30 new lightweight plastic stakes for the Pied Oystercatcher signs and nest protection fences at our most vulnerable nesting sites. These lightweight stakes are eyewateringly expensive, but vital for volunteer safety when carrying nest protection gear onto the beach.

A huge "Thanks!" to BirdLife Australia's Community Grants Program and to Kangaroo Island Wildlife Network for supporting community awareness and protection of our breeding POCs.



KI Beach-nesting Birds volunteer, David Potter at Nepean Bay Esplanade East, with the new chick Feeding Zone" sign funded by Birdlife Australia's Community Grant, and bright orange stakes funded by the KI Wildlife Network. 2/12/2025 (J. Turner)

2. BANDING NEWS

2.1. Mainland re-sightings. These past 9 months, there have been 4 re-sightings for each species (Table 6). The POCs have been a mixture of young birds travelling either from KI (Black KM) and the SESA (Black 06) or longer-term distant travellers (Black 07 and the bird from Port Phillip Bay (green/white plastic rings) to the Murray Estuary. Inspection of biometric data collected at the time of flagging revealed that all three SOC that travelled from KI to the mainland were 4+ aged adults, and possibly females, due to their relatively longer bills and heavier weights than male birds. SOC Black T3, re-sighted at Nora Creina, SESA, is a mature paired bird, that has been reported several times at the same site over the past 10 years.



Figs 14a & b: (a) Flagged POC Black KM at Thompson Beach South (photo: R. Shirlaw) and (b) Flagged POC Black 07 at Goolwa Beach (photo: E. Vanderzon).



Figs 15 a & b: Flagged re-sighted SOC at (a) Hindmarsh River Estuary (Black MT) (photo: R. Shirlaw) and (b) Nora Creina, SESA (Black T3) (photo: B. Simes)

Table 9: Details of flagged POCs and SOC re-sighted on SA mainland coastal sites between July'2025 and March'2026.

Species, flag number	Original capture and flagging details	Re-sightings details and estimated age in 2025/26
POC, Black flag, white KM	11 Dec'2024, Hanson Bay, KI (VWSG), chick	15 Sep'2025, Thompson Beach South (R. Shirlaw), 1 + yrs old
POC, Black flag, white 07	11 Nov'2020, Danger Point, SESA, chick (VWSG)	26 Feb'2026, Goolwa Beach (Beacon 19) (E. Vanderzon), 5 + yrs old
POC Green & White plastic rings	< 2007, Werribee, Pt. Phillip Bay (VWSG), unknown age)	31 Aug'2025, Murray Mouth Estuary, (K. Jones), at least 18 yrs old. (Re-sighted several times at the Murray Mouth since 2020).
POC Black Flag, white 06	15 Jan'2024, Geltwood Bay, SESA (VWSG) (Chick)	16 Jan'2026, Coorong Ocean Beach (R. Cope), 2 yrs old
SOC, Black flag, white JD	28 May'2025, Cape Rouge, KI (VWSG) (4+ adult)	28 Sep'2025, Snapper Point Western Fleurieu (B. Simes); re-sightings on 2 Oct'25, 6 Nov'25 at Snapper Point (B. Simes); 27 Dec'2025 at NW Granite Island (R. Shirlaw)
SOC, Black flag, white MT	28 May'2025, Cape Rouge, KI (VWSG) (4+ adult)	15 Dec'2025, Hindmarsh River Estuary (R. Shirlaw); re-sighting on 27 Dec'2025 at NW Granite Island (R. Shirlaw)
SOC, Black Flag, white, T3	19 Nov'2018, Nora Creina, SESA (VWSG), Juvenile	6 Feb'2025, Nora Creina, SESA (B. Simes), approx. 10 yrs old
SOC, Black Flag, white NU	28 May'2025, Cape Rouge, KI (VWSG), 4 + adult	14 Sep'2025, Thompson Beach South (R. Shirlaw); re-sighting on 28 Sep'2025 at Port Prime, NE Samphire Coast (MA Van Trigt)

2.2. Kangaroo Island Banding project by David Potter & Jean Turner.

Pied Oystercatchers

Funding from the South Australian Shorebird Foundation enabled volunteers from the Victorian Wader Study Group (VWSG) and Friends of Shorebirds South-East (FoSSE) to revisit Kangaroo Island in December 2025 to band more Pied Oystercatchers. We really appreciate the VWSG and FoSSE volunteers giving up their time once again to band our birds. Thanks to these highly skilled and dedicated people, we are learning so much more about the birds we monitor!

Twelve birds were banded in December 2025, comprising three chicks and nine adult birds. The banded birds have unique numbered metal bands, generally on the upper left leg, and unique black leg flags engraved in white, generally on the upper right legs. The engraved leg flags enable us to follow the birds' movements in flocking or breeding territories.

We now have 87 Kangaroo Island Pied Oystercatchers banded, with 17 of the monitored breeding sites now having at least one banded bird. Some of these breeding birds were banded in May 2025, at flocking sites outside of their breeding territories. Three of the 17 breeding sites with banded birds have had both partners captured and banded in their breeding territories. Since then, a partner swap has occurred at one site at Island Beach, with an unbanded bird displacing one of the banded pair. The displaced bird 'Black KU' hasn't been seen since 27/03/2025.

Kangaroo Island has three large Pied Oystercatcher flocking areas: Cape Rouge Spit, Reeves Point and Island Beach West. A minor flocking area in Nepean Bay Township is used mainly in winter, when there is less human disturbance. Birds use these flocking areas to feed and roost.

Most of the movements recorded so far have been local, with birds moving from breeding territories to flocking sites, or between different flocking sites within a wider area such as from Cape Rouge Point to Reeves Point and vice-versa in the Bay of Shoals. However, the birds banded at the Nepean Bay Township flocking area in May 2025 have revealed that in late winter, as human disturbances increase at Nepean Bay, flocking birds move, generally to Reeves Point and Cape Rouge in the Bay of Shoals. One of the Nepean Bay birds has been sighted several times at Island Beach.

And we were delighted to discover that two of the birds banded in the Nepean Bay flocking group are the Nepean Bay Esplanade East breeding pair, 'Black NL' and 'Black NM'.

A chick banded and flagged at Hanson Bay on the south coast of KI in December 2024 has made the longest recorded movements of our flagged birds so far. Initially 'Black KM' was re-sighted on the north coast of KI on 27/06/2025, in the Reeves Point flocking group. It was then seen at Thompson's Beach on 15/09/2025. As far as we know, 'Black KM' is still living on the 'big island'.

An exciting recent flag re-sighting was that of 'Black J1', banded at the old Fish Cannery site at American River as a 4-week-old chick in December 2025. 'Black J1' was last seen at the Cannery site with its parents (one also flagged, 'Black AAE') on 18/12/25. Next time we monitored, all three birds had gone. We hoped 'Black J1' had made it through those crucial last few weeks to become a fully fledged juvenile.

We are thrilled that 'Black J1' has been spotted at least twice recently in the Island Beach West flocking group. Proof of survival! Roosting nearby on 26/03/2026 was 'Black 31', banded as a chick at Island Beach boat ramp in December 2023. While the two birds are approximately 2 years apart in age, they are similar in appearance. 'Black J1' still has grey legs and lacks the red eye ring, but both birds still have black tips to their bills. Pied Oystercatchers take four to five years to reach maturity, so 'Black 31' is still a teenager.



Nepean Bay Esplanade East Pied Oystercatchers: 'Black NL' and 'Black NM' with young chick, 2/12/2025. (J Turner)



Part of a large flocking group of Pied Oystercatchers with banded birds, foraging for earthworms in a paddock near Swan Crossing, American River, 16/06/2025. (D Potter)

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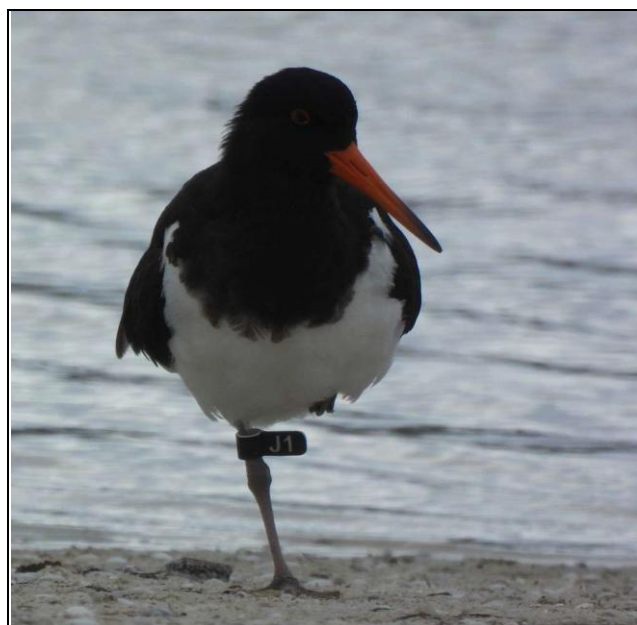
Sooty Oystercatchers

No additional Sooty Oystercatchers have banded on KI since May 2024. Recorded movements of the flagged 'Sooties' have mainly been over short distances. Birds banded and flagged at Cape Rouge Point have been seen regularly feeding and roosting at the Point, as well as along Cape Rouge Beach and on the tidal rock platforms adjoining North Cape Road, Bay of Shoals. One Cape Rouge bird has been recorded foraging at Brownlow Avenue Beach in Kingscote, and another seen roosting with other Sooty Oystercatchers at the Bay of Shoals boat ramp, Kingscote.

One of our flagged Sooty Oystercatcher 'Black NU' also headed overseas last winter to Thompson Beach. We don't know if he/she is still there.

We are keen to hear about any new sightings of the missing Pied Oystercatcher 'Black KU', or of our long-distance travellers, Pied Oystercatcher 'Black KM' and Sooty Oystercatcher 'Black NU' on the mainland.

Any observations of banded and flagged Pied Oystercatchers or Sooty Oystercatchers can be reported to the BirdMark Shorebird Portal: <https://www.birdmark.net/en>

	
Island Beach West flocking group, 25/03/2026: Pied Oystercatcher "Black J1" juvenile, 5 months old. (D. Potter)	Island Beach West flocking group, 25/03/2026: Pied Oystercatcher 'Black 31' immature, 2.5 years old. (D Potter)

3. FOUNDATION FOR SA SHOREBIRDS.

Grant No. 2022-02. Kangaroo Island: banding together to conserve the Hooded Plover (R. Mead, Birdlife Australia). A Hooded Plover banding project was undertaken by A and C-class licenced banders from Birdlife Australia at KI sites on the northern and southern beaches during 3 breeding seasons from 2023 to 2025. Blood samples were also taken to determine the sex of the banded birds. A total of 29 birds were caught and banded over the three seasons. The Foundation financially supported this project through assisting with costs for travel and accommodation, workshops and banding equipment. The final report of the project is seen on the SAShorebirds website (www.sashorebirds.org).

Grant No. 2023-01. KI POC banding project Victorian Wader Studies Group (VWSG) and Friends of Shorebirds South-East (FoSSE). In December'25, a further banding trip to KI was undertaken by VWSG and FoSSE and the trip report is seen in # 2.2 of this Newsletter.

Grant No. 2024.01. The ecology of Oystercatchers in South Australia (Emma Vanderzon, PhD candidate, Flinders University). The foraging behaviour and disturbance levels of Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers is being studied at a range of regions varying in levels of disturbance. Faecal and feather samples of birds collected during banding operations are being collected to determine the diets of the birds and adjacent habitats through DNA analyses. This is the second year of the project, with funds assisted by the Foundation. Additionally, Emma's Honours thesis on the effect of human disturbance and environmental conditions on Oystercatchers along the Goolwa Beach, previously supported by the Foundation, has recently been published (Vanderzon et al, 2026).

Grant No. 2021-02. Social Marketing to increase knowledge of human impact on beaches. (L. Butterfield, PhD Candidate, Flinders University). This project is nearing completion. A final report will be available on the Foundation for SASHorebirds website (www.sashorebirds.org).

Grant No. 2024-03. Quantifying the impact of disturbance processes on the movement and behaviour of Pied Oystercatchers. (Dr T. Prowse and R. Cope, University of Adelaide). On the Coorong Ocean Beach, during the nesting season a total of 11 adult POCs were caught and GPS trackers attached to follow the movements of these birds. Camera traps at the nests were also deployed. The Foundation assisted with funding the purchase of the GPS trackers. A report is being prepared to summarise the outcomes of this project.

Grant 2025-01. The National Beach-nesting Bird Conference, Goolwa, SA in May'2025. (Dr M. Cullen, Birdlife Australia). The Foundation has financially assisted regional coordinators from interstate to attend the conference.

4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our grateful thanks go again to the volunteer Oystercatcher observers who have assisted with counts and other observations on breeding and foraging behaviours. Special thanks go to Roslyn Shirlaw, Mark David, Barry Simes, Emma Vanderzon and Ruth Cope for their photos of flagged birds. Our long-term volunteer, Peter Hastwell has recently decided to retire after his 10 years of monitoring the Pied Oystercatchers along his stretch of the Nepean Bay coastal beach. We thank him very much for his dedication over this period, not only recording bird counts, but also levels of human disturbance and natural and feral predators. A summary of his counts is seen in # 2.f (i). We thank Roz Jessop (VWSG), Jeff Campbell and Maureen Christie (FoSSE) for assisting, not only with the banding history of re-sighted banded birds, but also their work on the KI POC banding surveys.

Finally, I am grateful to Dr. Greg Ferguson of SARDI (Aquatic Sciences) for allowing me to use the data on Goolwa Pipi Biomass on the Coorong Ocean Beach to explore its linkage with Oystercatcher numbers at the Murray Estuary and Goolwa Ocean Beach. Also, to Dr. Nick Whiterod and his team at the CLLMM Research Centre for information on the Goolwa Beach Pipi Surveys.

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The Mosaic Art of Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers, by Karen Carr (Squashed Cocky) at Port Neill.

