

## Hooded Plover Protection Program

### **Project Description and Objectives**

The primary objective of this project is to reduce the predatory pressure of the European Red Fox (*vulpes vulpes*) on the beach nesting Hooded Plover. However, by controlling fox numbers over large areas, we are protecting other broad taxonomic groups that are preyed on by foxes such as reptiles, mammals and other beach nesting birds. This program has been implemented for the last 4 years with great success and we hope to continue to protect our beaches and the critically endangered birds that call them home. Funding is sought from the Bass Landcare Public Fund Community Grants scheme for a three-year project that will undertake strategic fox control and community engagement to educate locals and members of the public and grow the program for future years.

As a secondary objective, control of Sea Spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*) will be conducted using a biocontrol (*Venturia paralias*) in the form of a fungus. When released in areas with high infestations of Sea Spurge, the fungus can spread up to 500m in each direction along the beach, yielding large sections of control. The biocontrol is typically released seasonally before Sea Spurge seeds later in the calendar year. Furthermore, serious infestations of Sea Spurge can alter dune shape and form which heavily impact on Hooded Plover nesting sites as appropriate nest sites are changed.



Map of soft-jaw trapping locations from San Remo to Inverloch in proximity to Hooded Plover nests

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Control will be done with a combination of soft-jaw trapping and 1080 baiting. Soft-jaw trapping allows for local tailored control over specific areas traps can easily be moved in response to fox activity for maximum effectiveness. 1080 baiting complements this control by targeting large areas as bait stations are set 500m away from each other, allowing for entire bush sections to be covered relatively easily.

7-day pulses of soft-jaw trapping will be conducted using BCLN's traps and materials and will be checked a minimum of once every 24 hours, as per animal humaneness laws. Traps will be set in appropriate places and in areas where dogs are banned or must be on-lead, eliminating the risk of



trapping the dog of a responsible pet owner. Trapped foxes will be euthanised with a firearm by a trained and licensed operator. Traps will also be set in areas where the critically endangered Hooded Plover nests, providing tailored control to target local foxes. Because of this, traps are set in areas between San Remo and Inverloch, where Hooded Plover nest site locations are known.

Alongside pulses of soft-jaw trapping, 6-week pulses of 1080 fox baiting will be conducted within the Cape Liptrap Coastal Park at Walkerville North and South as well as along a 10km stretch of Venus Bay Beach. These pulses help to establish a buffer zone of control around critical Hooded Plover nest sites. 1080 baits are buried to specifically target foxes and minimise the risk of off-target damage. 1080 is chosen as the bait of choice due to the high tolerance observed in many of our native animals and high toxicity in introduced species such as foxes. Baits are dug up and replaced if untaken once per week due to the nature of 1080 degrading rapidly in soil. Baits are checked during the other half of the week and replaced if necessary.

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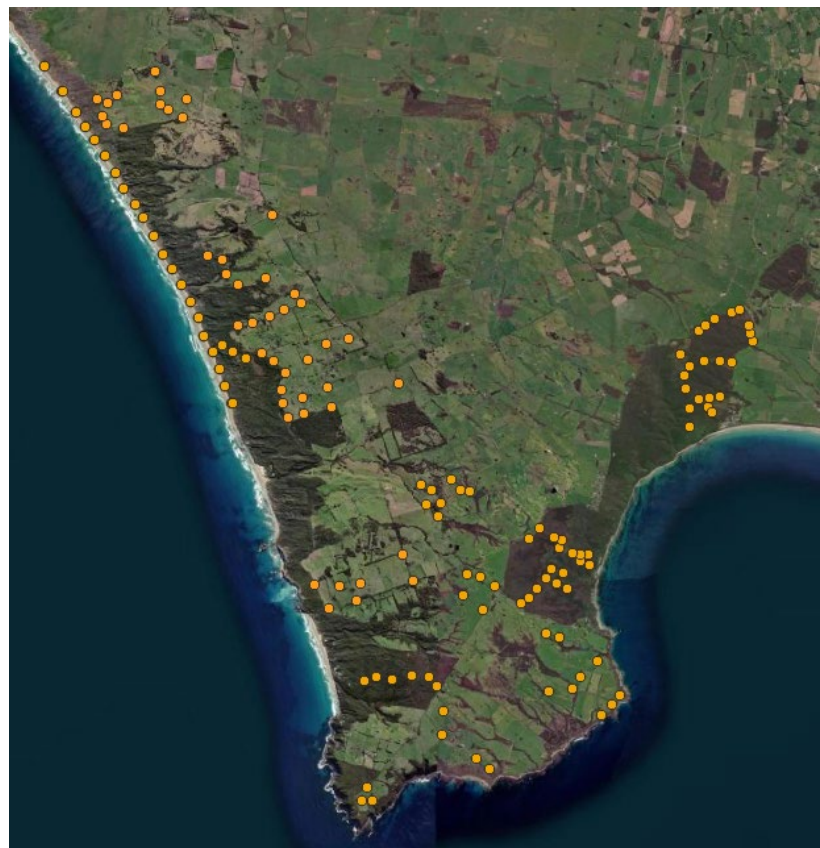
These control programs will lead to significant fox reduction and their subsequent predatory impacts on many native animals, but specifically on Hooded Plovers and other beach-nesting birds. Furthermore, a strong working relationship with Birdlife ensures that traps and baits can be set in response to recent fox sightings or prints near Hooded Plover nests. In addition to control, large-scale monitoring will be completed by Birdlife to measure the success of the birds such as successful nesting and fledging.

In addition to the Cape Liptrap Coastal Park control, significant landholder engagement has occurred in previous years of the project, allowing for large sections of private land to be included in the control. Over the 4 years the project has run, we have seen an increase in landholders joining the program which we hope to continue. To assist this process, we will conduct open days to inform landholders and other members of the public of the importance of fox control programs like this and how to get involved.

### **Project Management**

Our internal Invasive Species Team of trained and qualified workers who have experience with previous years of this project will complete the on-ground control works. All equipment including vehicles are supplied by BCLN.

BCLN will work closely with Birdlife, South Gippsland Landcare Network and Land Managers to deliver this program as well as supporting Birdlife with monitoring and their community engagement sessions.



Map of 1080 bait stations in the Cape Liptrap Coastal Park and on private land from a previous pulse

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### **Natural Resource Management Benefits**

Any significant reduction in feral animal populations yields a significant benefit in natural resource management. The biggest impact of foxes comes through their direct predation of native species which can be so intense it can lead to local or landscape wide extinction.

Foxes are known to patrol the high-tide mark of beaches and as opportunistic omnivores, will predate on Hooded Plovers, especially before fledging when the chicks are the most vulnerable. By removing this pressure, chicks will have a significantly lower likelihood of being wiped out by foxes. This pressure will naturally be removed for all other beach nesting birds too.

Additionally, the biocontrol of Sea Spurge will limit the further spread of the toxic weed and its ability to modify dune systems and subsequently reduce nesting habitat for beach nesting birds and other species that call our beach dunes home.

### **Community Benefits**

A major community benefit of this program will be in relation to private land. Many of the private landholders within the project area farm sheep, and experience significant loss every year by the predation of foxes. By controlling and reducing the overall population of foxes in the project area, the subsequent predation of lambs will also decrease, thus raising the income for local farmers. Furthermore, the continued engagement with private landholders has seen an expansion in additional private properties joining the program, a trend that we hope to see continue.



Hooded plover chicks

Hosting community open days in conjunction with organisations such as Birdlife Australia can be instrumental from a community engagement and education perspective. Helping people

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to understand why we run projects like this is critical for longevity as well as instructing people on how to tackle pest species on their own land.

### **Further Information**

This project has continued for four and a half years and is set to finish up by the end of the 22-23 financial year if funding cannot be sought. Continued and effective fox control is seen to have an extremely positive impact on almost all species of native wildlife. Lapses in control can have catastrophic impacts as fox populations can rapidly increase once control pressures are released. As the critically endangered Hooded Plover population continues to come back from the brink of extinction, it is our duty to protect them for introduced predators and thus protect the coastlines we love. Future generations should be able to enjoy wilderness areas and beaches without witnessing the impact of foxes and the further disappearance of our vulnerable native species. We wish to see this project continue the great work it has done thus far and build on previous years of success.

### **Project timetable**

1/7/2023 – 1/7/2025

### **Project location**

This project spans a total area of 6960 hectares between San Remo to the West and Walkerville North to the East and includes large sections of the Cape Liptrap Coastal Park along the coastline of Venus Bay and at Walkerville North and South. The coastline between San Remo and Inverloch is also targeted with this project, specifically in proximity to Hooded Plover nests on beaches.

The private landholder areas of this project are located in Tarwin Lower and Cape Liptrap, with the majority of these backing on to coastlines or coastal park areas. The combined area of the private land is 1930 hectares, making up a solid chunk of the project area.