**LITTLE TERN REPORT**

**Summer 20/21**

This year the breeding LT took up residence on 3 discreet sites in our area – 2 on Corrie Island and one on the dredge spoil at the Short Cut end of Winda Woppa. At the peak of the reproductive activity there were around 60 breeding pair and the end observation was nearly 30 fledged juveniles. Most of the leg work was done by Ann Woods at ‘Mound Evernest’ (short cut dredge spoil) and Sharon Taylor and myself at Corrie. There were 21 visits made to Corrie to collect data – 12 of these by kayak. We had great assistance and input from NPWS contractors, especially Silas Darnell (and his boat), and Brad Nesbitt, plus Christophe Tourenq from the SoS program DPIE, and Kath Howard from NPWS. This help was mainly for the National Park site of Corrie Island. Nicholas Coleman, Environmental Officer from Mid Coast Council was also an invaluable practical support in providing materials and erecting signs and fencing at the Winda Woppa site in a timely manner. Richard and Kit Streamer came to Corrie and assisted with signage and fencing placement and removal at both sites. Ann Woods visited the Mound area several times a week and made valuable notes on the Pied Oystercatchers as well as the intrepid LT who nested on top of the Mound. Neil Fraser, HBOC who introduced this group to the LT in 2017, is an ongoing interested and supportive voice and a great source of knowledge that we regularly call upon.

**Sequence of events over the Season**:

22 Oct 2020 - First sighting of Little Tern on Corrie Island: 20 adults

30 Oct 37 LT on Corrie; 4 near WW dredge spoil – ‘Mound Evernest’

13 Nov first nests discovered on Corrie, (camp fire remains) and one on Mound Evernest 17 Nov

20 Nov Some signage + fencing to vehicle access from beach to sand mound (next day signs uprooted, moved, fence interfered with)

22Nov Boat pulled up at Corrie LT colony, children running through nest area

24 Nov signs installed on Corrie

27 Nov 4 chicks observed – 2 on main, south facing site, 2 on western end of sand spit

 Top of WW mound fenced off, some more signage fixed (some damage to signs, fencing – followed by an attempted fix from unknown source)

30 Nov 151 total egg count on 3 separate sites

14 Dec 23 maximum chicks sighted overall

17 Dec Field camera installed at nest 32 (CT SoS DPIE)

Articles in Myall Coast & Port Stephens Nota, then Birdlife Australia, LinkedIn

21 Dec 12 runners observed. Field camera removed

26 Dec Same Article above condensed in Newcastle Herald

29 Dec 3 fledglings. Tepee discovered at western end, near start of that LT site

4 Jan 23 fledglings – most observed on any one visit (Tepee dismantled) remains of camp fire

12 Jan Very little activity, most adults and fledged juveniles not around (Tepee dismantled again)

 Although 13 adults, 9 nests with 16 eggs, plus 11 fledglings remained

14 Jan ‘Update’ article in local Notas

18 Jan 3 adults + 2 fledged juveniles on western end of Corrie

1 Feb 2 adults + 2 fledged juvs same location

5 Feb a small number of adults and fledglings also still near Mound Evernest

**Results**

2020/21 29+ fledged juveniles from approximately 60 adult pairs over 3 discreet sites

2019/20 26 fledged from 30 LT pair

2017/18 29+ from at least 56 pair

**Caveat on observations**- It often isn’t easy to count every adult as they don’t all sit neatly on the beach as we’d like! And even harder to distinguish adults in breeding plumage to non-breeding adults when in flight. Eggs are easier, though early on we must miss some as there were more hatched by the 3 week incubation stage than were counted 3 weeks earlier! The total number of nests in the first few weeks should tally with the number of breeding adults. After that re-laying will confuse the figures

 Getting an accurate chick count once they’ve left the nest is nigh impossible. They can move up to 100m from where they hatched and the fact that we can’t find them could mean they are so well camouflaged that they are also safe from some predators’ view as well. But chicks do get predated and it isn’t always possible to identify the predator. Without a hide to disguise our presence we make our visits on the breeding ground as brief as possible and try to get good counts via scopes and telephoto lens at a distance that won’t alert the birds to our approach

 The most important statistic after total breeding adults present, (aside from egg numbers, chicks hatched, runners) is the fledgling count. It is the true measure of the reproductive success of the season

**Egg Predation Rate -** Taken from the data for the main colony on Corrie Island.

From observations over the period 13 Nov to 4 Dec 20, 38 nests produced 103 eggs of which 37 eggs did not reach the hatching stage of 17+days. The rate of egg failure (= assumed predation within the 3 week gestation period) was .36 or just over 33%. *There were four nests where hatching or predation could not be determined due to the maturation period falling between observation days*

**Challenges and Predators** – ***Human*** presence near and on the breeding site was a particular disruptor to the small colony on WW sand spoil. Some boats and footprints on Corrie. A camp fire near the main colony, a Teepee and fire on the western end near that colony. Adults will leave their eggs and chicks when humans (or other perceived threats) come near. If the presence/danger is around too long and/or too often it can interfere with the incubation and feeding activities and eggs/chicks may not survive as a result

 ***Avian***- As well as smaller birds of prey, silver gulls take chicks, ravens take eggs and Pied Oystercatchers, Whimbrels and Beach Stone Curlew have been documented as attempting to take eggs or chicks, though not on a regular or large scale basis

 ***Animals*** – reptiles like the Lace Monitor; dingoes; small native mammals (from the Dasyurid family, possibly Phascogale sp.),or rats of introduced origin. Rat like prints were found near broken, half eaten eggs on Corrie Island. Field camera work required to id

Lace Monitor tracks, the presence of a dingo and ravens were evidence for much of the predation on Mound Nevernest. Ghost crabs also take eggs and newly hatched chicks. They were present under the shelters we placed on the Mound site

|  |
| --- |
| SNAPSHOT OF LITTLE TERN BREEDING STATS – SUMMER 20/21 |
| DATE | NESTS | EGGS | CHICKS | RUNNERS | FLEDGED | COMMENTS  |
| 22 Oct |  |  |  |  |  | 20 adults in Corrie Is area |
| 30Oct |  |  |  |  |  | 37 at Corrie; 4 WW mound |
| 13 Nov | 2 | 3 |  |  |  | First nest/egg sighting + 2nests on WW 17 Nov |
| 27 Nov | 52 | 131 | 4 |  |  | First chicks, 2 sites on Corrie |
| 30 Nov | 57 | 151 | 1 |  |  | Max egg count for season |
| 14 Dec | 31 | 49 | 23 |  |  | Max chick count  |
| 21 Dec | 21 | 33 | 11 | 12 |  | first runners observed |
| 29 Dec | 11 | 18 | 4 | 1 | 3 | First fledglings |
| 4 Jan | 9 | 16 | 3 |  | 23 | Max fledglings on one visit |
| 12 Jan | 9 | 16 |  |  | 11 | Greatly reduced adults, fledged |
| 18 Jan | 3 | 4 |  |  | 2 | Corrie |
| 1 Feb |  |  |  |  | 2 | Corrie |
| 5 Feb |  |  |  |  | 2+ | WW mound |