



## Beach-nesting Birds in Byron Shire – 2017 Breeding Season

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Byron Bird Buddies (BBB) members monitor three sites in Byron Shire for bird beach-nesting activity. The sites include the estuaries of Brunswick River, Belongil Creek and Tallow Creek. Nesting has been occurring successfully in both the Brunswick River and Belongil Creek estuaries for many years however, Tallow Creek is a new monitoring site for our group. To date, no nesting activity has occurred at the Tallow Creek Estuary but because of the presence of Pied Oystercatchers and Beach Stone-curlews the group will continue to monitor bird populations and watch for signs of beach-nesting activity. Tallow



Tallow Beach

Creek forms part of the Arakwal National Park and Cape Byron

Marine Park and is an important site for the traditional owners, the Arakwal Bumberlin people. It is also a very popular recreational area and over peak

holiday periods intensive human activity can occur including night-time parties with loud music. In order to raise awareness, this year BBB have produced education material including signs, bookmarks and a brochure to help inform the community and holiday-makers of the ecological importance of this site for migratory and resident ocean and waterbirds as well as the resident shorebirds and particularly the beach-nesting birds.



Tallow Estuary

This year was a very poor breeding year compared to 2016 when all the hatchlings survived without incidence.

At the Belongil Estuary, where two pair of Pied Oystercatchers usually nest, no nesting activity occurred from the pair that build their nest on a small sand island about 200m up the creek. It is noted that in 2016 they successfully fledged two chicks.



*In July, before the nesting season, BBB members with the assistance of staff from the nearby Elements Resort held a working-bee to re-established the temporary protective fence and renew the educational signs at Belongil*



The other pair of Pied Oystercatchers has been nesting on the beach since at least 2004. They laid two eggs on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, which was a month later than usual. Two weeks later, one of the pair was found with fishing line wrapped around both feet; however it was still able to fly, feed and attend to its nesting duties. Unfortunately, the line was very tightly wound around the left foot. All attempts by Seabird Rescue and others over the next 12 days to catch it and remove the line failed.



Fishing line (L) foot 20/9/17

Self-amputated 2/10/17

Feeding on Tallow Beach 5/10/17

The foot self-amputated three days before the eggs were due to hatch. By the presence of egg shells, it appears the eggs hatched on time however the chicks were never sighted. Dog tracks (it is a dog prohibited area) were observed close to the nest site. By a strange coincidence, and only two days after the amputation occurred, the pair were visited by another pair of Pied Oystercatchers and amazingly one of these birds was a right leg amputee! What makes this more incredible is we have never seen another one-legged Pied Oystercatcher in the area before? Within two weeks the left-legged amputee was replaced by a two-legged healthy bird and all was back to normal; that is to say there is still a beach-nesting pair on the front beach at Belongil. If there had been a month between monitoring visits one would be none the wiser that one bird had been replaced by another.



Two pair of Red-capped Plovers nested on the Belongil Beach this year. We did not see the first nest but at the end of September two adults and two almost fully grown chicks were observed. One chick survived from a second nesting and the third nest was abandoned. Presently, a pair is sitting on the fourth nest.

In the Brunswick River about 10k north of the Belongil Estuary, the three very successful breeding pairs of Pied Oystercatchers all nested again this year and each pair laid two eggs. One pair did manage to lay three eggs however it was after one egg had been washed out of the nest by storm water and it laid abandoned about 4m from the nest for several weeks. From the six viable eggs only three chicks fledged; one egg was abandoned, another did not hatch and the other hatched but the fate of the chick is unknown.

In Marshalls Creek, a tributary to the lower reaches of the river, a pair of Beach Stone-curlews has nested for the past seven years with various degrees of success. This year, they successfully hatched a chick but the chick disappeared after a month, possibly to a goanna. The pair re-nested two weeks later but the egg was gone within two days and the goanna is the chief suspect. Fortunately last year's chick survived. It was tagged C9 and remained with its parent's up until two weeks after they nested this year. It left the parents at the end of September.



Beach Stone-curlew C9