

# Red-capped Plovers

## Our Smallest Beach-nesting Birds

The Red-capped Plover, *Charadrius ruficapillus*, is Australia's smallest beach-nesting shorebird. While migratory shorebirds are here only for the spring and summer months, Red-capped Plovers spend their entire lives on our shores.



Male Red-capped Plover, North Arm Port River. Photo: Kym Murphy

They are so named for the distinctive rusty red colouring on their heads. The birds are tiny, with adults weighing just 35-40 grams: about the same as a muesli bar.



Female Red-Capped Plover, Semaphore South. Photo: Susan Kim Lee

Red-capped Plovers are widespread around the Australian coastline, as well as inland salt lakes and wetlands. They forage on mudflats, sandy beaches and saltmarsh areas, feeding on sand hoppers, small snails and beach worms. Their large eyes help them to spot prey on the surface.

birds are in our nature

## Breeding

Red-caps breed between August and February and may attempt multiple broods in one season. Females lay 1 or 2 eggs in a shallow depression or 'scrape', often lined with small shells, or pebbles.



Red-capped Plover nest on open sand.

The well-camouflaged eggs are incubated for 28-30 days. Both parents share the job, with females doing the day-shift and males at night, when their bright 'red' cap is less visible.



Female Red-capped Plover on nest. Photo Credit: Peter Allen

The nesting birds use distraction to defend their eggs and chicks – leading predators away and performing "broken wing" displays.

## Chicks



Newly-hatched chicks leave the nest almost straight away and must find their own food. They can not fly for 5 weeks, this is their most vulnerable period.

Young chick by the water's edge. Photo: Geoff Gates

During this time both parents look after their chicks, leading them to the water's edge to feed, protecting them from predators and keeping them warm, or shaded from extreme heat.



Mum and 1-week old chick. Photo: Ash & Sue Read

## Threats

Because they nest directly on the sand, Red-capped Plovers and their eggs are particularly vulnerable to predators, including foxes, dogs, cats and ravens. The chicks' are well camouflaged to their environment with brown and white speckled down. Eggs and young chicks are also vulnerable to extreme heat or cold, and are easily crushed especially by vehicles on beaches!

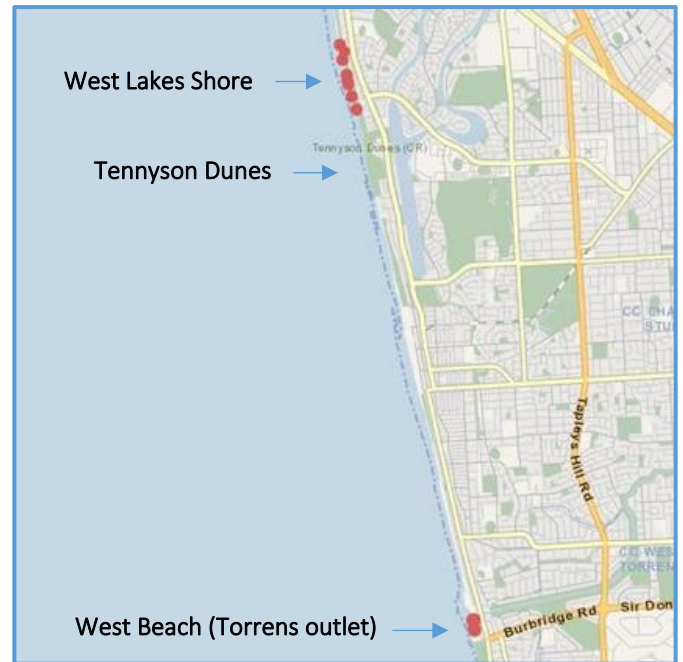


Red-capped Plover chick on vehicle track, Moana Beach. Photo: Peter Allen

## Red-capped Plovers on our coast

Red-capped Plovers are found on beaches and wetlands in the Adelaide metropolitan area. Unfortunately, their numbers are declining at some sites with many years of unsuccessful breeding.

The Red-capped Plover's breeding season (spring and summer) overlaps with the busiest time on our beaches. Disturbance by people and dogs adds to the many threats faced by breeding Red-capped Plovers and their chicks.



**Current Red-capped Plover nesting sites on Adelaide beaches (2021). Previous known nesting sites have included Largs, Semaphore South, and Semaphore Park.**

## How can you help?

- Walk your dog on a lead especially during the birds' spring/summer breeding season.
- Watch where you walk when visiting beaches or wetlands- stay down by the water's edge.
- Follow the signs and avoid walking on the upper beach or dunes, to reduce the risk of eggs and chicks being disturbed.
- Keep beaches clean and free of litter.
- Report any sighting of nests or chicks to the contact below.

To find out more or to report any sightings of nests or chicks, please contact Aleisa Lamanna  
Aleisa.lamanna@birdlife.org.au or visit  
[www.birdlife.org.au/beach](http://www.birdlife.org.au/beach)

The Red-capped Plover monitoring program is supported by BirdLife Australia, Green Adelaide, the City of Charles Sturt and the City of Port Adelaide Enfield