



Newsletter #5 – March 2025

Making progress toward recovery – Preliminary survey results.

At our Friends of Osprey management committee meeting, held in Port Lincoln in February 2025, we were provided with a comprehensive presentation by Randall Johnson from the Department for Environment and Water. Randall presented **preliminary data** from surveys of osprey and white-bellied sea-eagles between 1 May 2021 and 29 February 2024. Randall outlined difficulties involved in conducting these surveys along South Australia's vast coastline and offshore Islands, where many birds call home. The data is collaborated with reports mined from databases such as Birddata, E-bird, i-naturalist and the Friends of Osprey Facebook page and from collaborations with Primary Industries and Regions SA, Fisheries and Landscape Boards.

The preliminary data shows that during the survey period 50 occupied territories were identified. This is an increase from the previous survey conducted in 2015 – 2017 (Dennis and Detmar) where 43 occupied territories were identified but still less than the 58 occupied territories identified in 2008-2010.

The survey indicated that a significant part of the increase in territories can be attributed to the uptake of Artificial Nest Platforms erected on Yorke Peninsula and more recently on Eyre Peninsula through collaboration with the Northern and Yorke Landscape Board and Friends of Osprey. Recognition that progress is being made toward recovery.

Please help us to confirm and refine this data for future surveys by reporting Osprey sightings at <https://friendsofosprey.com.au/report-sighting-of-osprey/>

2024 artificial platform breeding summary

Gleesons Landing

Two chicks fledged. Female Annie (Black Left/Pink Right Bands) and Male Hector (Red Left and Blue Right Bands) fledged. Both were satellite tracked however Annie's tracker has not registered. Fortunately, we have regular reports from locals saying that both birds continue to be sighted around Gleesons and Corny Point.

Point Davenport

Not known

Wills Creek

One female (Maxine, Red Left/Black Right Bands) and one male Vincent (Red left/Green Right Bands) fledged. The male bird is fitted with a satellite tracker and remains in the near vicinity.

Port Broughton

No breeding in 2024 however we are hopeful for the coming season as Will the 2022 Male from Wills Creek has been occupying this territory along with an unbanded female.

Tumby Island

One female (Sandy-Blythe Yellow Left/Black Right) fledged and remains in the area.

Shoal Bay

It is not known if this platform has been successful in 2024 however we are attempting to attract a Committee Member from Kangaroo Island and working with us to grow the population in that important part of our state.

Adelaide Internation Bird Sanctuary

Not occupied.

Sheaok Flat

No breeding in 2024 however that territory has been taken up in recent months by Harry (brother to Will – 2022 bird from Wills Creek (Silver/Purple Bands) and an unbanded female so we are hopeful for future seasons.

Coobowie

This platform was the star of the show in 2024 with four eggs being laid. One chick did not survive but the remaining three females fledged. Marie (Red Left/White Right) – more about her later, Libby (Metal left/Pink right) and Missy (Red



Figure 1 Coobowie Family Photo by Dave Weatherall

Left/Pink Right). Libby continues to be in the Coobowie area and Missy has not been sighted for some weeks. The Adult Female from this nest also disappeared not long after the chicks fledged and despite significant efforts no reason for the disappearance has been identified.

Sleaford Bay

Not occupied

Arno Bay

Despite removing the old nest from the telecommunications tower the birds determinedly rebuilt it. Nesting was unsuccessful. This is not a safe place for the birds to breed and there will be another attempt to remove the nest and block access to encourage the birds to use the artificial nest platform closer to the coast.

Coffin Bay – Black Springs

The platform is occupied but as far as we know was not successful in 2024.

Onkaparinga Estuary

Not occupied.

Streaky Bay

The Artificial Nest Platform is occupied but breeding was not successful in 2024.

Smoky Bay

Not occupied

Port Lincoln

The Port Lincoln Barge produced three eggs but the youngest chick died. It is likely that this was a problem with hatching as the egg was 42 days old at hatch, took a long time to hatch and the chick looked weak from the beginning and died within hours. The remaining chicks a Male (Wilko – Green Left/Pink Right) and Female (Kasse – Red Left/White right) both fledged. Wilko was last recorded at Frenchman's Point and Kasse after a long flight north returned to the coast and seems settled at Tumby Bay.

Port Neill

Not occupied

Tulka

The platform has been occupied by Calypso (2019 Male from the Barge (Blue left/Metal right)) and an unbanded female. They have been defending the nest and while it looked like breeding would happen they were not successful in 2024. We have our fingers crossed for success in the 2025 breeding season

Learning from satellite tracking

With more than 20 osprey now having been fitted with satellite trackers the data coming in and the information gleaned is certainly beginning to show some amazing results.

Most interesting in 2024 was the flight of Marie. Before we get to her flight this bird seems to have nine lives. She chose to fledge in the middle of a storm and did not make it back to the nest. Her tracker showed her position the following morning at the foot of a small cliff very weak and bedraggled. To make a long story short the bird was rescued by Malcom Stanton, Dave Weatherall and Peter. As luck would have it, Roy Dennis OBE MBE, who is recognised Internationally for his work with osprey recovery in Scotland was visiting Coobowie as a guest of Friends of Osprey. Arriving that evening Roy

checked Marie over and fed her pilchards and Malcolm kept her overnight to help her recover. The following morning after more pilchards it was decided that Marie could not be returned to the Coobowie nest as it would put the other two chicks who had not yet fledged at risk. Since the group were moving on to Gleesons Landing to band and track two chicks there the suggestion was made by Roy that they would simply “foster” Marie onto the Gleesons Nest. Take two chicks off to band and track and then return three. This was a strategy that had been used successfully overseas and practiced by Roy several times before. The outcome was stunningly successful and Marie was accepted by both chicks and adults at Gleesons.

Marie’s epic flight

Ian Falkenberg, Vice Chair of Friends of Osprey, has provided the following analysis of Marie’s flight.

“16th February 2025 and departing Gleesons Landing.

Total distance travelled since leaving Gleesons Landing to Black Springs in Coffin Bay = 1,784km over a period of 8 days and 3 hours (approx.)

This is the longest flight of an Osprey young since the project commence in 2020

Some interesting facts relevant to this movement below

Distance from Gleeson Landing to Cape Bouger near Hansons Bay on KI = 134km

Flight distance from Cape Bouger south to the continental shelf and return to KI (Cape Gantheaume) = 380km. This is an interesting flight as it was over a period of 20.5 hours. No places to land in this area apart from boats. As it turns out I was about 60km south of KI in a boat on the actual day the Osprey flew back to KI and the conditions were 4 mtr swell and 25 knot winds.

Furthest distance travelled south of KI to continental shelf = 213km

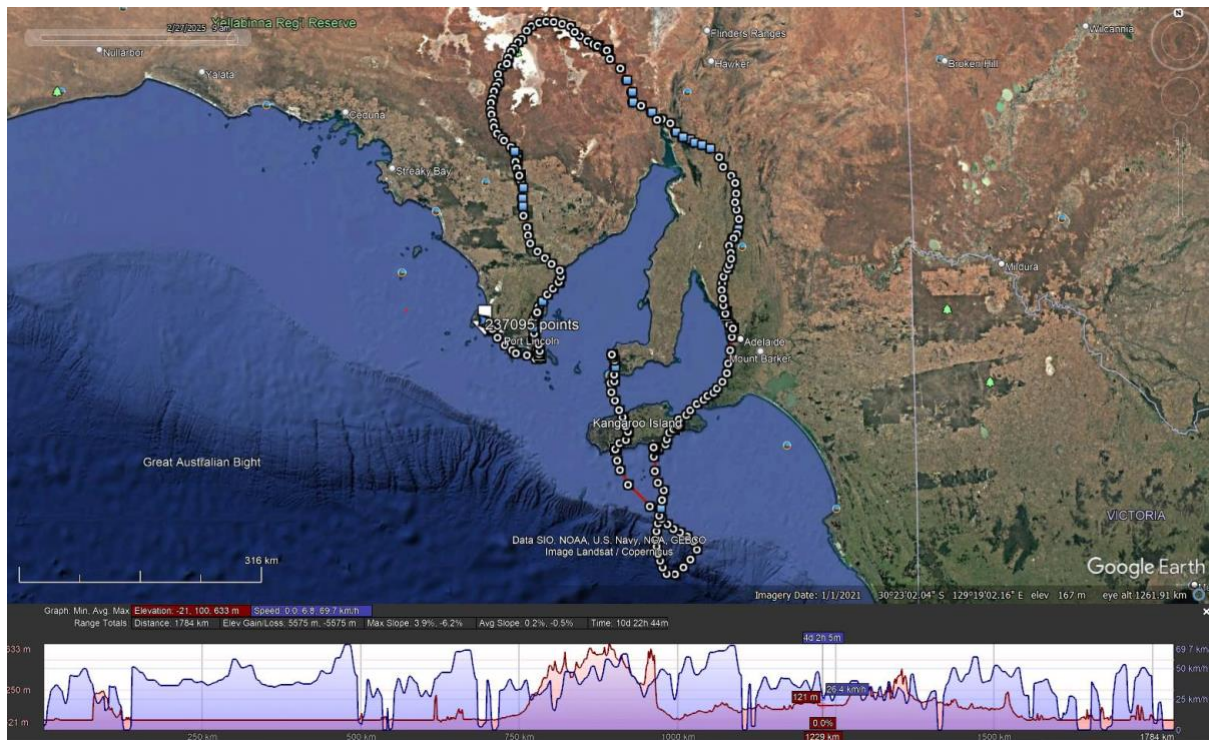
The interesting flight north from the AIBS over land and the dry pastoral areas to Lake Gairdner near Woomera and then south to Port Neil on Eyre Peninsula = 824 km over a period of 66 hours.

Maximum speed 69.7 km/hr and average speed 6.8 km/hr. Average elevation 100mtrs and maximum elevation 633 mtrs over the Flinders Ranges. (refer to elevation profile below)

Peaks on elevation profile are flights over land and flat sections are flights over water.

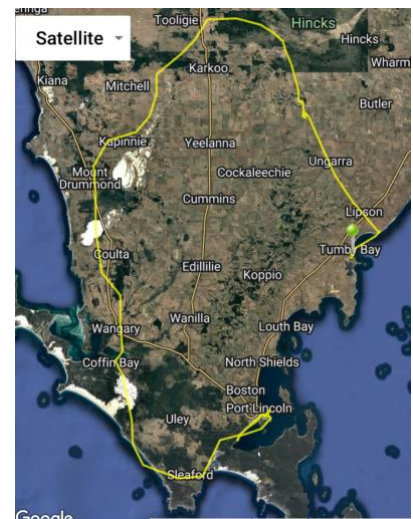
Three stop overs perhaps to feed occurred over the 1,784km at Cape Bouger, AIBS near St Kilda and Stamford Hill in Lincoln NP , otherwise continuous flight.

In summary, how did this Osprey complete such a marathon flight of 1,784 km successfully through some of the very dry pastoral areas of SA ? This Osprey and the other two Ospreys at the Coobowie nest were by far the heaviest female Ospreys tracked and banded so far (well above average weight). Success in part maybe due to fat which is the fuel that makes these flights possible. It is well known that migratory Ospreys and shorebirds that travel long distance with little food along the way, fat provides essential energy as well as releasing significant amounts of water when metabolised. Therefore an Ospreys movement through the dry interior of SA maybe able to maintain flight even though it has not eaten and had access to water.”



It does seem that the female Osprey are more likely to take off on these wild flights. As well as this flight by Marie, we also saw Kasse fly north to the middle of Eyre Peninsula before turning back to the coast and making herself at home at Tumbay Bay.

Over the years we have observed at least four females take similar flights way inland. Interestingly the males tend to stay closer to the natal nest. Having said that both last years chick and this years chick from the Thistle Island Nest have made their way into Port Lincoln which also seems odd for a bird hatched in such a remote location and both being males.



Roy Dennis Visit

We were thrilled to bits when Roy Dennis OBE, MBE agreed to include South Australia in his pre-Christmas Australian visit. Roy's only stipulation was he wanted to see as many Osprey as possible.



Figure 2 David Spiers, FOO President with special guest Roy Dennis

Roy Dennis OBE, MBE is a field ornithologist and wildlife consultant, living in Moray; he has worked in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland since 1959, most notably on the conservation of rare birds and the reintroduction of lost species, such as the white-tailed eagle and red kite. He is a specialist in raptor

conservation and reintroductions in the UK and abroad, having been involved with osprey, red kite, golden eagle and sea eagle reintroduction projects, and his satellite tracking studies since 1999 have broken new ground.

To have Roy in South Australia speaking to Friends of Osprey groups in Adelaide, Coobowie and Port Lincoln and to simply soak up his wonderful knowledge, quiet advice and absolute positivity was an inspiration to all of us who met him. As an added bonus more than \$5000 was raised for Friends of Osprey from Roy's dinner sessions.

Habitat conservation

Following visits to Port Lincoln in late 2024 the Friends of Osprey Committee identified an area of important wetland habitat on the outskirts of Port Lincoln. The area known as Greyhound Road is a series of three ponds each with different salinity levels separated from Proper Bay by an embankment. The Committee recognised the significance of this area for foraging for Osprey as well as many other birds and undertook to write to the City of Port Lincoln suggesting a strategy to conserve and improve the area. Subsequent meetings with Southern Eyre Birds, Birds SA, Eyre Peninsula Landscape Board and the City of Port Lincoln have been very positive and we are hopeful that this important habitat may be protected going forward.

Website update

In recent weeks our web site had been getting an update. The work is still in progress but its almost there. Head over and have a look at <https://friendsofosprey.com.au>

General committee news

In more general Committee news, we are thrilled to welcome some new Committee Members.

Ainsley Parker has agreed to come on board as our Treasurer as a qualified accountant with many years experience we know we are in good hands with Ainsley.

From Yorke Peninsula and the Mid-north we welcome Mike Roberts. Mike has a Graduate Diploma in Agriculture from Roseworthy, Bachelor of Science in Biology, Wildlife Science from State University of New York and has significant experience in marketing and promotions through his facility The Barn at Wombat Flat and the 500 Miles of Music. Mike has been a very keen follower of Osprey on Yorke Peninsula and has provided regular reports from Gleeson's Landing.

Lastly our Chair, David was on Kangaroo Island in recent days and met with people there about osprey conservation. We are hopeful we might have a Kangaroo Island representative as a result.