

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Outfoxing the Foxes

Dr Julie Old, Dr Ricky Spencer and Mr Jack Wolfenden from the School of Natural Sciences are investigating the impact that foxes and other predators have on shorebird populations and endangered bird species on the Central Coast. This research is supported by the Gosford City Council.

'Introduced predators such as European foxes continue to pose significant threats to native fauna populations,' says Dr Old. 'Particularly nesting shorebirds whose successful breeding is impacted significantly by predators. On the shores of the Central Coast of NSW, there are several endangered species of birds of high conservation value that nest on the ground, such as the Little Tern, the Bush-Stone Curlew and the Pied Oystercatcher. They live and breed in areas recently confirmed to have foxes actively hunting. Even the presence of non-predators such as humans or other animals can disturb and disrupt these birds' nesting areas. This study, therefore, aims to establish the impact foxes have on these bird nesting populations and to determine any other disturbances that may be influencing the breeding success and population numbers of shorebirds.'

Sites for study will be determined and surveyed in consultation with the Gosford City Council, National Parks and Wildlife and local bird watching and monitoring groups. Recordings will be made of the disturbance of shorebirds nests by foxes and other animals, such as dogs, at various sites using infra-red "camera-traps" that can monitor continuously day and night with no use of flash and little disturbance to the activities of birds, predators and people. Further information about animal movements in the area will be gathered by physical examination of the sites, including identifying scats and tracks and fox scats will be examined to determine their local diet.



Knowledge of the impact of foxes on shorebird populations of the Central Coast and the times when they are most active and their numbers most abundant will inform Gosford City Council on the best ways to conduct their fox management program. Any human-related impact found in the study may also contribute to the development of management programs for limiting human traffic and disturbance in the shorebird nesting areas, protecting already endangered Australian bird species.

Project Title: Assessing the impact of foxes on ground nesting shorebirds using new technologies
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