It started with two eggs: the story of Pip

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] T [/dropcap]o some people, the destiny of a sand plover sitting on a nest probably doesn't mean all that much, but *Bluestone* supporters are different to most people.

We know this because of how they – perhaps including you – responded to our efforts to protect one small plover that had made the decision to nest in dry sand about 150 metres from the Hopkins River bridge, right where fishermen, walkers and plenty of energetic, beach-excited dogs like to roam.

In fact I was roaming when my big clodhopper shoe nearly wiped out the two speckled eggs that were so well camouflaged as to be almost invisible. (Mama bird was nowhere to be seen at the time: she had probably popped to the shops).

Thinking the eggs were abandoned, I admired them and moved on.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] T [/dropcap]he next day, however, I was roaming again (I do that a lot, in the mornings) and Mama bird was draped over the eggs like a woman wearing a feathery ball gown: and so the quest to protect "Pip" and her eggs began.

We thought this would involve no more than a visit to Parks Victoria who would be able to protect the nest by roping off the area and banging a few signs into the sand, just as we had seen at other coastal nesting sites around Victoria.

But unfortunately Pip's GPS was off.

If she had nested on the actual foreshore, another 750 metres away, she would have been in the domain of Parks Victoria. Instead, she was in a sort of no-birds-land that, upon investigation, was found to be managed by the local council.

The council, unfortunately, was up to its neck with other things – things obviously much bigger than Pip – and was

unable to respond with the haste that we had hoped.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] W [/dropcap]hile we waited for the cavalry to arrive, we made our own signs – from whatever we could find – and rigged up a very non-convincing fence using bits of old rope.

Days ticked by, during which *Bluestone* began to post "Pip" updates on its Facebook page and hundreds of people began to follow our progress, or lack thereof.

As the days turned into more than a week, we checked our fence and our signs and were constantly amazed that, despite some horrendous weather, both continued to hold.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] W [/dropcap]e were also constantly amazed by how many of our readers wanted to know how Pip was faring – she was fast turning into a minor celebrity (although without an agent).

Last Wednesday – 13 days after Pip's nest was first discovered – the council was finally able to stake out her nesting zone with string and wooden posts, and erect two serious-looking signs.

We have no doubt that the *Bluestone* FB page helped that to happen and just in time, as on Sunday (yesterday) the river was packed with people and dogs enjoying the first day of Summer.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"]S[/dropcap]omething else happened over the weekend too.

Our first Pip-ette.

The second, we have no doubt, is not far behind and both Pip and her partner (Pat?) are sharing the nesting and chick-watching responsibilities.

Thankyou Bluestone supporters – we have made a small but important difference.

The ‘Bluestone baby’ – between Mum and Dad – shortly after hatching at the weekend.

[box] Unlike many young birds, sand plovers are self-sufficient from the moment they leave the egg. They are not fed directly by their parents, but collect their own food (under the protective eye of Mum or Dad) and spend most of their time hiding in the sand dunes until they are old enough to borrow the car keys.[/box]

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