

West Pilbara Turtle Program



PROGRAM SUMMARY 2024-25

Background



Watching flatback hatchlings and a nesting female at the same time, Bells Beach 2024



Nest eruption during a night tour at Bells Beach, December 2024

A brief history of the program

- The West Pilbara Turtle Program (WPTP) is a partnership between Rio Tinto and Parks and Wildlife Service (P&WS) of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA)
- It brings together industry, government and the community to monitor, raise awareness and protect marine turtles across the Pilbara
- WPTP has been operating for 22 years, with first data collected for a pilot project in December 2002
- The partnership between Rio Tinto and P&WS has been in place since 2005, 20 years
- Over 813 people have signed up as volunteers, since 2005
- 30-50 volunteers actively conduct beach monitoring each year
- In 2025, Rio Tinto renewed the funding agreement for the program until 2029 continuing long-term data collection at Bells Beach and education of the community about turtle conservation.

Monitoring methodology 2024-25

- Monitoring methodology is based on methodology used for Ningaloo Turtle Program and Care for Hedland Turtle Program
- This year, Bells Beach, Boat Beach and Yacht Club Beach (Wickham) and Cleaverville were monitored over the following dates to gain a broader insight into turtle activity in the region:
 - 7 – 25 November 2024
 - 26 November – 19 December 2024
 - 2 – 16 January 2025
- Data were collected digitally using the ODK collect app
- The yearly estimates of nest numbers and total tracks have been derived from a model developed by A. Whiting in 2018 using data collected from the three sampling periods above.

The West Pilbara Turtle Program acknowledges the Traditional Owners, the Ngarluma people, of the land and sea country where we work and pay our respects to Ngarluma elders past, present and emerging.

For more information contact the WPTP Coordinator. Phone: 9182 2031. Email: wptp@dbca.wa.gov.au

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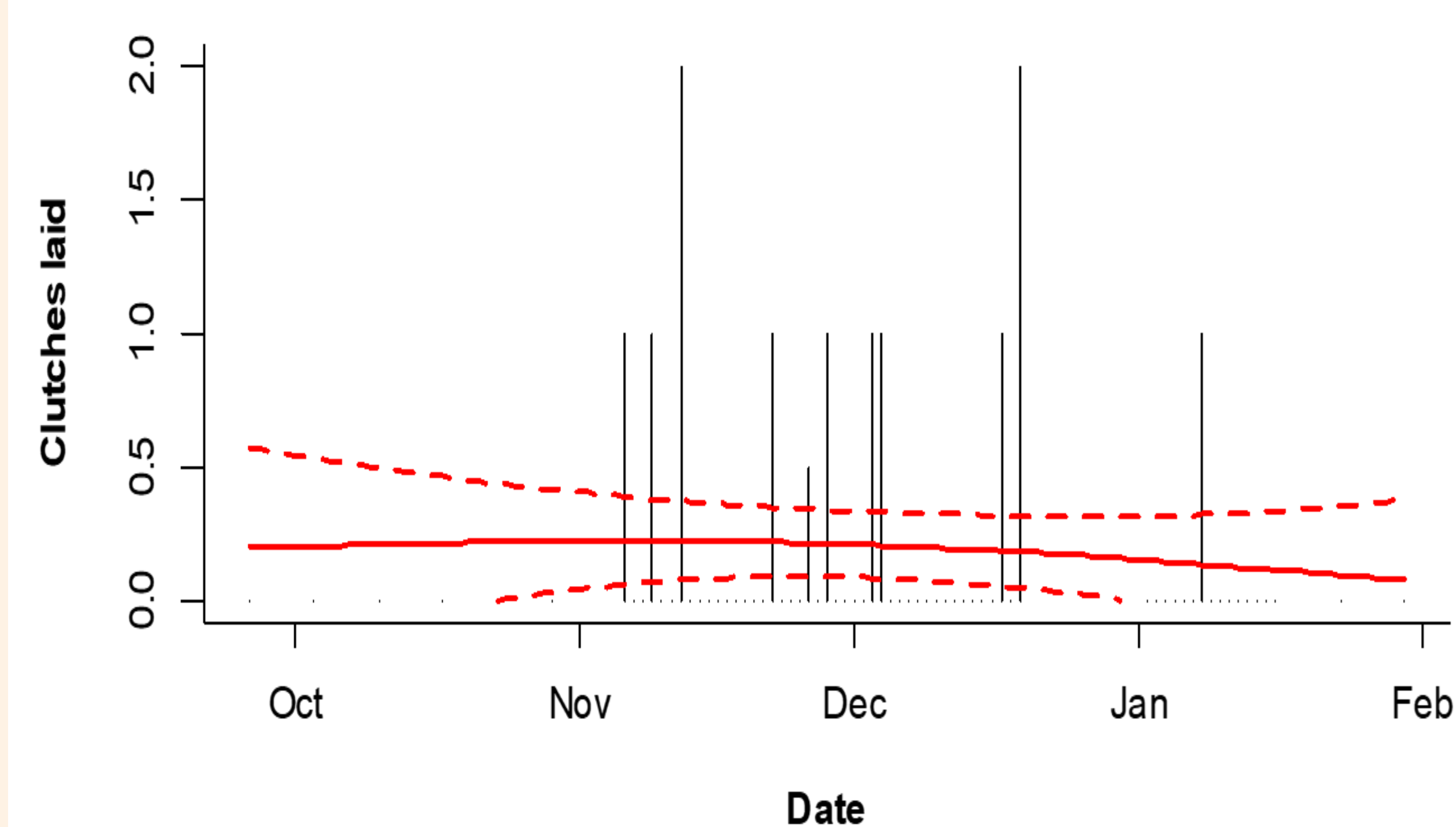
Our findings – monitoring data

Monitoring effort

- This year, there were 175 volunteer days covering four beaches.

Species identified

- All tracks and nests were identified as belonging to flatback (*Natator depressus*) turtles.



Boat Beach 2024-25

- Actual count: **12 nests over 59 days**
- Model prediction: **23 nests for season (error range: 4-48)**
- Black vertical bars are actual counts, red lines show model with upper and lower limits.



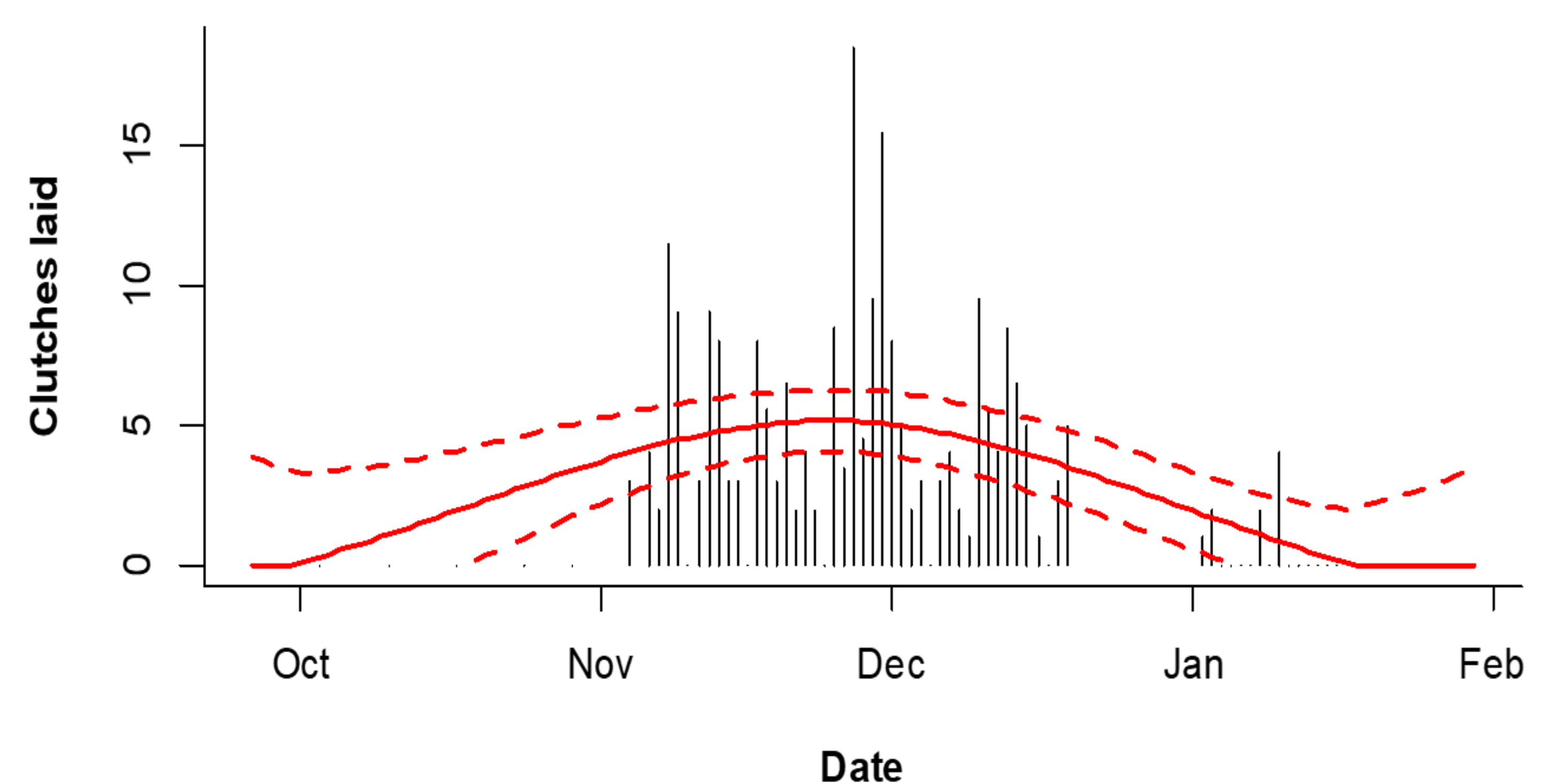
Flatback tracks on Boat Beach

Number of monitoring days and nests recorded at each monitoring beach, 2024-25.

Site	Days monitored	Nests
Bells and Yacht Club beaches	62	237 (Bells) 2 (Yacht Club)
Boat Beach	59	12
Cleaverville	54	24

Bells Beach 2024-25

- Actual count: **237 nests over 62 days**
- Model prediction: **330 nests for season (error range: 197-555)**
- Black vertical bars are actual counts, red lines show model with upper and lower limits.



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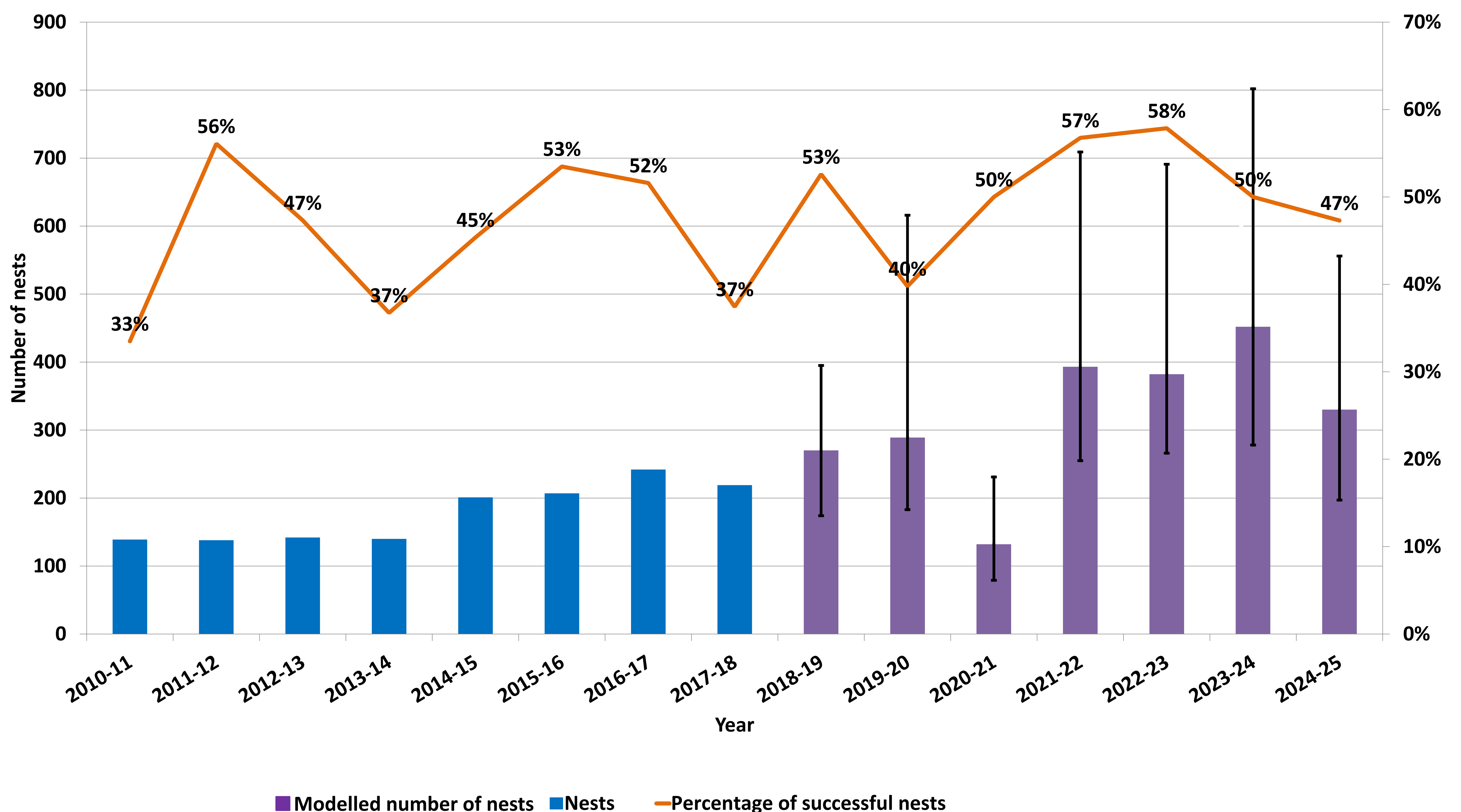
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Our findings – long term nesting trends

- Overall, the number of nests (estimated by the model) for 2024-25 was lower than the past three years with 330 nests estimated.
- Over the same date ranges, we recorded 237 nests this year (2024-25) compared with 269 last year (2023-24). The number of false crawls was also lower this year than last year (264 this year compared with 272 in 2023-24).
- Nest success (orange line in figure below) was lower than the previous two years at 47% compared with 50% for 2023-24.
- The peak of the nesting season seemed to have started early this season. This trend was observed at other nesting beaches in the northwest and is thought to be due to higher sea surface temperatures across the region. This may account for the lower numbers of nests as we may have missed some early nesters.



Note: Error bars for 2024-25 show the error range of the model used to predict 330 nests for the season at Bells Beach.

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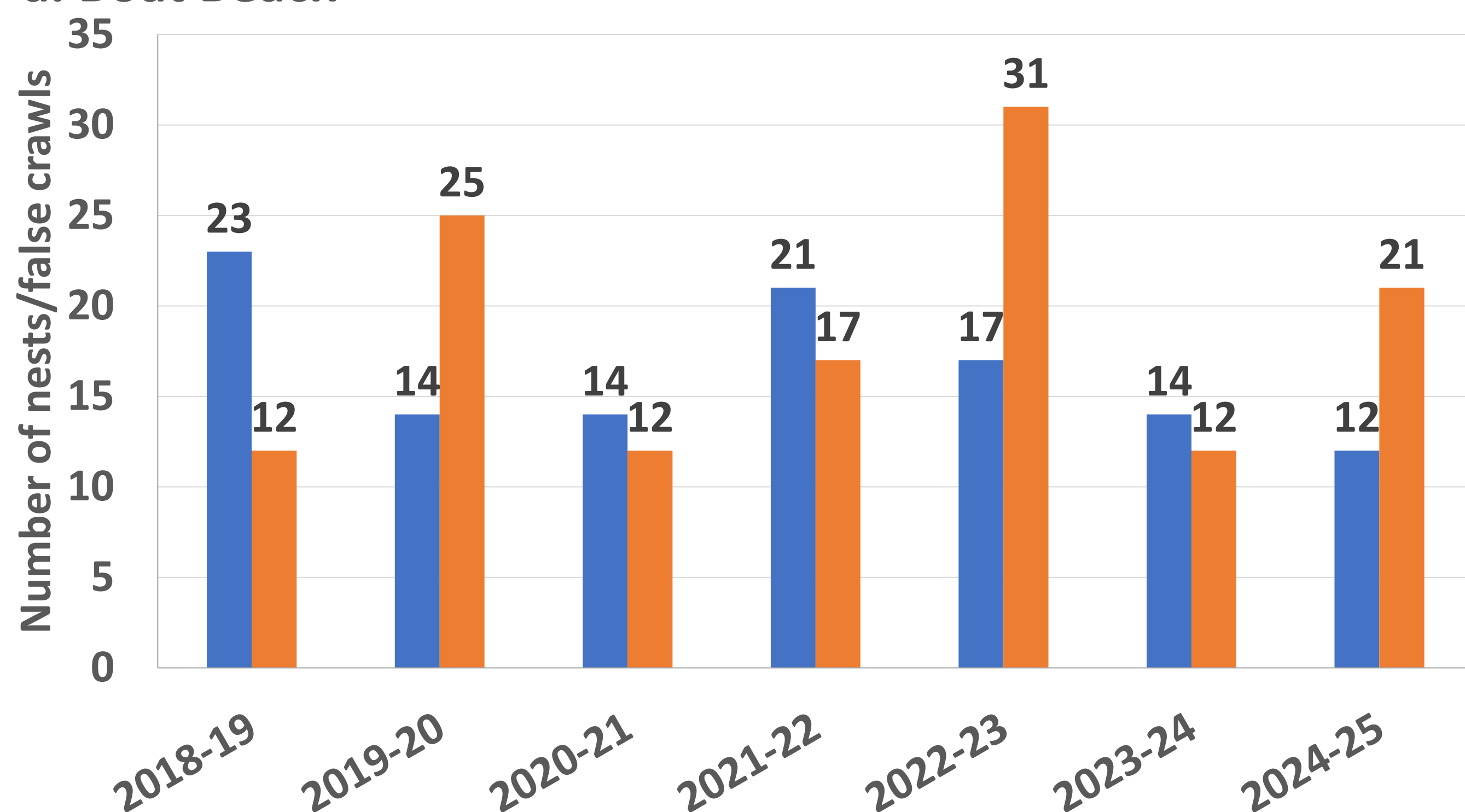


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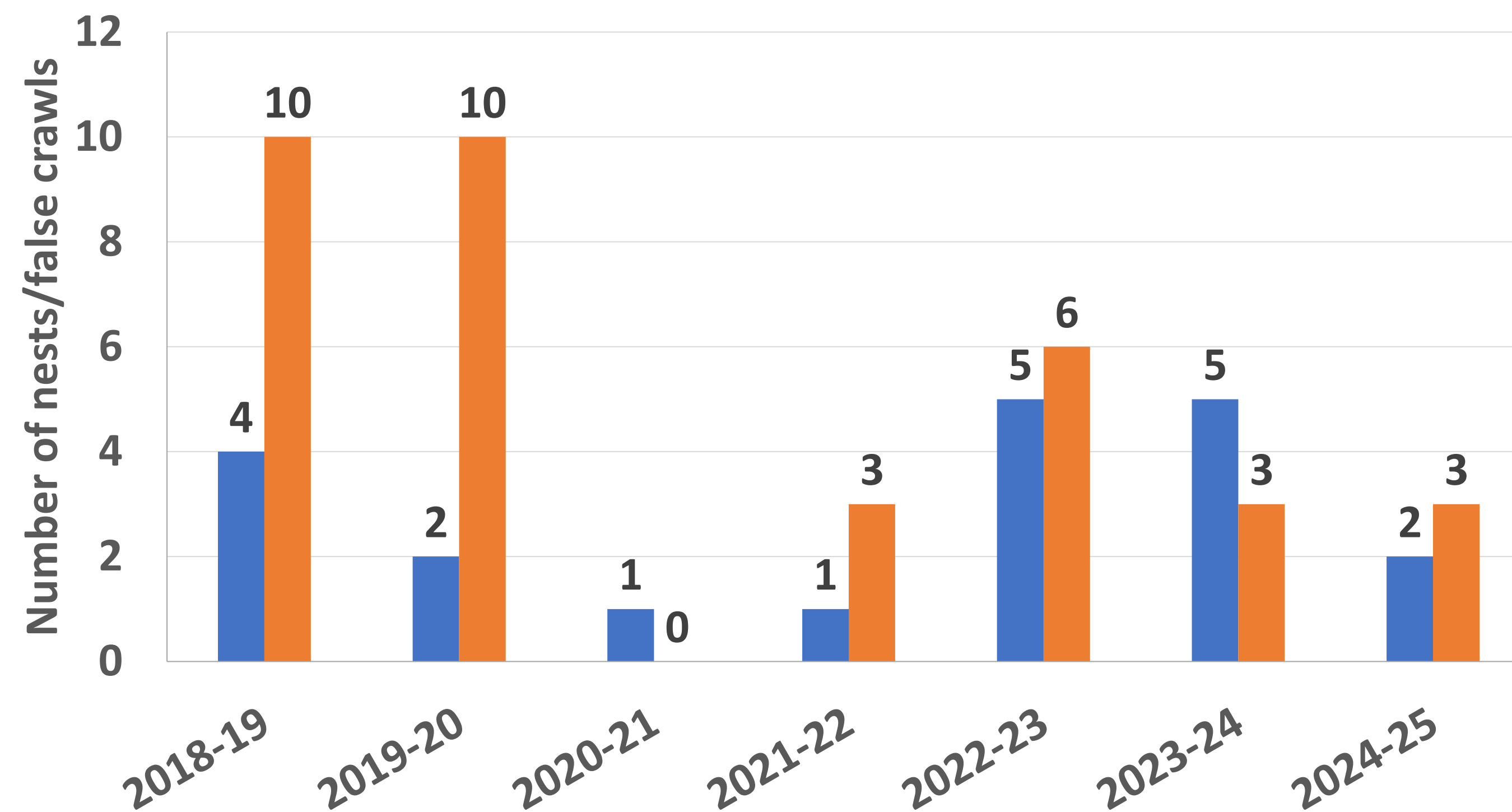
Our findings – long-term nesting trends continued

- There are now seven years of comparative data for Boat Beach, Yacht Club Beach and Cleaverville. Figures a-c below show a comparison of the same number of days over the same period each year. The number of nests and false crawls recorded at Boat Beach in 2024-25 were similar to previous years (Figure a).
- At Yacht Club Beach there was similar turtle activity in 2024-25 compared with the last three seasons (Figure b).
- At Cleaverville, the number of nests and false crawls recorded was lower than last season and 2021-22 but similar to other seasons (Figure c). Note years 2018-19 and 2019-20 there were fewer sampling days at Cleaverville only covering 25 November to 19 December compared with more recent years that covered 7 November – 16 January.
- It is evident from the past seven monitoring seasons that flatback turtles are consistently using Boat Beach, Yacht Club Beach and Cleaverville to nest, although much lower numbers than at Bells Beach.

a. Boat Beach



b. Yacht Club Beach



c. Cleaverville

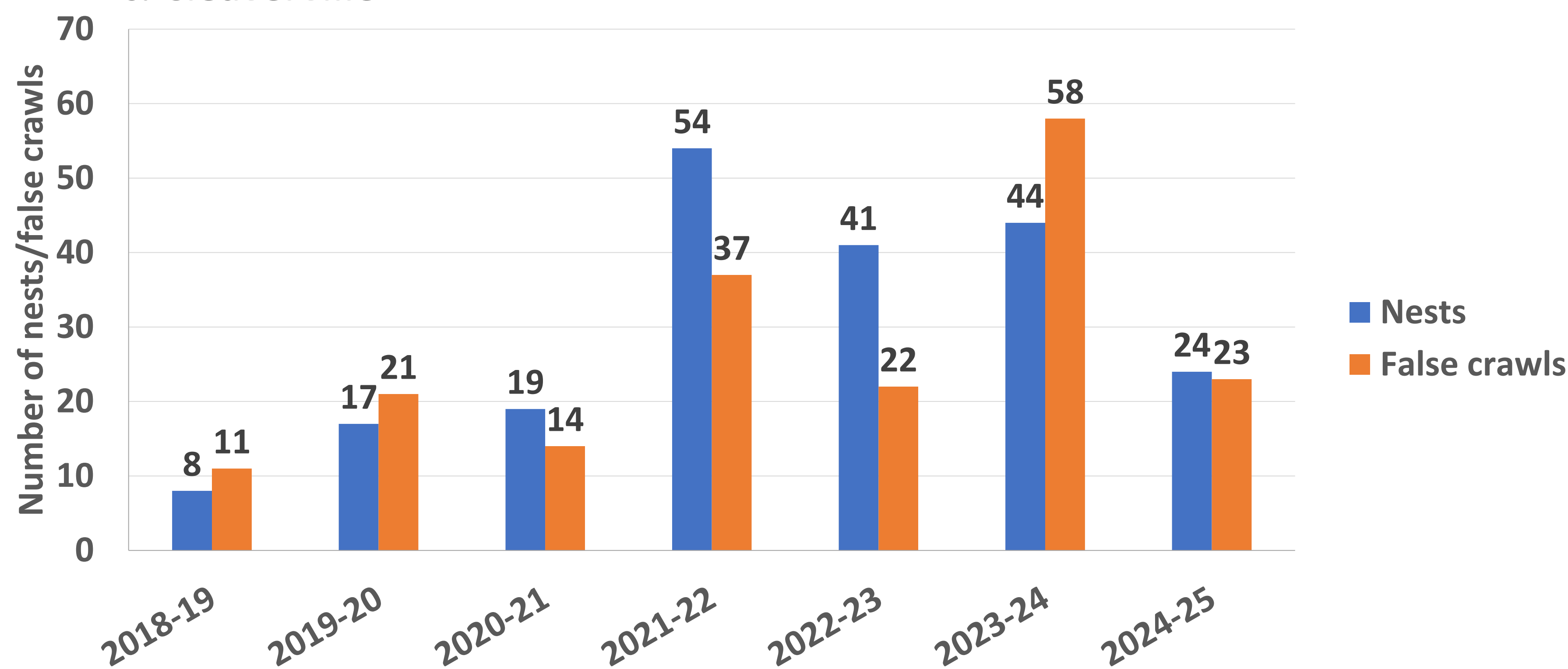


Figure a-c. Shows nests (blue bars) and false crawls (orange bars) for a. Boat Beach, b. Yacht Club Beach and c. Cleaverville

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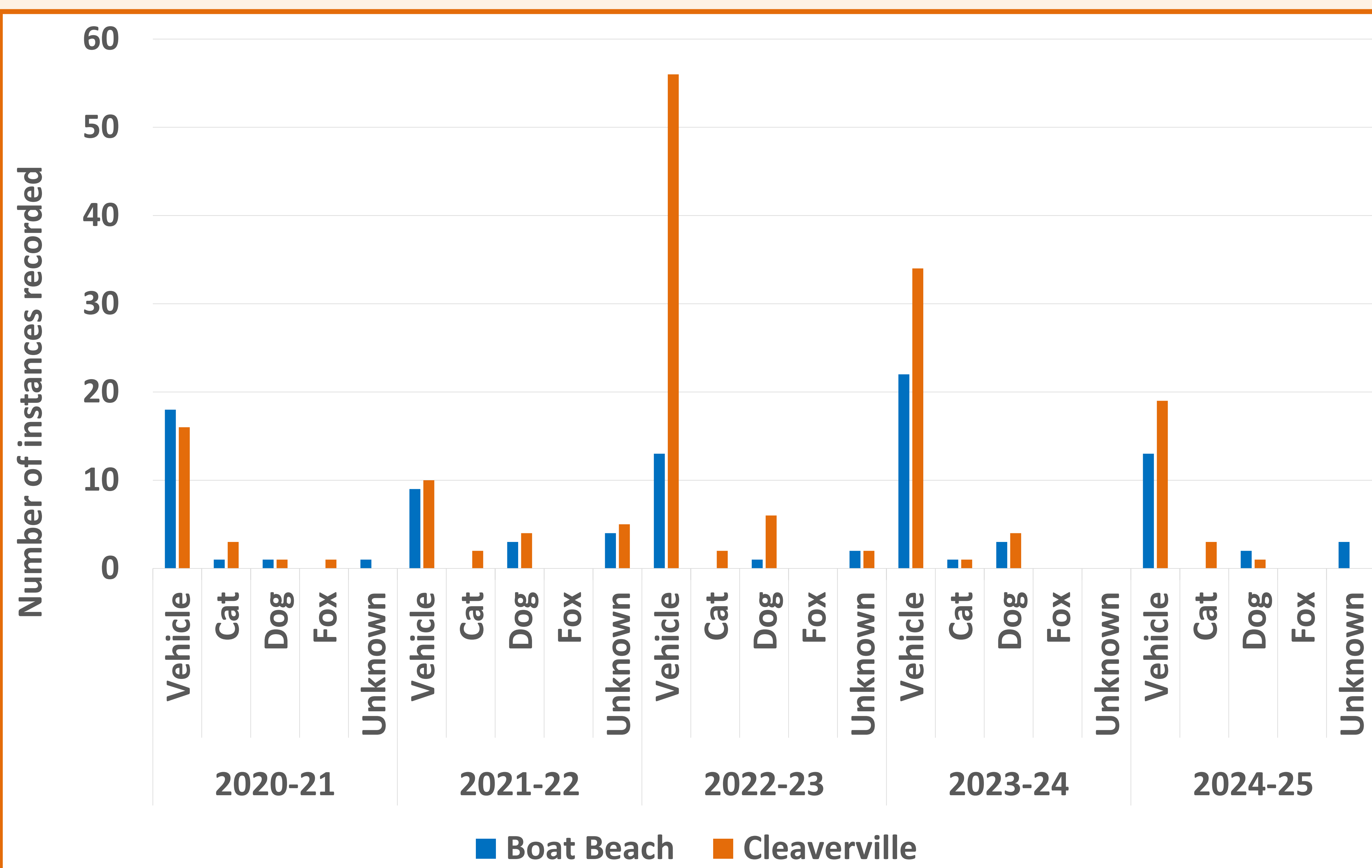
PROGRAM SUMMARY 2024-25

Our findings – disturbance to nesting turtles

- At Bells Beach there was one cat track, one dog track and one vehicle (quad bike) recorded for 2024-25.
- At Boat Beach there were many instances of general disturbance recorded by vehicles (13 instances) and dogs (two instances).
- At Cleaverville, there were 19 instances of vehicle activity, three cat tracks and one dog track.
- The reporting of vehicle and dog (and potentially cat) disturbance is likely being under reported at both Boat Beach and Cleaverville as anecdotally we saw vehicles on Boat Beach every.
- The low numbers of introduced predators is likely due to the on-going predator trapping undertaken by Rio Tinto each year around Bells Beach.
- The figure below shows the disturbances at Boat Beach and Cleaverville over the past five years with disturbance by vehicles a constant issue.
- The photo to the right shows a vehicle track over a turtle nest and the photo below right shows a hatchling caught in a tyre track. Evidence of the direct impact of vehicles on our nesting beaches.



Vehicle track over turtle nest on Boat Beach



Hatchling up-side-down, dead in car tyre track on Boat Beach

For more information contact the WPTP Coordinator. Phone: 9182 2031. Email: wptp@dbca.wa.gov.au

West Pilbara Turtle Program



PROGRAM SUMMARY 2024-25

Other achievements – promotion and education



Dampier markets and Pilbara News advertisement

West Pilbara Turtle Program



It's turtle nesting season! Help us monitor turtles, raise awareness and contribute to local turtle conservation. Get involved by volunteering to monitor turtle nesting, help clean-up important nesting beaches and participate in local events.

Free, fun and open to all ages!

The West Pilbara Turtle Program brings together industry, government and the community to monitor turtle nesting and raise awareness on the importance of local beaches for turtle conservation.

Where? Bells Beach (near Cape Lambert), Boat Beach (near Wickham) and Cleaverville

When? Daily turtle monitoring by volunteers: 7 November – 19 December | 2-16 January

Volunteer training: 2, 10, 13, 17 November

Night turtle nesting tours: 24, 27 November, 11-13 December

More information: Email: wptp@dbca.wa.gov.au or phone (08) 9182 2031.

Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions | PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE | West Pilbara Turtle Program | RioTinto

Promotional activities

In 2024-25 there were 22 activities, events or products delivered to promote the program. These included:

- Regular Facebook posts
- Distribution of merchandise at FeNaCING Festival, National Science Week display, the Karratha Visitors Centre, the Program Launch, Dampier market stall and Cape Lambert Family Day
- Distribution of flyers at shopping centres, sports precincts, libraries and visitor centres
- Advertisements and flyers on Rio Tinto site screens, social media and newsletters
- Merchandise produced and distributed including postcards, WPTP pins and magnets
- Newspaper advertisement and advertising on Volunteering WA and seek
- Radio interviews with ABC North West.

Educational activities

Educational activities were again a key focus for the WPTP in 2024-25. Across Karratha, Wickham, Roebourne and Dampier 74 educational activities were delivered reaching over 5000 people. These included:

- 34 talks, with 1347 students, at local primary and secondary schools and seven turtle sessions with pre-kindy students at Karratha Community House
- Five story time sessions at Karratha, Wickham and Dampier libraries
- Nine night tours to show the community turtle nesting at Bells Beach including one tour with the STARS Foundation KSHS and two with St Luke's STEM Academy
- Two family monitoring days to introduce people to the program and look for hatchlings
- Various stalls at festivals and school events including National Science Week Fair at Karratha Senior High School, STEM Open Day at St Luke's College, FeNaCING Festival and the Karratha Chamber of Commerce and Industry Career Expo
- Beach clean-ups with Pilbara Dive and Tours and Wickham Tidy Towns
- World Sea Turtle Day craft competition.



Polly Farmer STEM Centre students talking turtle bones

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Other achievements – working with others



Beach clean-up at Dampier with Pilbara Dive and Tours



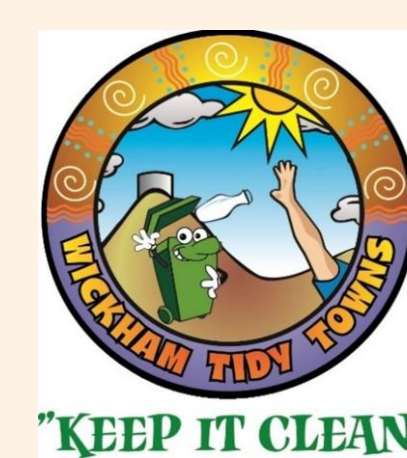
The crew from Cummins Engineering – regular turtle volunteers and beach clean-up crew

Working with others

In 2024-25, the WPTP continued to work closely with a range of stakeholders to deliver events and jointly manage turtle nesting beaches. For the seventh year in a row, we worked with Wickham Tidy Towns to launch the turtle monitoring season and clean-up Wickham beaches. We also worked with Pilbara Dive and Tours to clean-up Dampier beaches.

On Boat Beach during the turtle monitoring season we worked with the City of Karratha to protect turtle nests laid in the vehicle traffic zone by fencing nests with bunting and putting up signs.

This year, we continued to work with other turtle programs, particularly North West Shelf Flatback Turtle Program and Rosemary Island Turtle Program, to ensure consistent messaging and methodology. We also did some turtle walks with the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation rangers at Conzinc Bay.



Program launch with Wickham Tidy Towns



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Summary

- The Education pillar continues to be a strong component of the program with 74 activities delivered in 2024-25 across schools, community groups and events.
- In 2024-25, we continued our relationship with the Polly Farmer STEM Centre in Karratha, Wickham and Roebourne, Karratha Senior High School, St Luke's College, the STARS Foundation and Karratha Community House. We have worked with these schools and education organisations for the past six years.
- There was again strong demand for education activities with regular requests for turtle talks, projects or activities by schools, daycares and community groups.
- Many people were again interested in the WPTP this year but the number of volunteers engaging with the program was slightly lower than in 2023-24. Sixty new volunteers signed up over the year and 36 new volunteers attended one of four training sessions. This was nearly half the number of new volunteers that participated in training last year.
- Despite the lower number of volunteers engaging in the program in 2024-25, the volunteer roster for beach monitoring was covered by returning and new volunteers every single day except one, that the WPTP Coordinator covered. This is the first time in the program's history that volunteers have covered almost all of the monitoring days. An amazing effort by the dedicated volunteers participating in 2024-25.
- Night tours were again very popular with 187 people participating in eight public tours to watch nesting turtles. Twenty more people attending compared with last season (2023-24).
- In addition to the public night tours, this year we ran three night tours for school or community groups including St Luke's College and Karratha Senior High School STARS Foundation students. This is a special way to extend the classroom turtle sessions and get students out on Country.
- The WPTP and North West Shelf Flatback Turtle Conservation Program (NWSFTCP) continued their work together, sharing knowledge and ensuring consistent messaging and activities across the region.
- While the WPTP was not able to collaborate with the Ngarluma Aboriginal Corporation on turtle work this year, the program remains committed to inviting and engaging them in future activities, including the 2025-26 season.
- Overall, the program has had positive community support and continues to deliver both turtle monitoring and community education of marine turtle conservation in the local area.



St Luke's watching a nesting flatback



Nest excavation



End of season volunteer celebration



Franki and Geoff at FeNaClING

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