

Department for Environment and Heritage

# Waders of the Coorong and Lower Lakes



Your guide to discovering  
migratory wader birds



Government  
of South Australia



[www.environment.sa.gov.au](http://www.environment.sa.gov.au)

The annual spring wader migration brings a special reward to those visiting the Coorong and Lower Lakes. This area encompasses some of Australia's most significant wetlands and the Coorong and Bool Lagoon are designated as Wetlands of International Importance. During September, October and November, up to 100 000 birds and dozens of species, including the beautiful Red-necked Avocet, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Black-winged Stilt descend on the wetlands to feed.



### What's a wader?

Wader is a term used to describe dozens of bird species that live and feed in wetland and coastal environments. Many wader species are migratory. Each year, migratory waders fly thousands of kilometres from distant breeding grounds in Siberia, Asia and the Arctic Circle to feeding grounds in the Southern Hemisphere. The wader's migration means they experience summer year-round.

### Flyways and byways

Migratory waders fly on routes called flyways. Waders stop at three or four wetlands along their route between the hemispheres. Any degradation to just one of these stopover points could negatively affect the entire migration. The waders you see in the Coorong and Lower Lakes travel along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

### Protecting the flyways

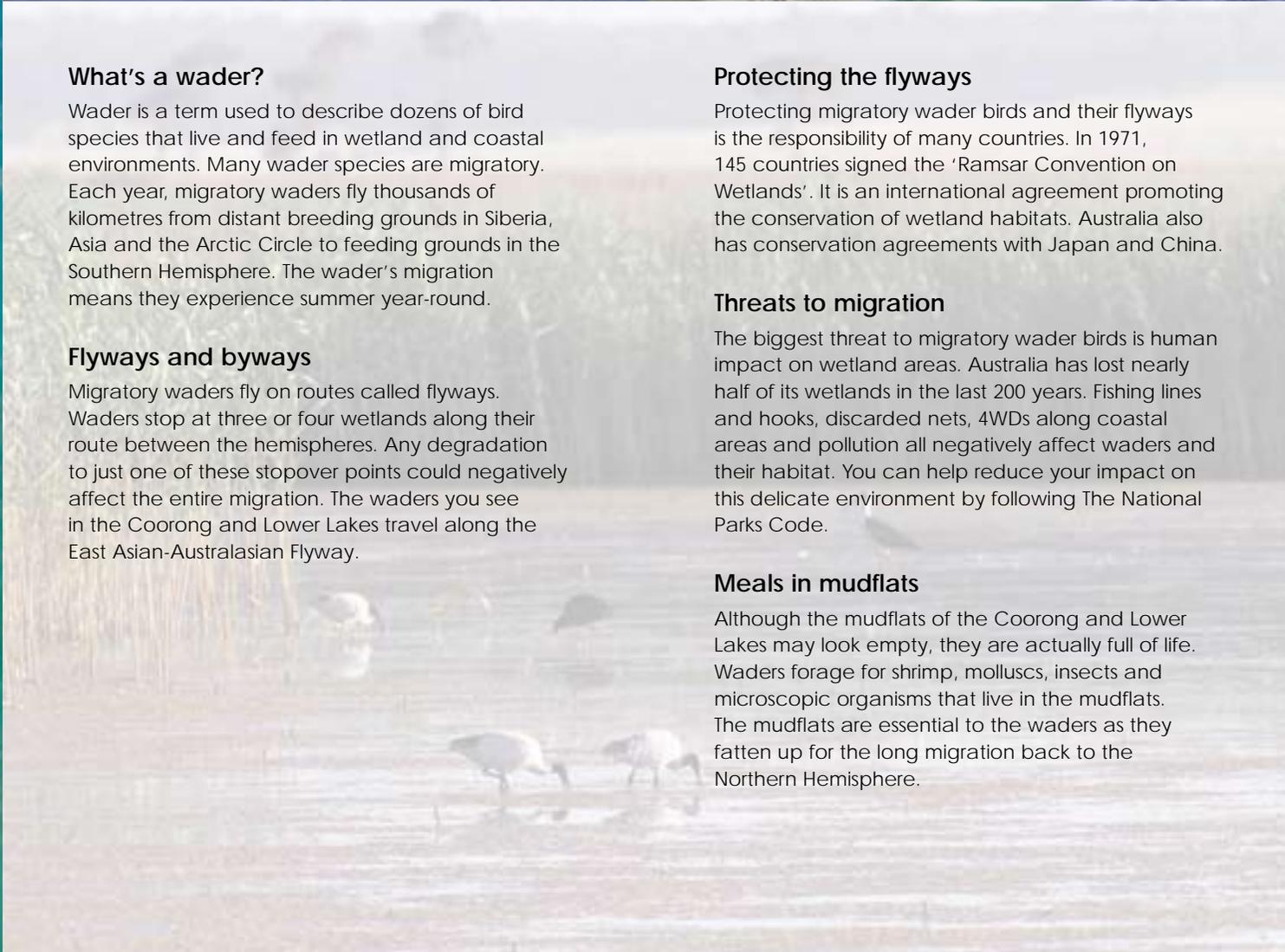
Protecting migratory wader birds and their flyways is the responsibility of many countries. In 1971, 145 countries signed the 'Ramsar Convention on Wetlands'. It is an international agreement promoting the conservation of wetland habitats. Australia also has conservation agreements with Japan and China.

### Threats to migration

The biggest threat to migratory wader birds is human impact on wetland areas. Australia has lost nearly half of its wetlands in the last 200 years. Fishing lines and hooks, discarded nets, 4WDs along coastal areas and pollution all negatively affect waders and their habitat. You can help reduce your impact on this delicate environment by following The National Parks Code.

### Meals in mudflats

Although the mudflats of the Coorong and Lower Lakes may look empty, they are actually full of life. Waders forage for shrimp, molluscs, insects and microscopic organisms that live in the mudflats. The mudflats are essential to the waders as they fatten up for the long migration back to the Northern Hemisphere.





# Your guide to discovering migratory wader birds



**Red-necked Avocet**

*Recurvirostra novaehollandiae*

The Red-necked Avocet is easily spotted in the shallows of wetlands and lakes. With its distinctive upturned bill and red neck, this bird feeds by sweeping its bill from side to side, stirring the mud and catching molluscs and insects. Listen for trumpeting whistles. Size: 40-45 cm.



**Common Greenshank**

*Tringa nebularia*

The Common Greenshank inhabits sandbars and mudflats. Look for its olive-green legs, pure white underparts and mottled brown/olive-green wings. In flight, shows white rump and back. Greenshanks use their slightly upturned bill to probe the mud and flush out prey, including worms and molluscs. Listen for a ringing 'tew, tew, tew'. Size: 33 cm.



**Curlew Sandpiper**

*Calidris ferruginea*

This small wader often feeds belly-deep at the water's edge. The upper plumage is grey-brown; the underparts are pale white with grey across the breast. Look for its distinctive black, down-turned bill. Listen for a pleasant "chirrup". Size: 21 cm



**Sharp-tailed Sandpiper**

*Calidris acuminata*

The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper inhabits mudflats, tidal sandbars, inland lakes and shorelines. They forage for insects, molluscs, and worms using their straight, dark bill. Their feathers have black centres with buff edges. It has a brown crown, white eye stripe and a white chest and belly. Listen for a shrill ringing in flight. Size: 19-22 cm.



**Red-necked Stint**

*Calidris ruficollis*

The Red-necked Stint is the smallest migratory wader weighing only 30 grams. Within its lifetime, it will fly more than the distance between the earth and the moon. Look for a whitish and grey-brown breast. It has a black tapering bill and black feet. Look for the Red-necked Stint on mudflats. Listen for a twittering sound as it feeds on molluscs and worms. Size: 15 cm.



**Black-winged Stilt**

*Himantopus himantopus*

Wading through the mudflats and shallow water on its long red legs, the Black-winged Stilt is found throughout most of Australia except the driest parts of the interior. Look for white plumage on the head, neck, chest and abdomen; black plumage on the nape, back of head and wings. The bill is long, black and straight. Listen for its distinctive high-pitched barking call. Size: 36-38 cm.

## The best locations to see these species

### In the Lower South East

- Bool Lagoon
- Lake St Clair
- Port Macdonnell

- Lake Eliza
- Lake George
- Cape Banks

### In Coorong National Park

- Salt Creek
- Parnka Point
- Murray Mouth
- Jacks Point
- Pelican Point
- Beacon 19 (Goolwa)



Bool Lagoon

### How to be a wader-watcher

- Use a pair of binoculars to get a close-up view of the birds.
- Wear clothes that blend in with the surroundings.
- Move quietly to a good spot where you can sit down and watch.
- Remember to observe from a distance and do not interfere with nests.
- Carry a field guide to ensure positive identification.

### How do I know what bird it is?

Identification of birds, especially the smaller and less colourful species can be challenging. Take note of their:

- shape – especially their beak or bill
- unusual features – perhaps their walk, call or flight pattern
- flashes of colour – the head, neck and underside of wings may give a clue
- habitat – did you see them in reeds, on the beach or wading?

It's important to remember that not all wader species will be at all sites. The waders will be more abundant in some areas than others. Each time you visit the Coorong and Lower Lakes you will have a new experience!

## The National Parks Code

Help protect your national parks by following these guidelines:

- Leave your pets at home.
- Take your rubbish with you.
- Observe fire restrictions, usually 1 November to 30 April. Check CFS Hotline 1300 362 361.
- Conserve native habitat by using liquid fuel or gas stoves.
- Camp only in designated areas.
- Respect geological and heritage sites.
- Keep our wildlife wild – do not feed or disturb animals, or remove native plants.
- Keep to defined vehicle tracks and walking trails
- Be considerate of other park users.

**Thank you for leaving the bush in its natural state for the enjoyment of others.**

### Wader checklist (not exhaustive)

<input type="checkbox"/> Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Curlew	<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Greater Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Grey-tailed Tattler	<i>Heteroscelus brevipes</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Long-toed Stint	<i>Calidris subminuta</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Oriental Plover	<i>Charadrius veredus</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Oriental Pratincole	<i>Glareola maldivarum</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Pintailed Snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-necked Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra novahollandiae</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-necked Stint	<i>Calidris ruficallis</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	<i>Calidris acuminata</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Swinhoe's Snipe	<i>Gallinago megala</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Wandering Tattler	<i>Heteroscelis (Tringa) incana</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>

### For more information contact

Department for Environment and Heritage

**Information Line: (08) 8204 1910**

Or your local national parks office.

**[www.environment.sa.gov.au](http://www.environment.sa.gov.au)**

To learn about wetland conservation in Australia go to:

**[www.deh.gov.au/water/wetlands](http://www.deh.gov.au/water/wetlands)**

To learn about wetlands around the world go to:

**[www.wetlands.org](http://www.wetlands.org)**