

Shorebirds Competition 2021

Background Information

Shorebirds, also called 'waders', make up about 10% of Australia's bird species. Shorebirds live their lives almost entirely on shores, wading in shallow water looking for food on coastal mudflats, estuaries and inland waterways in areas called wetlands.

Most of Australia's 37 species of shorebird are migratory, travelling along the *East Asian-Australasian Flyway* to breed in the Arctic and then returning to Australia in September-October each year to 'overwinter' until April – May when they fly back to the Arctic again. Some shorebirds also live and breed in Australia all year round – these are called resident shorebirds. Shorebirds are highly vulnerable to disturbance and loss of wetland habitat.

This year, 2021, is the 50th anniversary of The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention) signed in February 1971, in Ramsar, Iran. The Ramsar Convention aims to protect wetlands globally and shows that habitats around the world are connected. Ramsar wetlands in Australia are vital shorebird breeding and feeding sites. Australia designated its first Ramsar wetland in 1974 and since then has added another 65 wetland areas to the list.

Australia's coastal and freshwater wetlands are important feeding grounds for over 2 million migratory and resident shorebird species. They can be found everywhere in Australia, from the rivers that cross the continent, to a vast range of water-based areas including swamps, marshes, billabongs, lakes, salt marshes, mudflats, mangroves and coral reefs. Many of them are coastal where our major cities and towns are located.

When migratory shorebirds arrive after their amazing journey of up to 13,000 km from the northern hemisphere, they spread across Australia with many taking advantage of seasonal wetlands across inland Australia, while others spread out along Australia's coastline.

To ensure the survival of healthy shorebird populations, it is critical that important shorebird feeding areas are protected from threats such as climate change, habitat loss and change from urban, industrial and agricultural development, pollution, weeds, invasive species and water overuse. It is more important than ever before to look after these unique wetland ecosystems, big and small. The shorebirds depend upon them for survival.

<https://birdlife.org.au/documents/Shorebirds-FactSheet.pdf>

https://birdlife.org.au/documents/Shorebird_ID_Booklet_V3.pdf

<https://environment.gov.au/water/wetlands/ramsar>

<https://www.ramsar.org/wetland/australia>

<https://wetlandinfo.des.qld.gov.au/wetlands/what-are-wetlands/>