

# What are wetlands?

Almost anywhere that can be wet is a wetland as long as it has plants and animals that like to live in wet conditions. Wetlands include natural and human made habitats and the water can be still or flowing, fresh, salty or a mix of both. They do not have to be permanently wet and many inland wetlands can be dry for a long time until heavy rain comes.

Mangrove areas



Inland streams and rivers



Salt marshes



Swamps, marshes, billabongs, lakes, streams, saltmarshes, mudflats, mangroves, coral reefs, farm dams and urban stormwater ponds are all wetlands. Australia even has underground wetlands.

## Australia's Ramsar connection



Australia was one of the first countries to sign the Ramsar Convention – an important written agreement between nations to protect wetlands. In 1974 the Cobourg Peninsula in the Northern Territory was the world's first Wetland of International Importance. There are now 66 wetlands in Australia that have been recognised under the Ramsar Convention and they cover an area greater than Tasmania.

## Why do we need to protect wetlands?

Wetlands are very important for the environment, food production, culture and recreation. A healthy wetland has many plants and animals including threatened species. They allow plants and animals to spread out around Australia and maintain their populations by joining areas together.

Wetland systems remove harmful sediment and nutrients, helping to keep water systems clean and healthy. They provide protection from the effects of extreme weather events such as storms and floods and can help reduce greenhouse gases by storing carbon.

Wetlands are used for agriculture, providing water for farm animals and crop watering, while the ones near beaches are nurseries for fish and other sea creatures. Wetlands are also important to Indigenous people who use wetland plants and animals for food, medicine, fibre and tools.

# Wetlands and shorebirds



Bar Tailed Godwits on Sydney Bay

Australia's wetlands provide essential habitat for shorebirds. Some shorebirds live in Australia all year round, while others migrate thousands of kilometres to visit for the warmer months each year. Wetlands provide a safe place where migrating shorebirds are able to stop, rest and feed after their long journey.

## What are the threats to wetlands?



Climate change dries creeks and waterways

Many things can affect a wetland, threatening its survival. Some of our wetlands are no longer working naturally because humans have changed the way water flows in or out of them. Housing development, taking water for other uses, climate change, feral animals, weeds and fires all damage wetlands. A damaged wetland can become a healthy one again with help but once a wetland is drained or built on, it may not be possible to save it.

## What can we do?

There are some things you can do to help keep wetlands healthy so everyone can enjoy them. They include when visiting wetlands keeping pets under control and carrying out all rubbish, keeping weeds and invasive species, such as aquarium fish, out of wetlands, joining a local conservation group that cares for wetlands and finding out more about wetlands and what makes them special. You can be a voice for the wetlands near you by learning about them and raising public awareness about how wonderful they are as habitat for Australia's threatened shorebirds.

### Image acknowledgements

[www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)  
[www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au)  
[www.oceanwatch.org.au](http://www.oceanwatch.org.au)  
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