

The East **Asian-Australasian** Flyway

Most migratory waders (shorebirds) fly here in our spring from their Arctic Circle summer breeding grounds in Siberia and Alaska. Their migration routes follow through Japan, the coasts of China and southeast Asia, the Philli pines and Indonesia to Australia's northern coasts, thence to other coastal and wetland areas throughout Australia and New Zealand. In our autumn the majority fly north again for their breeding season.

Latham's Snipe fly in from northern Japan and eastern Asia for our summer.

Conservation of migratory waders is facilitated under the Ramsar Convention, CAMBA (the China Australia Migratory Birds Agreement) and JAMBA (Japan Australia Migratory Birds Agreement). During their migration these huge flocks of birds need regular stopovers to feed and regain the weight they have lost in flight before heading off on the next leg. The key to the waders' survival is maintenance and protection of both these fly way stopover wetlands and the wetlands where the waders spend their non-breeding season.

Trans-Tasman Migratory Waders

During February Double-banded Plover start flying in from their summer breeding grounds on the braided river channels of New Zealand's South Island. In our late winter-early spring the majority return east to New Zealand to breed. This is the only east-west wader migration to our coastal areas.

Waders in Anderson Inlet

Anderson Inlet is ranked 4th-equal of 38 sites in Victoria for waders.

It is listed as an Internationally Important Site (Ramsar criterion is that it regularly supports more than 1% of the Fly way population of a species) for:

Double-banded Plover
Eastern Curlew
Red-necked Stint
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

It is listed as a Nationally Important Site (It regularly supports more than 1% of the Australian population of a species) for;

Double-banded Plover
Eastern Curlew
Red-necked Stint
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper
Common Greenshank
Pacific Golden Plover

Wader surveys have been carried out in Anderson Inlet since 1980. The current; bi-monthly boat-based counts supported by Parks Victoria have been surveying 8 sites since January 2000 (all other water birds are also counted). The maximum number of waders counted in the Inlet since January 2000 was a total of 6,304 on 03.12.02.

Including the above 6 wader species 23 different species have been recorded in Anderson Inlet (the latest addition to the list was a Pectoral Sandpiper in December 2002). Most numerous here from the Arctic Circle are Red-necked Stint, Eastern Curlew, Curlew Sandpiper¹; Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Pacific Golden Plover. The

smaller species prefer to roost at high tide on the small sand spits and muddy beaches, but those people with canoes or boats may sometimes see these smaller waders roosting on tide-surrounded mangroves

At; times; flocks of some hundreds of Red-necked Stint and some sandpipers will roost at high tide on the ocean surf beaches. Double-banded Plover flocks also feed and roost on the surf beaches.

The bigger Eastern Curlew usually roost on saltmarsh coastal edges, Being taller than most of the other waders they will roost in areas where vegetation cover would be too high for the smaller species. Eastern Curlew are very spooky birds, intolerant of even reasonably distant perceived disturbance.

Banding studies in Victoria show that: adult birds of Red-necked Stint and Double-banded Plover populations have high site fidelity during the non-breeding season - many of those that use Anderson Inlet will return in subsequent seasons.

Not all international migrants return to their breeding grounds each year. Red-necked Stint in particular show good numbers of birds remaining in Anderson Inlet throughout winter; many of these are juveniles, not yet capable of breeding. Anderson Inlet is recognised as an important "nursery area" for Red-necked Stint,

Resident Waders

Hooded Plover (endangered in Victoria) feed, breed and roost on our ocean beaches (see SGCS February 2003 leaflets *Hooded Plovers Need Our Help* and *Hooded Plover Breeding Attempts in the Inverloch Area*).

Red-capped Plover feed, breed and roost on our ocean beaches and on the sandy and muddy beaches in Anderson Inlet. They lay their eggs in mere scrapes above the high tide line, often in the sand dunes.

Sooty and Pied Oystercatchers feed and roost on low tide rock platforms, mudflats and low tide surf beach areas. One particular spit east of Maher's Landing is a favoured roost for Pied Oystercatcher - as many as 28 have been seen clustered together.

Masked Lapwings are often seen feeding on the Inlet's mudflats or roosting in saltmarsh.

Spartina in Anderson Inlet

Spartina's spread into sandspit and mud beach areas has caused roosting site problems for many of the waders. It was feared that its spread might drive some of the waders away, as studies have proved in some overseas areas. Smaller wader species seem to prefer clear roost sites although the Eastern Curlew are tall enough to cope with roosting in tide-edge areas where *Spartina* is still short,

However, a December 1999 survey found that countless tide-surrounded mangroves near the mouth of Pound Creek and around the *Spartina* islands near Fisherman's Jetty were

covered with the smaller waders roosting on top - Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpaper, Pacific Golden Plover and Common Greenshank. They have since been observed many times on the mangroves during the bi-monthly counts, both near Fisherman's Jetty and at Pound Creek.

Thus the smaller species have so far adopted an alternative roost habitat at those times when wind direction and tide height have combined to make their traditional/preferred roost sites east of Maher's Landing un-useable (when areas clear of *Spartina* are tide-covered). Who knows how long these birds will persevere with this roosting adaptation - it's the first record anywhere in the world of these small waders roosting on mangroves, although some larger species have been known to do so.

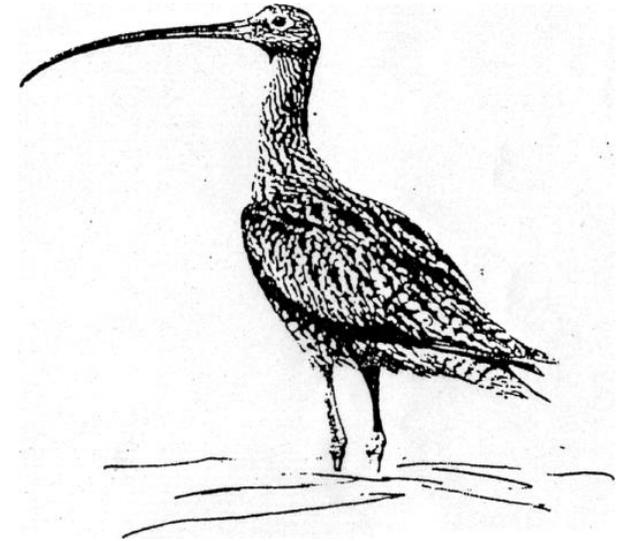
All waders, their habitats along the East **Asian-Australasian** Flyway and their Australian wetland habitats are protected under international agreements to which Australia is a signatory.



Spartina

WADERS IN THE INVERLOCH AREA

Eastern Curlew



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See also: *Anderson Inlet Waders and Waterbirds and Birds of the Bunurong Coast*, 1999, South Gippsland Conservation Society.