

Migratory Shorebirds of the Cairns Esplanade

Regular Migrants (25 species)

These 25 species are regular long-distance migrants to Australia. Some are seen every season on the Cairns Foreshore, some infrequently.

Pacific Golden Plover	Common Greenshank
Grey Plover	Marsh Sandpiper
Lesser Sand Plover	Ruddy Turnstone
Greater Sand Plover	Asian Dowitcher (Rare)
Latham's Snipe (Rare)	Great Knot
Black-tailed Godwit	Red Knot
Bar-tailed Godwit	Sanderling
Whimbrel	Red-necked Stint
Eastern Curlew	Pectoral Sandpiper
Terek Sandpiper	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper
Common Sandpiper	Curlew Sandpiper
Grey-tailed Tattler	Broad-billed Sandpiper
Wandering Tattler (Rare)	

Rare Migrants /Vagrants (10 species)

These species visit irregularly and some sightings are reviewed by national or state Rarities Committees.

Red-necked Avocet

Double-banded Plover
Oriental Plover
Little Curlew
Wood Sandpiper
Common Redshank
Little Stint
Long-toed Stint
Pectoral Sandpiper

Resident shorebirds (8 species)

Some Australian breeding resident waders are common on the Esplanade (eg Masked Lapwing) but others, like the Red-kneed Dotterel & Beach Stone-curlew, are only occasional visitors.

Bush Stone-curlew	Red-capped Plover
Beach Stone-curlew	Black-fronted Dotterel
Australian Pied Oystercatcher	Red-kneed Dotterel
Black-winged Stilt	Masked Lapwing

New or unusual sightings? Contact us! →→

The East Asian-Australasian Flyway



Cairns Esplanade, part of Trinity Bay, is an important link in one of the world's greatest bird migrations. Each year millions of shorebirds leave Alaska, Siberia, N China, Mongolia and Japan after breeding in the northern tundras and fly south to Australia for our summer. Their network of refuelling stops and final destinations is the "East Asian-Australasian Flyway".

Trinity Inlet is the only food-rich site between Townsville and the tip of Cape York. At least 5000 long-distance migrants stay the whole summer. Tens of thousands more stop en route to southern Australia in August-December, and on their return to the northern breeding grounds in March-April. There can be 1200+ Whimbrels, more than 1% of the world population.

The Esplanade, only minutes from the Cairns CBD, offers excellent views of feeding shorebirds when the mudflats are exposed by tides. At high tide they rest on Casuarina Point at the Barron River mouth, salt pans and marshes near Cairns airport and in mangroves at Chinaman Creek (especially Whimbrels and Tattlers).

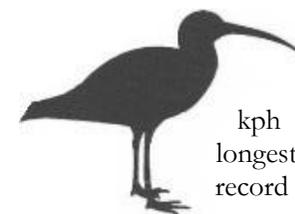
Images courtesy Australian Wader Study Group

The smallest migrant ...



The **Red-necked Stint** weighs just 25-30 gm but before returning north to breed will build up its fat reserves to weigh around 40 gm, giving it a predicted flight range of 4000 km. It makes an annual round trip of up to 25,000 km to and from the breeding grounds.

The largest ...



The **Eastern Curlew** weighs 900 gm. It can fly 5500 km non-stop, averaging over 80 kph in a day, over 4½ days. The longest individual non-stop flight on record was 7000 km.

Identifying shorebirds

Shorebird identification can be difficult but careful observation of features such as size, bill length and shape, along with feeding behaviour will generally separate out the species. Bill length and shape governs the depth at which the birds feed in or on the surface of the mud, lessening competition for the food resource. Some are easier to identify in March-April when they start to develop their more colourful breeding plumage, prior to flying north.

See also —

Checklist No. 7

Cairns Esplanade Bird Species Checklist

Based on original by K & L Fisher (sootyowl@bigpond.com & www.birdwatchers.com.au/). Names and taxonomic order used for the list follow *Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds* by L Christidis and W E Boles (CSIRO, Melb., 2008).

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WHO ARE WE?

BirdLife Northern Queensland is a branch of the national organisation BirdLife Australia, formed in 2012 by the merger of Birds Australia and BOCA.

BirdLife Northern Queensland organizes both scientific and social activities. These include bird surveys, outings, workshops and presentations with guest speakers. The regular field trips and campouts cater for all levels of expertise from beginner to professional and emphasise fun as well as worthwhile conservation projects.

Members receive a quarterly newsletter *Contact Call* detailing local activities and also enjoy *BirdLife Australia* magazine dealing with national bird issues.

You can join BirdLife Australia and help the conservation of Australian birds at www.birdlife.org.au

Birding with a purpose'

Have a real impact on the conservation of our wild birds and their habitats. Contact us ...

www.birdlife.org.au

For more about North Queensland birds, birding and bird conservation visit our website

www.birdsaustralianq.org/

INFORMATION

The *Cairns foreshore*, with its Esplanade boardwalk and viewing platforms, is only minutes from the CBD.

The Esplanade is acclaimed worldwide as a migratory wader (shorebird) observation site. Nowhere else in the world can these birds be seen at such close range and in comfort, within a major city. Thousands of international birdwatchers visit each year and occasional rarities bring an influx of keen birders from across Australia.

A visit during August to March-April will find over 20 species of long distance migrants, plus resident shorebirds, probing in the mud for the valuable food resource. Some migrants stay all year, mainly first and second year birds. Best views along the Cairns mudflats are on an incoming tide in the evening.

Migratory shorebirds are threatened by degradation of key stopover sites. As a signatory to international shorebird conservation agreements Australia works closely with other countries along the Flyway to identify and reduce threats, including mudflat reclamation and pollution.

Within Trinity Bay waders are subjected to disturbance by hovercraft, jet-skis, helicopters, dogs and people. Along the Esplanade, BANQ and other groups have worked with the Regional Council to promote birdwatching and try and to minimise impacts of development on the shorebirds: so far, this seems to have been successful.

BANQ activities on the Cairns foreshore include wader surveys (with other groups) and the annual "Wave the Waders Goodbye" each March - details on our website.

Cairns Regional Council has recognised the importance of the shorebirds in signage and posters. Hopefully, we can ensure this unique and valuable foreshore environment is preserved for future generations of birds and people.

MIGRATORY SHOREBIRDS

Cairns Esplanade

Birding Information No 11



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