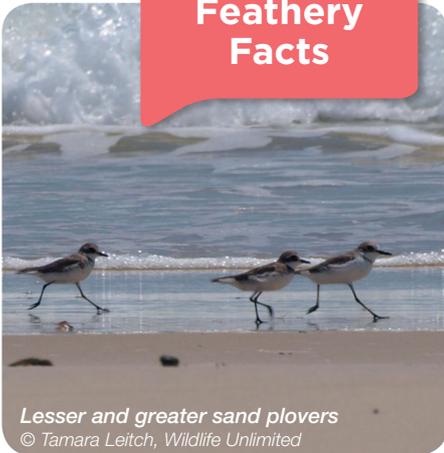


# Shorebirds

## Fact Sheet



### Feathery Facts



Lesser and greater sand plovers  
© Tamara Leitch, Wildlife Unlimited

## Introducing the shorebirds of the Gladstone region

Shorebirds are the birds you will see feeding along the coastline, often on mudflats, inland wetlands and estuaries - but you will also find some species on offshore islands of the Great Barrier Reef.

Sometimes known as waders, there are 15 species of resident shorebirds in Australia, with 36 species regularly migrating from overseas including China, Mongolia, Siberia, and Alaska.

These migratory shorebirds travel tens of thousands of kilometres along the East Asian – Australasian Flyway (a path that migratory birds regularly follow – it's like a highway in the sky!) to escape the winter in their breeding areas for the warm Australian summer, before returning to the northern hemisphere when the seasons change.

North Curtis Island and the Fitzroy estuary are considered high priority sites for migratory shorebird populations, and some of the shorebird species you will find around the Gladstone area include (the number in the brackets shows how many were counted in the area in 2014):

- Grey-tailed tattler (885)
- Red-necked stint (1,938)
- Lesser land plover (979)
- Terek sandpiper (937)
- Eastern curlew (853)
- Whimbrel (929)
- Greater sand plover (886)
- Bar-tailed godwit (2,870).



Grey-tailed tattler  
© Setaphong Tantanawat / shutterstock.com

## Risks to these species

Shorebird populations are sensitive to environmental change. The main threats to these species include:

- Habitat loss and degradation – both in Australia and abroad
- Weeds that take over food sources (native grasses)
- Pollution (including oil spills and chemical spills)
- Disturbance from human activities, such as camping or four-wheel driving, fishing, domestic animals (dogs and cats), and aquaculture
- Hunting during migration, and in breeding areas in the northern hemisphere, can endanger many migratory shorebirds.

## Grey-tailed tattler

- The grey-tailed tattler's scientific name is *Tringa brevipes*.
- These are a medium-sized bird, coloured white, brown, black and brown, with yellow feet.
- Grey-tailed tattlers are mainly found on rocky shores and mudflats during the day, but at night sleep among the mangroves or on rocks.
- They eat molluscs, insects and the occasional fish, but their favourite meal is a small crab.
- You're most likely to find one at Yellow Patch beach on Curtis Island or the intertidal areas in Rodds Bay.

**1** Many of the shorebirds found in Gladstone have come a long way, many nesting as far away as Alaska and Siberia. They usually arrive in Australia exhausted and hungry!

**2** The East Asian-Australasian Flyway is one of nine recognised flyways in the world, passing through 23 countries from Russia and Alaska (USA) in the north to Australia and NZ in the south. About 54 migratory species use the flyway every year.

**3** Although migratory shorebirds have great powers of flight, given their needs, there are only a few places in the world that they can actually go. They highly rely on mudflats.

**4** Australia has the most recognised internationally important sites for migratory shorebirds at 118, followed by Japan (89) and China (51).

**5** Young shorebirds, sometimes weighing as little as 30 grams at the beginning of the journey, may have to fly up to 25,000km a year on their own wings (no piggy backs in the bird world!)

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## Fact Sheet



### Red-necked stint

- The red-necked stint's scientific name is *Calidris ruficollis*.
- They are very small birds, weighing not much more than a box of matches.
- The female red-necked stint is the first to leave the nest after the chicks hatch – the male will remain with the young birds until they are 16 or 17 days old.
- Red-necked stints love water and can be found in coastal areas like lagoons, estuaries, intertidal mudflats, bays, and sandy or coral shores. They are typically found in large flocks, which provide some safety from predators when they are either feeding or sleeping.

### Whimbrel

- The whimbrel's scientific name is *Numenius phaeopus*.
- The whimbrel travels from Siberia to Australia. You can spot one in Gladstone.
- They are often found on mudflats, especially near mangroves where they like to sleep, and they use their long bills to fish out worms, molluscs, and crustaceans from deep mud or sand. Whimbrels like to feed at night and they are often bullied by larger birds and lose their meal.



### Lesser sand plover

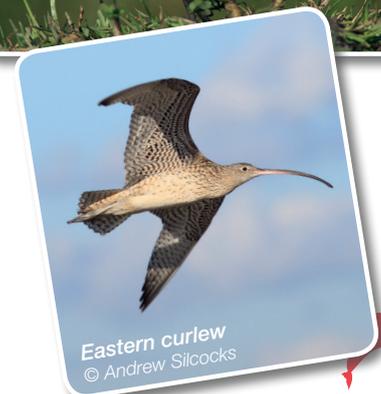
- The lesser sand plover's scientific name is *Charadrius mongolus*.
- There are five separate groups of the lesser sand plover, separated by their breeding location. There are two groups which migrate annually to Australia: the group that breeds in eastern Russia, Kamchatka and the Commander Islands; and the group that breeds in Siberia.
- Although they spend most of their time on sand or mudflats, coral reefs and rocky outcrops, lesser sand plovers breed in high altitude alpine valleys which are often quite cold.
- They eat worms, crustaceans, insects and molluscs, with a particular taste for bivalves (molluscs with a two-part hinged shell containing a soft-bodied invertebrate like oysters, mussels and scallops).

### Eastern curlew

- The eastern curlew's scientific name is *Numenius madagascariensis*, and this species is also known as the Australian curlew, sea curlew or far eastern curlew.
- They are the largest curlew species, and have a long curving bill which they use to fish out worms, molluscs, and crustaceans (crabs, shrimps, and prawns) from deep mud or sand.
- The eastern curlew is easily identified by its haunting, mournful cry which can be a little spooky at night.
- They are often found around mudflats, estuaries, and mangroves, and will hide in coastal vegetation when having a rest.
- The eastern curlew is listed as Near Threatened under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

### Terek sandpiper

- The terek sandpiper's scientific name is *Xenus cinereus*.
- A small bird with short orange legs and an orange beak, terek sandpipers bob and teeter and wobble when they walk.
- This is a bird that loves to travel! They breed in Finland and Russia, and travel to Australia, North Africa, India and the Malayan peninsula.
- They are often found in intertidal mudflats, sheltered estuaries, harbours or lagoons.
- The terek sandpiper prefers to sleep in mangroves, but they can be found sleeping beside other shorebirds on flat shores or muddy spits. Although they are happy to be around other shorebirds in the evening, they like to hunt for their food on their own.



### Places to learn more

The Australian Government's Species Profile and Threats Database  
[www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au)  
Queensland Wader Study Group  
[www.waders.org.au](http://www.waders.org.au)



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