

# Eastern curlew

## Fact Sheet



### Top Five Feathery Facts



© Andrew Silcocks

**1** The eastern curlew can fly for days at a time - without a break! They also start young, with their first migration usually attempted at around 8 weeks.

**2** Over the course of its yearly migration, a single eastern curlew can fly more than 20,000 kilometres (return trip)!

**3** The eastern curlew is the largest migratory shorebird (and wader) in Australia, with its bill making up almost a third of the bird's length!

**4** The eastern curlew is extremely wary and will take flight if you go near them.

**5** They have a haunting, mournful call that can sound a bit scary (especially at night).

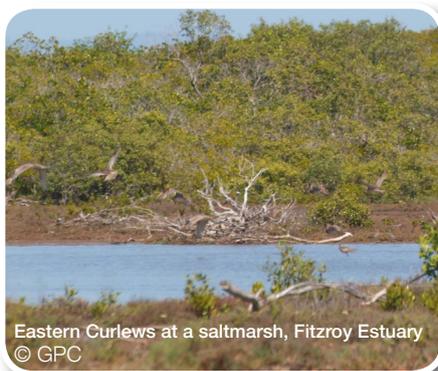
## Introducing the eastern curlews Yearly visitors to the Gladstone region

The eastern curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*) is a migratory bird and the largest wader (or shorebird) that visits Australia. Also known as the Australian curlew, sea curlew, or far-eastern curlew, the eastern curlew is easily identified by its long down-curved bill which can be more than 185 millimetres in length - the longest of any wader.

The eastern curlew has a stocky body with dark-streaked brown feathers and a long neck and legs. The female's bill is usually longer than the male's.

### Habitat

Eastern curlews love wetland landscapes - places such as intertidal zones, mudflats, estuaries, bays, harbours, mangroves, and coastal lagoons.



Eastern Curlews at a saltmarsh, Fitzroy Estuary  
© GPC



Eastern curlews on a beach  
© Qld Government, DNPBSR

### Our favourite foods

Eastern curlews use their long bills to fish out worms, molluscs, and crustaceans (crabs, shrimps, and prawns) from deep mud or sand. They'll also gobble down any insects that happen to be passing by.

### Protected status and local hangouts

Scientists believe about 28,000 of these birds visit Australia during the non-breeding season but populations are falling in Queensland and the species is listed as Near Threatened under Queensland's Nature Conservation Act 1992.

They are listed as marine and migratory birds in the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*, providing some federal protections.

Eastern curlews arrive in north Queensland around August and move south along the coastline during spring and summer. Intertidal areas around Gladstone - like mudflats and sandy beaches - are the best places to spot a curlew as they hunt for invertebrates (crabs and prawns and insects) at low tide.

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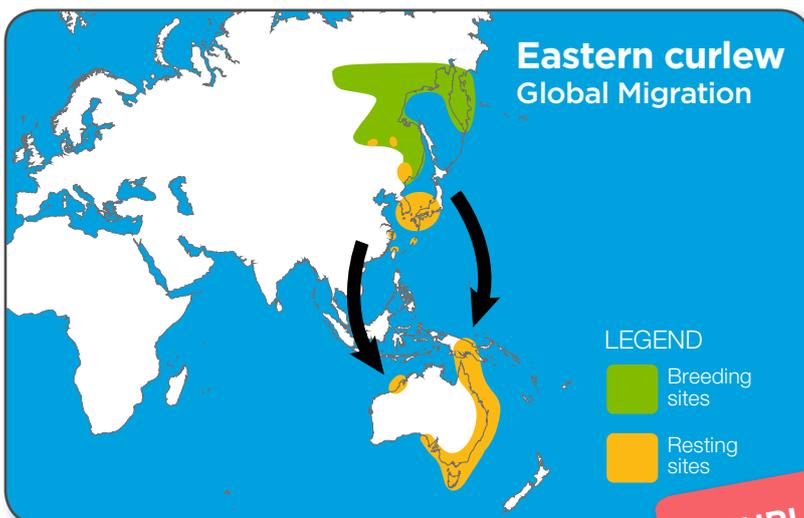
## The lifecycle of the eastern curlew

Adult birds will leave Australia between February and April to breed. They mate in places like Siberia and Kamchatka in Russia, Korea, and Mongolia, then go on to make their nests nearby, throughout Russia and north-eastern China during the northern summer (Australia's winter).

Immature birds will stay in the country but head north for the Australian winter, and may continue to do so until they are three to four years of age, when they are ready for the long journey back to the northern hemisphere to breed. The figure below shows the known breeding areas of eastern curlews, and the areas in Australia where they're usually found (called "resting sites"). While they are in the Gladstone region, you will most likely find the eastern curlew near mudflats and beaches.



Eastern curlew with a green turtle on a beach  
Source: USFWS under Creative Commons



### CURLEW CLUES

## What you can do to help

- Not disturbing their habitat – mudflats and sandy beaches are important to the health of many bird species. A good rule when visiting these areas, like the mudflats and beaches of Gladstone and Curtis Island, is to “take only photographs, leave only footprints.”
- Wetlands are very sensitive ecosystems and rubbish and chemicals from human activity can upset the balance. Always put your litter in the bin and never pour chemicals down the drain!
- Campaign to stop shorebird hunting and wetland destruction along their migratory path to protect their breeding and nesting grounds.

## Risks to this species

- Habitat loss from coastal development along their migratory route, including areas near Gladstone can affect where these birds can find shelter and food.
- Landscape changes (including land reclamation) in Russia, China and Korea can take away important breeding areas.
- Hunting during migration, and in breeding areas in the northern hemisphere, can endanger eastern curlews.
- Migration is a risky time for eastern curlews, when they are most at risk of disturbance. Besides the pressure of time, they need continued access to food to survive.

## Find out more

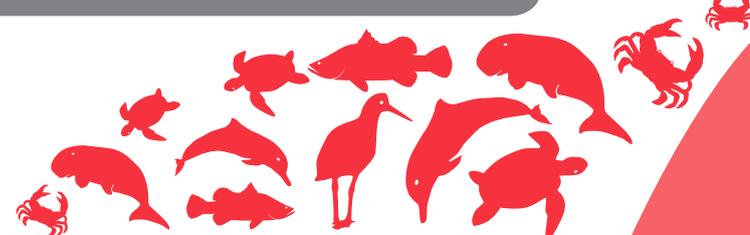
Queensland Government Department of Environment and Heritage Protection  
[www.ehp.qld.gov.au/](http://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/)

Australian Government Department of the Environment  
[www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au)

Bird Life International  
[www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)

The Internet Bird Collection (for photos, videos and more!)  
[ibc.lynxeds.com](http://ibc.lynxeds.com)

Queensland Wader Study Group  
[www.waders.org.au](http://www.waders.org.au)



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