



# *Wings over* **Wetlands**

**The wetland birds of the  
Corangamite region**



CORANGAMITE CMA

HEALTHY CATCHMENTS  
- HEALTHY WATERWAYS



Australian Government



## References and further reading

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## Disclaimer

This publication may be of assistance to you in identifying wetland bird species encountered in the Corangamite region. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information presented within is accurate and up to date, however we do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaim all liability for any error, loss or other consequence that may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.

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## Introduction

If you journey from east to west across the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority region, you will see a beautiful and unique landscape with productive agricultural land, tall wet forests, grassland remnants on the volcanic plains and meandering creeks and rivers.

A highlight of the trip however will be the variety of wetland habitats including coastal swamps, shallow seasonal meadows and marshes, stony rise lowlands and large saline lakes. These wetlands support a rich diversity of plants and animals including a large number of waterbirds that depend on them for food, shelter and breeding.

The Corangamite region has more than 1500 wetlands (equalling an area of approximately 65,000 hectares) and including two Ramsar sites – these are wetlands of international importance due to the bird life they support. These migratory birds link us to other parts of the world through the flyways they use and the wetlands they rest at along the way.

Wetlands are one of the most threatened ecosystems throughout the world and their continued loss adds pressure on species that depend on them for survival. By taking an interest and making an effort to recognise the birds which inhabit our wetlands, whether they are urban storm water wetlands or salty windswept lakes surrounded by farmland, we gain an appreciation of the links between our environment and the life it sustains.

On that journey west, take time to watch Black Swans feeding gracefully on seagrass meadows, or get the binoculars out to see tiny Red-necked Stints after they have travelled from Siberia to avoid frozen winters. If you are lucky you may have the chance to see Brolgas dance on the volcanic plains, celebrating life.

This field guide is an introduction to the region's waterbirds and the wetlands that sustain them: ducks, grebes, herons, swamphens .... read on!

Donna Smithyman,  
Wetlands Coordinator,  
Corangamite Catchment Management Authority



## About the Photographer

Trevor Pescott began photographing wildlife as a teenager in the 1950s and has maintained a keen interest since then. His first photographs were published in the college yearbook when he was studying civil engineering.

His first equipment consisted of a rather primitive large-format camera and little else, taking black-and-white photographs which he developed and printed in a temporary darkroom. As colour film became more readily available, he moved to an SLR 35 millimeter camera and added an electronic flash and a modest, then later sophisticated, telephoto lens.

He has always preferred to photograph from a hide, built near a bird's nest or a waterhole, because once out of sight, the birds and other wildlife ignore the photographer. This way, a wonderful insight into nature can be gained simply by watching what is going on around him. In some ways this is more interesting than the photographs that are gained!

Trevor's pictures have now been published very widely in books, magazines, newspapers and in various other places.

## Acknowledgements

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The content of this wetland bird field guide was prepared by Leanne Rolfe, Wetlands Officer, Corangamite CMA, 2007.

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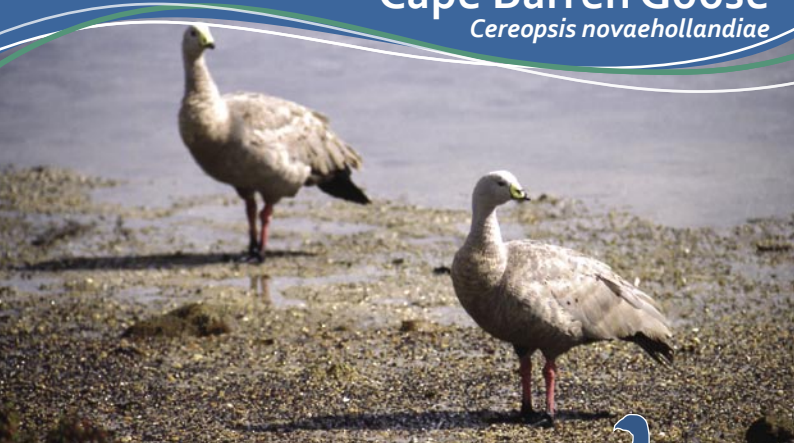
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# Cape Barren Goose

*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*



## Cape Barren Goose



### Distinguishing features

Grey with large black spots on wings, a prominent yellow/green cere (fleshy part around the nostrils), strong reddish legs and black feet.

**Size:** 100cm.

### Habitat

Grazes in open pasture areas near fresh to brackish wetlands and dams during the warmer months.

**Breeding season:** July to September.

### Feathery Facts

- The Cape Barren Goose is one of the rarest of the world's geese and can only be found in southern Australia.
- Its diet consists of native grasses, herbs, succulents and introduced pasture grasses.
- The geese form life-long pair bonds and breed on offshore islands during the winter months (although sometimes they nest in the Western District).
- The Cape Barren Goose is able to drink salty water (has salt-excreting glands).
- Also known as the Pig Goose due to its pig-like grunts.

# Magpie Goose

*Anseranas semipalmata*



## Magpie Goose

### Distinguishing features

Black neck and head with a knob on the crown (increasing in size with age) and an orange hooked bill, white underparts with black edges on the underwing, long orange legs and partly-webbed toes.

**Size:** 92cm.

### Habitat

Prefers floodplains and wetlands with good coverage of vegetation such as sedges, rushes and grasses.

**Breeding season:** February to June.

### Feathery Facts

- Large noisy flocks of Magpie Geese (up to a few thousand) may congregate to feed on aquatic plants such as Spike-Rush (*Eleocharis*)
- The Magpie Goose moults its flight feathers one after another so that it is never flightless (unlike ducks and swans which have a complete wing-moult)
- Both male and female share nest duties – sometimes there are two females to the one male – with the nest placed either in tree tops close to a wetland or on a floating platform of trampled reeds.

# Black Swan

*Cygnus atratus*



## Black Swan

### Distinguishing features

Black with white-tipped wings, long slender neck, red bill, black legs and feet. The female swan has a shorter neck and a lighter coloured bill and eyes. Younger birds are more grey in colour and have black wingtips.

**Size:** 140cm.

### Habitat

Large open waters (fresh to salty) with good aquatic vegetation, wetlands, flooded pastures.

**Breeding season:** June to September.

### Feathery Facts

- The Black Swan is mainly found in the wetter east and south west of Australia, not so much in inland or tropics.
- It has the distinction of being the only predominantly black-coloured swan in the world.
- Its diet consists of algae and aquatic plants such as Water Ribbons (*Triglochin*)
- Swans trumpet to their mate in greeting with displays of bowing and wing raising. Birds pair for life.
- Nests are made of reeds and grasses on either a small island or floated in deeper water. Sometimes swans nest in colonies.
- Swans need up to 50m of clear water for a take-off. They usually fly at night in "V" formation and can fly distances up to 1000 km.



# Australasian Shoveler

*Anas rhynchos*



## Australasian Shoveler



### Distinguishing features

A low-floating duck with sloping forehead, long square-cut dark bill, blue shoulders, chestnut underparts. Male (breeding) has blue-grey head with white vertical crescent, yellow eye, black back, white rump patch, orange legs/feet (the non-breeding male has duller plumage). Female has mottled brown upperparts, brown eye, yellow-brown legs/feet.

**Size:** 53cm.

**Species similar in appearance:** Chestnut Teal.

### Habitat

Permanent fresh to salty wetlands with areas of open water and thick vegetation.

**Breeding season:** August to December.

### Feathery Facts

- In flight the Australasian Shoveler has very quick wing beats and is the only Australian duck to make a distinctive whirring noise.
- The Shoveler's specialised bill is for filter-feeding. It has grooves along the edges of the bill to filter water bugs, crustaceans and plants from the water. This restricts its foraging range to aquatic habitats and soft mud.
- The male Australasian Shoveler is the only native Australian duck with orange legs.
- Also known as the Blue-winged Shoveler, Spoonbill Duck.

# Australian Wood Duck

*Chenonetta jubata*



## Australian Wood Duck



### Distinguishing features

A “goose-like” duck with its longish neck and legs. It has a pale grey body with two black stripes along the back, a dark head and a short black bill.

The male has a small dark mane and a speckled brown-grey breast, black underparts. The female has a paler head with a white stripe above and below the eye, speckled breast and flanks, white underparts.

**Size:** 50cm.

### Habitat

Wetlands, farm dams, lakes, grasslands, open woodlands.

**Breeding season:** September to November.

### Feathery Facts

- The Australian Wood Duck is found throughout Australia.
- Often perches in trees and walks easily on land.
- The Australian Wood Duck uses its short bill with its serrated cutting edges for grazing on grasses and herbs.
- Nests in tree holes either above or near water.
- Breeding pairs will remain together outside the breeding season.
- Also known as the Maned Duck or Maned Goose.

# Blue-billed Duck

*Oxyura australis*

Victorian Conservation Status: Threatened



## Blue-billed Duck

### Distinguishing features

Compact duck with short neck, large round head, scooped bill and a stiff tail. Male and female have different plumages. Male (breeding) chestnut body with black head and bright blue bill; (non-breeding) duller plumage with grey bill. Female medium grey with lighter barring to the head and body feathers, dark bill.

**Size:** 44cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**

Musk Duck, Hardhead.

### Habitat

Deep permanent freshwater wetlands with thick vegetation throughout much of the year.

**Breeding season:** August to November.

### Feathery Facts

- Blue-billed Ducks are only found in Australia.
- The Blue-billed Duck feeds either on the surface of the water or by diving. Its diet includes water bugs as well as aquatic plants.
- During winter will flock to large, open (fresh to salty) wetlands.
- Elaborate courtship displays by the male involve head-dipping, diving, fanning the tail and almost standing on their tail in the water.
- Nests are usually made in dense vegetation such as Cumbungi (*Typha*).
- Also known as the Stiff-tail or Diving Duck.

# Chestnut Teal

*Anas castanea*



## Chestnut Teal

### Distinguishing features

A small duck with a rounded head, deep red eye, blue-grey bill, green-purple speculum (iridescent patch) edged white on the wings and greenish legs and feet. The male is chestnut with a green-black glossy head. Both the female and non-breeding male are a mottled brown and darker than the Grey Teal.

**Size:** 48cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**

Australasian Shoveler, Grey Teal.

### Habitat

Fresh to salty wetlands, coastal estuaries, saltmarshes.

**Breeding season:** July to November.

### Feathery Facts



- The Chestnut Teal is most commonly found on wetlands and estuaries in coastal regions in Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales.
- Its diet includes molluscs and crustaceans, insects, aquatic plants and seeds.
- Chestnut Teal ducks form pairs that remain together outside the breeding season.
- The ducklings are able to swim within a day of hatching and will follow their mother out onto the water where the male will assist in their protection (an unusual trait in ducks). Parents will quack, splash and feign an injury if their young are threatened by a predator, to allow the ducklings time to escape.

# Freckled Duck

*Stictonetta naevosa*



Victorian Conservation Status: Threatened

## Freckled Duck

### Distinguishing features

Grey-brown in colour with all-over speckling, head has a small tuft of feathers, distinctive scooped swan-like bill (which is red at base in breeding males). The plumage of both sexes is similar however the female is generally lighter in colour.

**Size:** 59cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**

Pacific Black Duck, Hardhead and the female Blue-billed Duck.

### Habitat

Large permanent freshwater wetlands with dense vegetation. During drought will move to fresh to salty permanent open lakes.

**Breeding season:** September to December.

### Feathery Facts



- The Freckled Duck is found only in Australia and is considered to be one of the world's rarest ducks. It has the characteristics of both swans and ducks and is considered to represent an early stage of waterfowl evolution.
- Its diet includes algae, water bugs, seeds and aquatic plants.
- Also known as the Monkey Duck because of its practice of climbing through lignum clumps to reach its nest.



## Grey Teal

### Distinguishing features

A small grey-brown speckled duck with a white chin and throat, red eye, green bill, and a blue-black speculum (iridescent patch) on the upper-wing.

**Size:** 46cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**

Female Chestnut Teal.

### Habitat

Fresh to salty wetlands in sheltered areas, able to travel great distances in search of water during periods of drought.

**Breeding season:** Any time of the year.



### Feathery Facts

- The Grey Teal is found throughout Australia and is considered to be the most widespread of the waterbirds in Australia.
- Generally the Grey Teal will follow rainfall, being the first to arrive in newly flooded areas.
- Its diet includes both dryland and aquatic plants, seeds, crustaceans, insects and water bugs.

# Musk Duck

*Biziura lobata*



## Musk Duck

### Distinguishing features

Dark, stiff-tailed duck which is broad and floats low in the water. The head is finely speckled, and there is light brown barring on the body. The male is larger than the female and has a distinctive leathery flap of skin hanging from beneath its bill, which enlarges during the breeding season.

**Size:** 73cm.

**Species similar in appearance:** Blue-billed Duck.

### Habitat

Permanent fresh to brackish wetlands with dense vegetation, large lakes, estuaries and bays.

**Breeding season:** September to December.



### Feathery Facts

- The Musk Duck is found only in Australia.
- A strong musk smell is released by the male from a gland on its rump.
- It is an excellent diving duck and the majority of its food is obtained underwater. Diet includes water bugs, crustaceans, molluscs, fish, frogs, ducklings and occasionally the seeds of aquatic plants.
- The male performs spectacular courtship displays by raising and fanning his tail, splashing water, inflating the flap of skin under his bill and whistling loudly while throwing his head back.
- Also known as the Diver Duck.

# Pacific Black Duck

*Anas superciliosa*



## Pacific Black Duck



### Distinguishing features

A large duck with a pale stripe above and below the eye, grey bill, brown upperparts with each feather having a paler margin, green-purple speculum (iridescent patch) present on the upper-wing.

**Size:** 60cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**

Mallard (female), Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal (female).

### Habitat

Deep, permanent wetlands with good vegetation.

**Breeding season:** June to December.

### Feathery Facts

- The Pacific Black Duck is found throughout Australia and its range extends all through the Pacific region.
- The duck mainly feeds on the seeds of aquatic plants but its diet also includes water bugs, crustaceans and molluscs.
- Sufficient water and food will trigger breeding and the courtship displays involve preening, bobbing and wing-flapping.
- The Mallard Duck (introduced to Australia from the Northern Hemisphere) will interbreed with the Pacific Black Duck. Hybrid Mallard-Pacific Black Ducks have orange-brown legs and feet.
- Also known as the Wild Duck.

# Pink-eared Duck

*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*



## Pink-eared Duck

### Distinguishing features

Small distinctive duck with 'zebra' stripes. The face is white with a large brown eye patch and a small pink ear patch, large grey square-tipped bill. Upperparts are brown and underparts are white with brown barring.

**Size:** 45cm

**Species similar in appearance:** Australasian Shoveler.

### Habitat

Shallow temporary inland waters with timbered areas nearby. In dry years big flocks will disperse to well-vegetated freshwater to salty coastal wetlands.

**Breeding season:** Any time of the year if the water conditions are suitable.

### Feathery Facts

- The Pink-eared Duck is found throughout Australia.
- It makes an unusual musical chirruping call both in flight and on water.
- Able to fly long distances in search of water.
- Pairs of Pink-eared Ducks feed by swimming in a circle, head to tail, creating a small 'whirlpool' effect. The rotating current of water concentrates the small organisms which are then filtered using the ducks' specialised bills.
- It is thought that Pink-eared Ducks form life-long pair bonds. Both male and female share the nesting duties.
- Also known as the Zebra Duck.



# Great Crested Grebe

*Podiceps cristatus*



## Great Crested Grebe

### Distinguishing features

The largest of the grebes, it has a white face with a dark crown and distinctive black pointed ear tufts, red eye and long fine bill. The slender neck is encircled with a reddish-brown ruff tipped with black, and underparts are white with dark brown wings, olive-green feet. The female is slightly smaller than the male.

**Size:** 61cm.

### Habitat

Large deep open waters (fresh to salty) with good vegetation.

**Breeding season:** August to September.

### Feathery Facts

- The Great Crested Grebe is found in all states and territories of Australia as well as in New Zealand, Asia, Africa and Europe.
- It dives underwater to catch fish, usually staying under for less than 30 seconds – they swim using their legs and not their wings.
- Great Crested Grebes perform a spectacular courtship display shaking their head crests and ruffs and offering each other nesting material.
- Both male and female grebes share nest duties. Hatchlings are fed by the parents who carry them out onto the water on their back or under their wing.



# Hoary-headed Grebe

*Poliiocephalus poliocephalus*



## Hoary-headed Grebe



### Distinguishing features

A small and sturdy grey grebe with a dark head, pale eye, white foreneck and breast, narrow black streak down nape of neck, greyish flanks.

**Breeding:** Adult plumage white streaking over entire head, dark bill with pale tip.

**Size:** 30cm.

**Species similar in appearance:** Australasian Grebe (non-breeding).

### Habitat

Fresh to salty, large open waters.

**Breeding season:** October to January.

### Feathery Facts

- Hoary-headed Grebes which are found throughout Australia as well as in New Zealand are considered to be of ancient origin.
- Grebes are good swimmers and divers. They dive underwater for their food (small fish, tadpoles, crustaceans) and will also dive to escape from danger (rather than flying).
- Breeding pairs construct a nest offshore in floating vegetation and both parents will assist in the incubation of the eggs.
- The Hoary-headed Grebe obtains its name from the white streaking of its head during breeding time. It is also known as the Hoary-headed Dab-chick and Tom Pudding.

# Great Cormorant

*Phalacrocorax carbo*



## Great Cormorant

### Distinguishing features

The largest of the Australian cormorants. It is all black apart from a yellow face.

**Breeding:** white plumes on neck and there is a white patch on both the side of the head and thigh.

**Size:** 90cm.

**Species similar in appearance:** Little Black Cormorant.

### Habitat

Most aquatic habitats including coasts, bays, estuaries, lakes, wetlands and rivers.

**Breeding season:** August to January.

### Feathery Facts

- Great Cormorants are widespread throughout the world and can be found in most of Australia.
- Cormorants catch fish by diving and their eyes are protected by a special see-through third eyelid (nictitating membrane).
- To improve diving, cormorants don't fully waterproof their feathers (waterproofing traps air under the wings making the bird more buoyant). Note The Great Cormorant has been observed swallowing small pebbles to give extra weight to assist its diving. The pebbles are then regurgitated after feeding.
- After feeding, cormorants dry their feathers in the sun and wind by spreading their wings.

Also known as the Black Cormorant, Common Cormorant or Black Shag.

# Little Pied Cormorant

*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*



## Little Pied Cormorant

### Distinguishing features

The smallest of the Australian cormorants. Plumage is entirely black above and white below, short yellow bill, long neck, webbed feet.

**Breeding:** short tufted crest on head.

**Size:** 55cm

**Species similar in appearance:** Pied Cormorant.

### Habitat

Freshwater lakes, rivers, wetlands, dams through to estuaries and coastal waters.

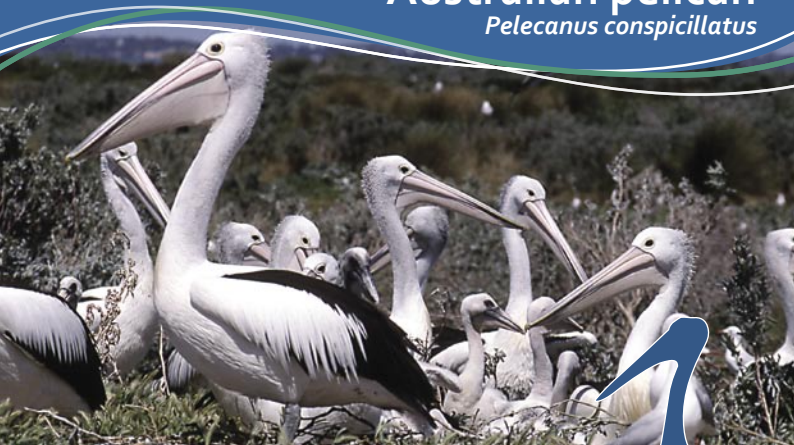
**Breeding season:** September to April.

### Feathery Facts

- The Little Pied Cormorant is found throughout Australia and is one of Australia's most common waterbirds.
- It dives underwater for its food which includes fish, yabbies and shrimp.
- The Little Pied Cormorant is often seen with Little Black Cormorant (a totally black cormorant).
- Little Pied Cormorants, unlike other cormorants, do not form a "V" formation when flying.

# Australian pelican

*Pelecanus conspicillatus*



## Australian Pelican

### Distinguishing features

Large white bird with black wings and its characteristic big bill and throat pouch.

**Breeding:** The bill becomes much brighter in colour.

**Size:** 190cm.

### Habitat

Fresh to salty, large shallow waters.

**Breeding season:** Any time of the year if conditions are suitable.

### Feathery Facts

- At over 40cm the Australian Pelican claims the longest bill of any known bird in the world. Their expanding bill pouch can hold up to 13 litres and is used as both a net and for short-term food storage.
- Pelicans have a light skeleton, weighing less than 10 per cent of their total body weight
- Although one of the world's heaviest flying birds, pelicans with their ability to soar and use thermal currents, can stay in the air for 24 hours and are capable of travelling great distances.
- Parents incubate eggs on their feet and after the eggs are hatched the chicks leave the nest to form crèches of up to 100 birds.
- Pelicans work together to obtain feed by driving and encircling schools of fish.

# Cattle Egret

*Ardea ibis*



## Cattle Egret

### Distinguishing features

Short snowy white egret with large head, yellow slightly down-curved bill and grey-green legs.

**Breeding:** orange crown, neck and breast with long orange neck plumes, reddish bill, orange-red legs.

**Size:** 53cm.

**Species similar in appearance:** Little Egret.

### Habitat

Open grazing land, shallows of wetlands.

**Breeding season:** October to March.

### Feathery Facts



- The Cattle Egret is now widespread in Australia having naturally extended its range from Asia.
- The Cattle Egret feeds by following grazing stock (such as cattle) and eating the insects they disturb. It prefers grasshoppers but will also eat frogs, lizards and small mammals.
- Cattle Egrets form pairs for the breeding season with both parents building the nest in bushes or trees in wetland areas and incubating the eggs.
- Farmers value the Cattle Egret for reducing crop pests and cattle tick infestations.
- Cattle Egrets are occasionally seen sitting on the backs of cattle keeping a look-out for insects.

# Great Egret

*Ardea alba*



Victorian Conservation  
Status: Threatened



## Great Egret

### Distinguishing features

Large white bird with long slender neck (often crooked into a question mark shape) and dark legs. Yellow face and a yellow bill with the fleshy corner of the bill (gape) extending behind eye.

**Breeding:** plumes on back, black bill, greenish face, red upper legs.

**Size:** 100cm.

**Species similar in appearance:** Intermediate Egret, Little Egret.

### Habitat

Freshwater wetlands, river shallows, estuaries and tidal mudflats.

**Breeding season:** October to December.

### Feathery Facts

- Egrets are found throughout most of the world.
- The Great Egret usually hunts alone. It wades through shallow water and feeds on fish, frogs, water bugs, molluscs and crustaceans.
- Breeding takes place in colonies and both parents share in the construction of the nest (a large platform made of sticks placed in a tree over the water) and nesting duties.
- Egrets (including Great, Intermediate and Little) were hunted almost to extinction for the plume feathers which they develop during breeding season.

# Nankeen Night Heron

*Nycticorax caledonicus*



## Nankeen Night Heron

### Distinguishing features

A small chestnut-coloured stocky heron with a dark crown and olive-green bill, yellow eye, white underparts and yellowish legs.

**Breeding:** slender white plumes on the back of the head.

**Size:** 60cm. Immature Nankeen Night Herons, being mottled brown, are similar in appearance to Bitterns.

### Habitat

Well vegetated wetlands, floodplains, shallow river margins, estuaries.

**Breeding season:** September to February.

### Feathery Facts

- The Nankeen Night Heron is found near permanent water throughout mainland Australia.
- Mainly nocturnal but can be seen feeding during the day, its diet includes fish, frogs, crustaceans and insects.
- The Nankeen Night Heron roosts in trees close to water and has been observed roosting under the wharves at Port Melbourne.
- Breeding takes place in colonies with a loose stick nest built in a tree hanging over water. Both parents incubate the eggs.
- The Nankeen Night Heron was so named because of the brown-yellow colour of nankeen – a cotton cloth available from China in early colonial times.

Also known as the Rufous Night Heron

# White-faced Heron

*Egretta novaehollandiae*



## White-faced Heron

### Distinguishing features

Pale blue-grey heron with a characteristic white face, long slender neck, pointed grey-black bill, long yellow legs.

**Breeding:** long plumes on the lower neck and back.

**Size:** 70cm.

**Species similar in appearance:** White-necked Heron.

### Habitat

Fresh to salty shallow wetlands, pastures, crops, orchards, saltmarsh.

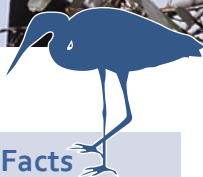
**Breeding season:** October to December.

### Feathery Facts

- Our most familiar heron, found throughout Australia.
- Herons, when feeding, sometimes stir ahead with one foot to disturb their prey. They are then able to straighten their curved neck quickly to increase the speed of thrust. Their sharp bills have fine serrated edges for grabbing slippery food such as fish and frogs. They will also eat grasshoppers and other insects.
- Both parents share the building of a nest in a suitable tree, incubation of the eggs and care of the young.
- Used to be known as the Blue Crane – although they are not a crane.

# White-necked Heron

*Ardea pacifica*



## White-necked Heron

### Distinguishing features

A large heron with white head and a long white neck with a double line of black spots running down its centre. Slate-black upperparts with grey underparts streaked with white, naked facial skin is either blue or yellow, green eyes, black bill, dark legs.

**Breeding:** short iridescent plum-coloured plumes on back and upper breast.

**Size:** 106cm.

### Habitat

Freshwater lakes and shallow wetlands, floodwaters, wet pastures.

**Breeding season:** September to December.

### Feathery Facts

- Found throughout Australia however not as common as the White-faced Heron.
- The White-necked Heron wades through shallow water feeding on fish, frogs and crustaceans. It will also feed on grasshoppers and other insects in wet pastures.
- Herons are able to rapidly extend their folded neck to catch unsuspecting prey as they have a special "hinge mechanism" at the sixth vertebra.
- Parents build a stick nest in a living tree which overhangs water and both will incubate the eggs. There may be several heron pairs in the same tree.
- Also known as the Pacific Heron.

# Australian White Ibis

*Threskiornis molucca*



## Australian White Ibis

### Distinguishing features

Ibis are almost entirely white with a bare-skinned black head and neck, black down-curved long bill, black feathers near tail, reddish brown legs.

**Size:** 76cm.

### Habitat

Freshwater to salty wetlands, dams, tidal mudflats, pastures.

**Breeding season:** June to December.

- Also known as the Sacred Ibis (a closely related African species associated with the gods of ancient Egypt)

### Feathery Facts

- Using its long bill, it digs for its most favoured foods – yabbies and mussels – which are opened by banging them on a hard surface.
- It is common to see large flocks of ibis feeding in paddocks. Ibis are sometimes called the “farmer’s friend” as they clean up pasture pests such as grasshoppers, beetle larvae and mice. Each ibis can eat about 200 grams of insects per day.
- During breeding season the male Australian White Ibis will bow to a female from a branch of a tall tree, offering her a twig. By accepting the twig a pair-bond is formed and the birds will fly off to build a nest elsewhere.
- Ibis frequently fly distances of more than 30 kilometres from breeding colonies to feed.

# Royal Spoonbill

*Platalea regia*



## Royal Spoonbill

### Distinguishing features

Large white bird with a black face and spoon-shaped bill, black legs. Breeding white head-plumes, small patches of yellow above each eye and red on forehead, creamy wash across lower neck and upper breast.

**Size:** 81cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**

Yellow-billed Spoonbill.

### Habitat

Shallow fresh to salty wetlands, intertidal mudflats, wet grasslands.

**Breeding season:** October to March.

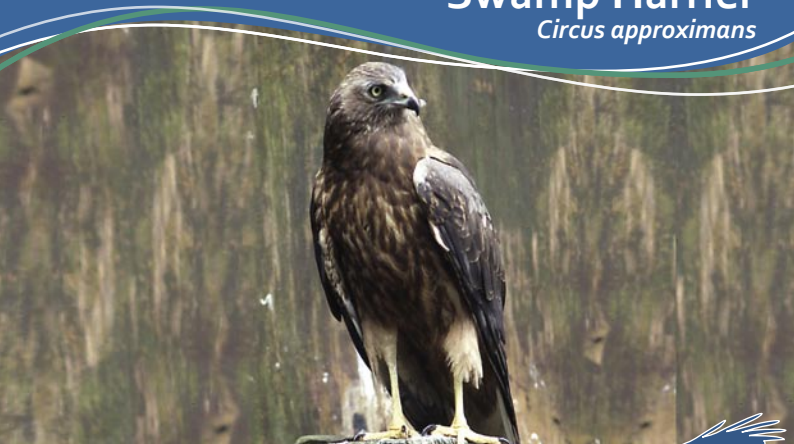
The Royal Spoonbill is not tolerant to disturbances from humans and dogs, especially when breeding.

### Feathery Facts

- The Royal Spoonbill is found throughout eastern and northern mainland Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and on some Pacific islands.
- Spoonbills feed by sweeping their bills through shallow water searching for food such as fish and shrimp. Special vibration detectors within the spoon-shaped bill allow the bird to 'feel' its dinner-prey. Shrimps are hit against rocks to remove the shell.
- On the land spoonbills will also eat insects, frogs and mice.
- The Royal Spoonbill forms pair-bonds and nest in colonies alongside many other waterbirds. Nests are built in the crown of a tree over water or in high reeds. Both parents incubate the eggs and feed the young.

# Swamp Harrier

*Circus approximans*



## Swamp Harrier

### Distinguishing features

Large, slim-bodied raptor (bird of prey) with a small head, an owl-like face mask and yellow eyes. Upperparts are dark brown with bars on the long tail and wings, white rump, long yellow legs. Male whitish underparts. Female larger with brown underparts.

**Size:** 60cm.

**Species similar in appearance:** Spotted Harrier.

### Habitat

Wetlands, saltmarsh, grasslands, heathlands.

**Breeding season:** September to December. Human disturbance can cause the mother Swamp Harrier to abandon her eggs or chicks.



### Feathery Facts

- The Swamp Harrier can be seen flying low over reeds and crops on upswept long wings (wingspan up to 1.45m) with head down-pointed searching systematically for prey such as grasshoppers, mice, rats, rabbits, reptiles, frogs and birds.
- Drowns its waterbird prey (coots, grebes, cormorants) by landing on them in shallow water and holding them under.
- The Swamp Harrier male will put on stunning aerial diving displays above the chosen breeding site.
- Nests in dense, low vegetation on ground (sometimes in a crop) or over water. The female cares for the young while the male hunts for food. The male transfers the food to the female in the air and she in turn feeds the young.

Also known as Marsh Harrier

# Black-tailed Native Hen

*Gallinula ventralis*



## Black-tailed Native Hen

### Distinguishing features

Bantam-like in appearance with the erect tail. Olive-brown upperparts with an erect narrow black tail, black underparts with blue sheen on neck and breast, white spots on sides of breast, green facial shield and bill with orange at base, bright yellow eyes, long red legs.

**Size:** 38cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**

Dusky Moorhen.

### Habitat

Temporary wetlands, open margins of permanent fresh to brackish wetlands, lakes and rivers.

**Breeding season:** August to December.

### Feathery Facts

- The Black-tailed Native Hen is found throughout most of Australia.
- Large numbers of Black-tailed Native Hens may arrive overnight to take advantage of temporary wetlands, breed and then depart.
- The Black-tailed Native Hen feeds on seeds, insects and plant material ashore.
- Its nest is cup-shaped and made of stalks and twigs lined with grasses and feathers.

# Dusky Moorhen

*Gallinula tenebrosa*



## Dusky Moorhen

### Distinguishing features

Dusky brown medium-sized waterhen with red facial shield and red bill with a yellow-tip, white undertail, reddish legs.

**Size:** 40cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**

Purple Swamphen, Eurasian Coot.

### Habitat

Well vegetated wetlands, lakes and rivers.

**Breeding season:** August to March.



### Feathery Facts

- The Dusky Moorhen is found mainly in eastern and south-western Australia. It is a commonly-seen waterhen which nods its head as it swims.
- The Dusky Moorhen feeds both in the water and on the land and its diet includes algae, water plants, molluscs, grasses, seeds and fruits.
- A breeding group of up to seven Dusky Moorhens is formed and all members will assist in nest building, incubating eggs and feeding young.

# Purple Swampphen

*Porphyrio porphyrio*



## Purple Swampphen

### Distinguishing features

Black with distinctive deep blue/purple chest, red bill and frontal shield, long reddish legs, white undertail.

**Size:** 48cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**  
Dusky Moorhen.

### Habitat

Margins of freshwater wetlands, lakes and rivers with dense rushes/reeds.

**Breeding season:** July to December.

### Feathery Facts



- The Purple Swampphen is common throughout eastern and northern Australia with an isolated population in Western Australia.
- Swampphens will feed on the soft shoots of reeds and rushes by using their long toes to hold food while eating. Their diet also includes frogs, snails, eggs and ducklings.
- The swampphen will fly to escape danger, its long legs and toes trailing behind.
- Purple Swampphens are found in small groups and all family members will share in the incubation and care of the young. Their nest is a large platform of trampled reeds, usually well hidden.

# Eurasian Coot

*Fulica atra*



## Eurasian Coot

### Distinguishing features

Dark sooty grey waterhen with white bill and facial shield, red eyes, grey legs.

**Size:** 39cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**

Dusky Moorhen.

### Habitat

Fresh to brackish permanent wetlands, open lakes with underwater vegetation.

**Breeding season:** August to February.



### Feathery Facts

- The Eurasian Coot is common on wetlands throughout Australia and is also found in Indonesia, New Guinea and New Zealand.
- The Eurasian Coot dives underwater for its plant food (up to 7 metres) and may stay under for up to 15 seconds. It is able to do this by compressing its feathers and squeezing all the air out.
- It will also graze on land or on the surface of the water and has a mainly vegetarian diet supplemented by worms, insects and fish.
- A breeding pair will sometimes take another waterbird species' nest. Both parents share nest duties and care of the young.

# Brolga

*Grus rubicunda*



Victorian Conservation Status: Threatened

## Brolga

### Distinguishing features

Large grey crane with distinctive featherless red head and grey crown, black dewlap under chin, straight bill, 'bustle' of feathers over rump, long dark grey legs.

**Size:** 125cm.

### Habitat

Large, shallow freshwater marshes, wet meadows, permanent freshwater and brackish wetlands.

**Breeding season:** September to December.



### Feathery Facts

- Brolgas are well known for their unison calling and "dancing" displays which include bowing, leaping and wing-flapping.
- Brolgas pair for life and will defend a large nesting territory (up to 300 hectares) including one or more wetlands
- Brolgas feed on wetland plant tubers, grains, insects, molluscs, frogs and mice.
- Glands near the Brolga's eye excrete salt, allowing them to drink salt water.
- Brolgas need adequate room for a "run-up" to fly.
- Fox attacks on Brolga eggs and chicks, fences, powerlines and drainage of wetlands have affected populations in southern Australia.

Also known as the Native Companion.

# Red-necked Stint

*Calidris ruficollis*



## Red-necked Stint

### Distinguishing features

Short black bill with a bulbous tip, grey-brown upperparts with pale-edged feathers, white underparts with some grey on either side of the upperbreast, black legs.

**Breeding:** Reddish head, neck and upperbreast, back feathers have black centres with chestnut edges.

**Size:** 15cm.

**Species similar in appearance:** Little Stint, Long-toed Stint.

### Habitat

Saltmarshes, estuaries, fresh to salty inland wetlands.

**Migratory Notes:** The Red-necked Stint breeds in Siberia and Alaska and can be found in Australia from late August through to March.



### Feathery Facts

- The Red-necked Stint is very small and is the most common migratory wader in Australia.
- Usually seen in large flocks which run about picking constantly at the muddy surface. Their diet consists of seeds, plants, insects and shellfish.
- The Red-necked Stint also migrates to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and the sub-Antarctic islands.
- A wader study reported that two juvenile Red-necked Stints – 44 and 50 days old – were found around 2000km from their breeding grounds.
- Some first-year birds remain in Australia over winter.

# Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

*Calidris acuminata*



## Sharp-tailed Sandpiper



### Distinguishing features

Straight black bill with olive base, chestnut coloured crown, reddish brown upperparts with each feather having a black centre, finely streaked breast with a white belly, olive legs.

**Size:** 24cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**

Pectoral Sandpiper

### Habitat

Saltmarshes, tidal mudflats, shallow fresh to salty inland wetlands, floodwaters.

**Migratory Notes:** The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper breeds in Siberia and can be found in Australia from August through to February.

### Feathery Facts

- Large flocks of the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper can be seen foraging in shallow waters – usually in the company of other wader species.
- Their diet consists of waterbugs, worms, shellfish and seeds.
- The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper also migrates to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, New Zealand.

# Common Greenshank

*Tringa nebularia*



## Common Greenshank

### Distinguishing features

Long, slightly upturned dark bill, grey-brown upperparts, pale underparts, long green legs.

**Size:** 34cm.

**Species similar in appearance:** Marsh Sandpiper.

### Habitat

Saltmarshes, tidal mudflats and estuaries, margins of lakes, fresh to salty wetlands.

**Migratory Notes:** The Common Greenshank breeds in the Palaearctic regions (from Scotland across to Siberia) and arrives in Australia from August through to November. They return north again in March and April.

### Feathery Facts

- The Common Greenshank are usually seen as individuals or in small parties – rarely seen as a flock.
- It has a loud ringing alarm call “tew-tew” and is often the first wader to rise when disturbed, alerting the other species.
- The Common Greenshank feeds on fish, shrimps, shellfish, worms and insects. It disturbs prey by stirring up the sediment with its feet and then swinging its bill from side to side to catch them.

# Latham's Snipe

*Gallinago hardwickii*



## Latham's Snipe

### Distinguishing features

Mainly brown plumage with upper body boldly patterned with black, brown and white, white belly, long straight bill, long tail, short legs.

**Size:** 33cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**

Painted Snipe

### Habitat

Shallow freshwater wetlands, saltmarsh, wet grasslands.

**Migratory Notes:** The Latham's Snipe breeds in Japan and on the East Asian mainland and flies to Australia in the warmer months.



### Feathery Facts

- Latham's Snipe is a shy bird and when disturbed will either freeze or erupt into the sky in a fast zigzagging flight (known as "jinking").
- Feeds by ramming its bill vertically into muddy ground with a rapid action.
- Latham's Snipe are known in Japan as "Thunder Birds. This is because their outer tail feathers make a drumming noise during the spectacular display flights in breeding season.

# Banded Stilt

*Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*



## Banded Stilt

### Distinguishing features

White head and body, black wings, long black slender bill, long pinkish legs.

**Breeding:** broad chestnut band across the breast extending down to the belly.

**Size:** 43cm.

**Species similar in appearance:** Black-winged Stilt.

### Habitat

Fresh and saltwater marshes, estuaries, large shallow lakes.

**Breeding season:** May to December.

### Feathery Facts

- Banded Stilts are found mainly in the south of Australia and inland.
- Banded Stilts are often in enormous colonies and move in response to the food and breeding habitat available. Their diet consists of brine shrimps, shellfish, insects, vegetation, seeds and roots.
- As a long-legged wader, the Banded Stilt is able to wade in deeper water than other waders and also swims.
- Banded Stilts breed on small islands in lakes, their nest being a scrape in the ground.



# Red-necked Avocet

*Recurvirostra novaehollandiae*



## Red-necked Avocet



### Distinguishing features

White and black avocet with a chestnut brown head, white eye-ring, long black upturned bill, blue-grey long legs, webbed feet. The male has a more sharply upturned bill.

**Size:** 45cm.

### Habitat

Large shallow fresh to salty wetlands, estuarine mudflats.

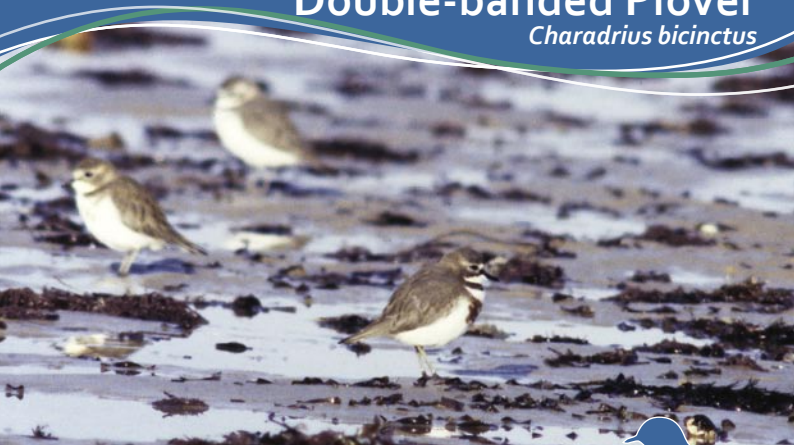
**Breeding season:** August to November.

### Feathery Facts

- The Red-necked Avocet is found throughout mainland Australia with breeding occurring mainly in the south-western interior. They are usually found in pairs or small flocks.
- Avocets feed on waterbugs, crustaceans and seeds. Although they do swim occasionally for their food, upending like ducks, it is more usual for them to wade in shallow water and sweep their bill back and forth. The upturned bill is more efficient at capturing surface-swimming prey.
- The call of the Red-necked Avocet is a musical "toot-toot".

# Double-banded Plover

*Charadrius bicinctus*



## Double-banded Plover



### Distinguishing features

Grey-brown upperparts and white below with a single grey breastband, white eyebrow, short black bill, greyish legs.

**Breeding:** adult has two chest bands – a black upper and wider chestnut lower band, white forehead patch.

**Size:** 19cm.

### Habitat

Shallow fresh to salty wetlands, paddocks, saltmarsh, tidal mudflats, wide beaches.

**Migratory Notes:** The Double-banded Plover breeds in New Zealand during summer and migrates to south-eastern Australia in the winter. It is mostly seen in Australia between February to August.

### Feathery Facts

- In Australia most Double-banded Plovers are seen in their duller non-breeding plumage.
- Their diet consists of shellfish, insects and occasional seeds and fruit.
- Also known as the Double-banded Dotterel and in New Zealand as the Banded Dotterel.

# Red-capped Plover

*Charadrius ruficapillus*



## Red-capped Plover



### Distinguishing features

Adult male has a white forehead, red crown (cap), nape and collar partly edged black, black eye-stripe, grey-brown upperparts, white underparts, black legs. The female is similar but duller in colour and black is less distinct.

**Size:** 16cm.

**Species similar in appearance:** Double-banded Plover.

### Habitat

Saltmarshes, margins of salty wetlands and lakes, tidal mudflats and occasional shallow freshwater wetlands. Coastal and inland areas.

**Breeding season:** July to March.

### Feathery Facts

- The Red-capped Plover is a resident of Australia.
- It forages for shellfish and some vegetation and is seen on mudflats, sandy beaches and saltmarsh.
- The Red-capped Plover lays its well-camouflaged eggs in a shallow scrape usually close to water and both parents share nest duties.
- If the nest is threatened the Red-capped Plovers may fake injury by dragging a wing, or other such methods, to draw the predator away.
- Also known as Red-capped Dotterel and Sand Lark.

# Red-kneed Dotterel

*Erythrogonyx cinctus*



## Red-kneed Dotterel

### Distinguishing features

Black cap and breastband with a white throat and bib, chestnut flanks, upperparts are brown and the underparts are white from the belly to the undertail, red bill with black tip and grayish legs with red "knees".

**Size:** 19cm.

### Habitat

Shallow freshwater wetlands, floodwaters, some brackish to salty wetlands.

**Breeding season:** August to January.

### Feathery Facts

- The Red-kneed Dotterel can be found throughout mainland Australia and southern New Guinea.
- It forages in the mud along shorelines and also feeds while swimming. Its diet includes waterbugs and seeds.
- The nest is a scraped hollow in wet ground and both parents will share nest duties. The young are able to swim upon hatching.
- The Red-kneed Dotterel is able to run very fast to escape predators.



# Caspian Tern

*Sterna caspia*



## Caspian Tern

### Distinguishing features

Breeding adult is white with black bristling cap, grey back and wings, heavy red bill with a darkish tip, slightly forked tail and black legs. Non-breeding grey streaked cap.

**Size:** 60cm.

### Habitat

Fresh to salty wetlands, sheltered estuaries, rivers, coastal waters.

**Breeding season:** October to December.

### Feathery Facts

- Caspian Terns are common and widespread and can be found throughout Australasia, Africa, Eurasia and North America.
- Their diet is mainly fish and it is usual to see them hovering up to 15 metres above the water before folding in their wings and diving into the water to catch their prey. The fish are swallowed head first whilst flying.
- Caspian Terns breed in single pairs or dense colonies, their nest being an unlined scrape on the ground. Both parents share nest duties and whole fish are regurgitated to feed the young.



# Whiskered Tern

*Chlidonias hybridus*



## Whiskered Tern

### Distinguishing features

Breeding adults are grey with a black cap, white cheeks “whiskers”, red bill, short forked tail, red legs. Non-breeding white streaked black cap, black bill and legs.

**Size:** 25cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**

White-winged Black Tern (non-breeding).

### Habitat

Shallow fresh to salty wetlands, lakes, floodwaters, large dams.

**Breeding season:**

September to December.

**Migratory Notes:** Whiskered Terns migrate autumn-winter to Asia and can be found in southern Australia between September and March.

### Feathery Facts

- The Whiskered Tern breeds in separate populations across southern Europe and Asia, in Australia, south-eastern Africa and Madagascar.
- The Whiskered Tern’s diet includes small fish, amphibians and insects. The insects are taken on wing (a method known as hawking).
- Large inland temporary wetlands are the preferred breeding sites and nests are a rough raft of floating or moored vegetation.
- Also known as the Marsh Tern or Black-fronted Tern.



# Blue-winged Parrot

*Neophema chrysostoma*



## Blue-winged Parrot

### Distinguishing features

Dull olive-green with yellow and blue facial band, dark blue patch on wings, pale yellow underparts which may have orange centre, slender blue tail with yellow below. Female similar to male but duller, small facial band.

**Size:** 24cm.

**Species similar in appearance:**

Elegant Parrot, Orange-bellied Parrot.

### Habitat

Edges of wetlands, saltmarshes, grasslands, grassy woodlands from coastal through to semi-arid areas.

**Breeding season:** October to February.

### Feathery Facts

- The main populations of Blue-winged Parrot are in Victoria and Tasmania.
- Blue-winged Parrot pairs or parties forage on the ground for seeds of grasses and herbaceous plants.
- Small vertical openings in hollow trees, stumps and fence-posts are preferred for nest making – the small opening is to prevent predator-birds stealing eggs/young (eg Grey Shrike-thrush).
- Although Blue-winged Parrots do breed on the mainland, some make the journey from Tasmania in March-April to the mainland and return in August-October.



Also known as the Blue-banded Parrot, Blue-winged Grass Parakeet.

# Golden-headed Cisticola

*Cisticola exilis*



## Golden-headed Cisticola



### Distinguishing features

Breeding male has a golden head with golden upperparts streaked black, creamy underparts, long pinkish legs. Both the female and non-breeding male are less golden in colour with a blackish streaked crown and longer tail.

**Size:** 11cm.

### Habitat

Tall grasses, rushes, shrubs around wetlands, saltmarsh, wet grasslands, irrigated pastures and rivers.

**Breeding season:** September to March.

### Feathery Facts

- The Golden-headed Cisticola is common in Australia and can be found in India and southern China.
- Their diet consists of insects and seeds.
- The breeding male calls continuously with a loud insect-like buzzing sound and will often soar high when singing.
- Nest-building is carried out by both the male and female Golden-headed Cisticola. The small domed nest with a side entrance is made of fine grass and plant down, covered by leaves which have been "stitched" in with spiders' web and plant fibres (giving it the common name of "Tailorbird").

Also known as Golden-headed Fantail Warbler, Barleybird, Cornbird.

# White-fronted Chat

*Epthianura albifrons*



## White-fronted Chat



### Distinguishing features

Male has a white head with a black hood, black bill, broad black breastband, grey back, white underparts and black legs. Female face and upperparts are grey-brown, underparts are white/pale-grey, narrow blackish breastband.

**Size:** 13cm.

### Habitat

Both coastal and inland saltmarshes, damp open areas with low vegetation, farmland.

**Breeding season:** August to January.

### Feathery Facts

- The White-fronted Chat is common across southern Australia.
- Its diet includes small insects such as midges, bugs and beetles.
- A sudden surge in insect populations will bring flocks of White-fronted Chats to feed.
- Breeding pairs will share incubation and feeding responsibilities. However only the female will build the cup-shaped nest while the male guards the small nest-site territory.



# Corangamite Catchment Management Authority

**Committed to healthy catchments and waterways**

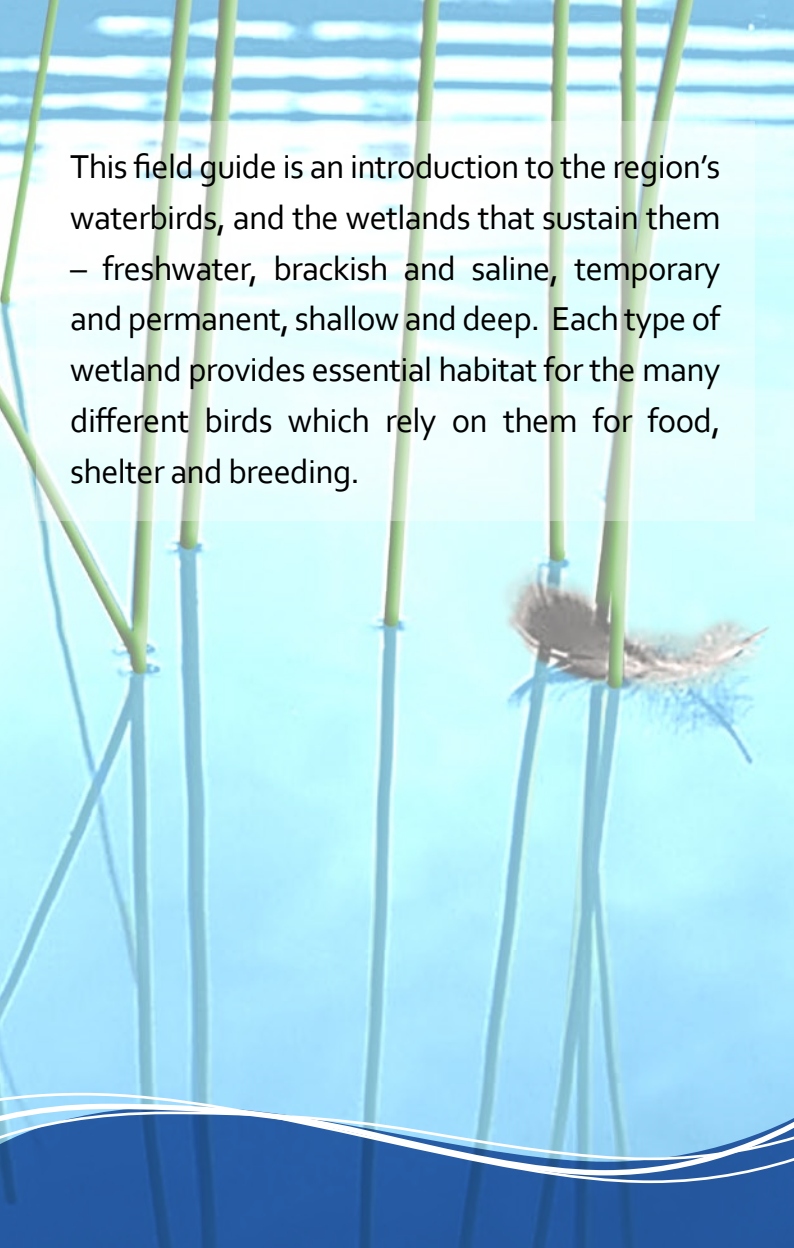
The Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (CMA) was established in 1997 by the Victorian Government to ensure the protection and sustainable development of land, vegetation and water resources within a boundary stretching from Geelong to Ballarat and along the coast to Peterborough.

About 350,000 people live in the catchment which has a total area of 13,340 square kilometres. It includes all or part of the municipalities of Cities of Ballarat and Greater Geelong, the Borough of Queenscliffe, the shires of Moorabool, Surf Coast, Corangamite, Golden Plains, Colac Otway and Moyne.



**Australian Government**





This field guide is an introduction to the region's waterbirds, and the wetlands that sustain them – freshwater, brackish and saline, temporary and permanent, shallow and deep. Each type of wetland provides essential habitat for the many different birds which rely on them for food, shelter and breeding.

