

Save the Riverstone Wetlands



“As long as the wetland looks pretty and also attracts ducks from time to time, it is regarded as a complete success. An attractive appearance is fine and is of considerable concern in urban developments.”

It is the pretense that such wetlands also create rich habitats which is objectionable, when urban development is the primary cause of loss of diversity in a wide range of ecosystems around cities including wetlands.

The one ecologically positive thing that most created wetlands do a reasonable job of is water treatment, because the limited range of plants likely to survive the semi-toxic soils and waters of newly created wetlands are invariably colonisers that will also use up a wide range of nutrients.”

Nick Romanowski, Wetland Habitats: A Practical Guide to Restoration and Management

The Riverstone Wetlands and the Cumberland Conservation Corridor

Originally cleared for timber and later agriculture, Cumberland Plain Woodland is a recognised Critically Endangered Ecological Community, around 5% remains, much of which is degraded and lacks viability due to increased fragmentation as small remnants are cleared for urban development.

Description:

“Until the early 1950s, when clearing for housing became massive, extensive tracts of parklike woodland, interspersed with fields, characterized the Cumberland Plain between Kellyville and the Nepean River. The best tracts were around Doonside, Blacktown, and St Marys and formed major study sites for Sydney ornithologists. Major trees were: Grey Box *Eucalyptus moluccana*, Forest Redgum *E. tereticornis*, Narrow-leafed Ironbark *E. crebra*, and the teatree *Melaleuca decora* that hosted high populations of the Mistletoe *Amyema gaudichaudii*. There were sluggish but rich creek drainages with pools, and creekside thickets of *Bursaria* and other shrubs. The substratum for the most part was grassy.”

Allan Keast, *Habitat loss and species loss: the birds of Sydney 50 years ago and now*, 1995



Above: Almost 100 houses squeezed onto a small, Cumberland Plain Woodland remnant in Schofields, loss of habitat resulting in the local extinction of declining and threatened species, including the Critically Endangered Swift Parrot.

Increased human migration now fuels ‘growth’ and ‘development’ with flawed schemes such as the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (CPCP), Biobanking, Offsets and ‘activation’ of green space all contributing in net loss of Australia’s unique biodiversity.

In 2012, as a last ditch effort, some concerned environmentalists proposed a corridor linking existing woodland remnants, riparian corridors and the National Park estate in northwestern Sydney.



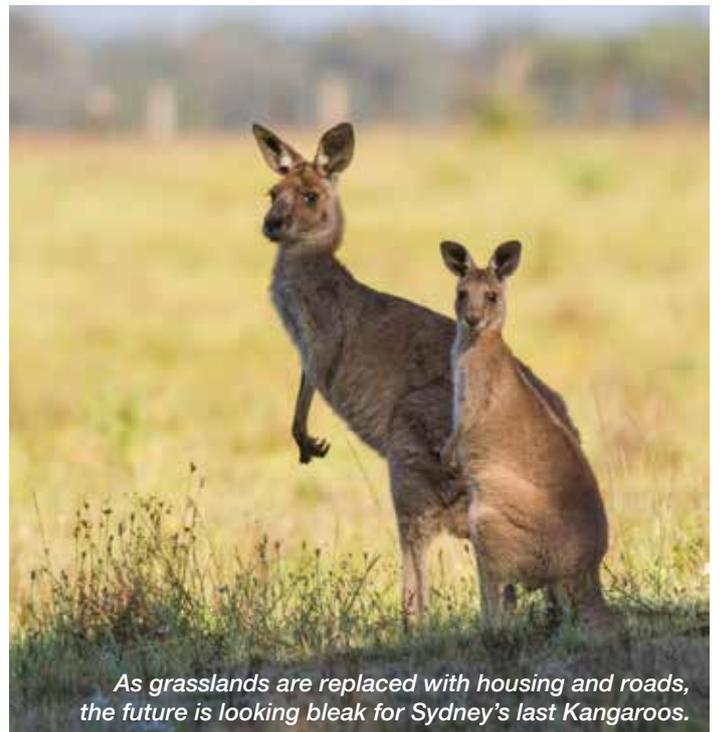
Above: View from the northern boundary of Shanes Park Air Services site (now Yiraaldiya NP) a ‘clayscape’ has replaced green fields (see map). Now a ‘heat island’ of asphalt, houses and concrete raising the temperature by an additional 10/12°C. Marsden Park is forecast to be the hottest place on Earth (Samuel Austin, JOC Consulting senior urban planner).

“25% of all nationally listed threatened plants and 46% of nationally listed threatened animals are found in Australia’s cities and towns...

...in the first 17 years of the operation of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act, at least 20,212 hectares of urban threatened species habitat was destroyed”.

‘The extinction crisis in Australia’s cities and towns’ ACF

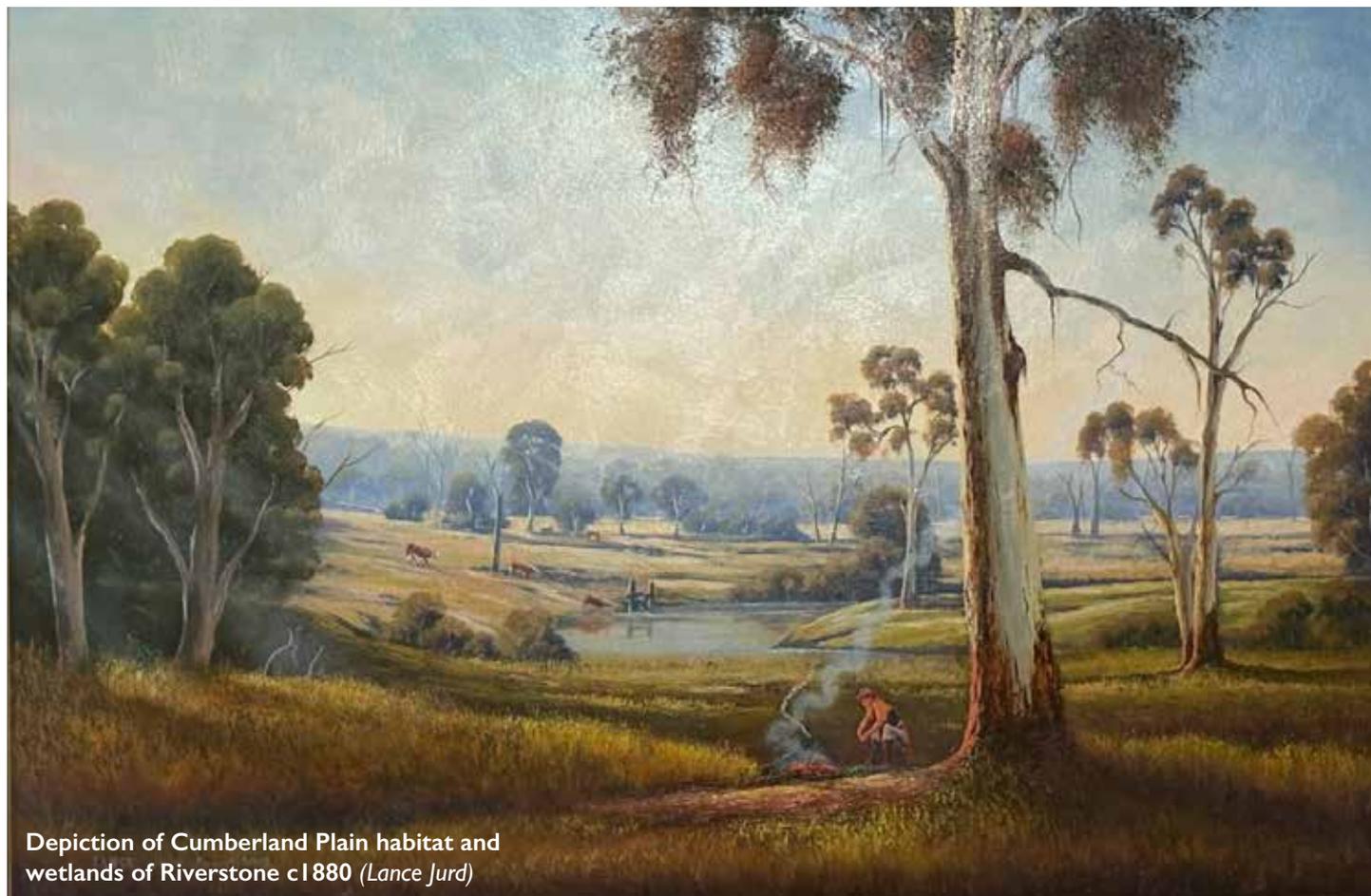
PROPOSED CUMBERLAND CONSERVATION CORRIDOR



As grasslands are replaced with housing and roads, the future is looking bleak for Sydney’s last Kangaroos.

The History of Riverstone Meatworks

Early explorers had difficulty locating and mapping Sydneys extensive wetland systems, the vegetation forming a natural barrier. There previously were functioning wetlands all along the creeks in Western Sydney but since 1798 the landscape has been so heavily altered that the natural systems that were in place no longer exist.



Depiction of Cumberland Plain habitat and wetlands of Riverstone c1880 (Lance Jurd)

Occupied by the Darug people for over 8,000 years, evidence in the form of stone artifacts adjacent to nearby waterways can still be found in Windsor Downs Nature Reserve. Between 1788 and 1791 Land grants were given to Richard Rouse, Rev. Samuel Marsden, John Schofield and James Ruse, their names a feature of many western Sydney suburbs.

Richard Rouse owned the land known as Jericho Farm. In 1878 Benjamin Richards established the Riverstone Meatworks, a 2,000 hectare property for cattle grazing, meat and dairy production. The land being acquired by the Angliss Meat Corporation

Cumberland Bird Observers Club (CBOC) Conservation Officer and Angliss employee, Roger Golding managed the property throughout the 1960s - 1980s. He noted the importance of species such as Hooded Robin, Black-eared Cuckoo and its preferred host, the Speckled Warbler - now locally extinct. Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeaters were also present.

In 1973 settlement ponds were constructed to process wastewater from the nearby abattoir and tanning operations. Left *in situ* for 50 years, these fertile, shallow ponds have produced the perfect habitat for some of Australia's rarest wetland birds.

The high level of biodiversity and quality of the Cumberland Plain Woodland on the site was evident in 1990 when 600ha was sold by the Angliss Meat Corporation for the Windsor Downs housing estate, 330ha of which was given to NSW PWS to create the Windsor Downs Nature Reserve.

The reserve was to be used for research, education and nature study. Due to the surrounding housing estate, community support was recommended along with careful management of feral pests, weeds and negative human impact.

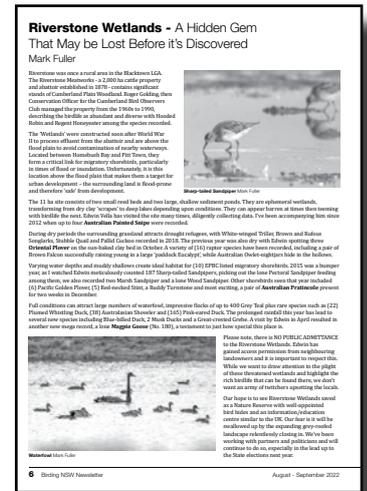
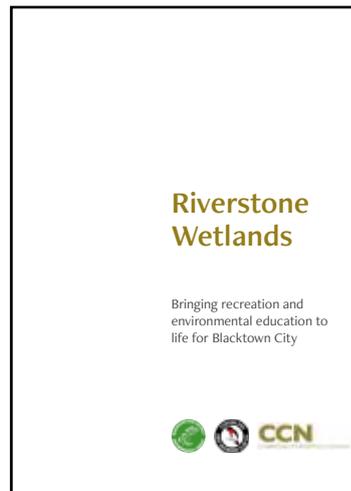
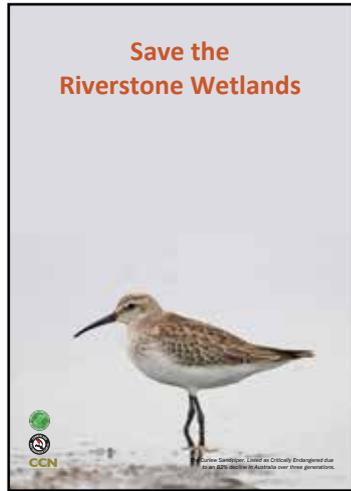
The Meatworks closed in 1984. Large numbers of wildfowl and rare migratory shorebirds now use this site, a key link between the estuarine mudflats of Homebush Bay and the wetland network of the Hawkesbury River. Being above the flood plain, it provides shallow feeding conditions when the previous two sites are inundated due to flooding..

The 2020s marks the final years for the Riverstone Meatworks, now to be replaced by suburbs such as Angus, created through the implementation of the North West Growth Plan (NWGP) a major NSW Government strategy to build 90,000 homes for 250,000 people in Blacktown, The Hills, Hawkesbury LGAs.



The Campaign to save the Riverstone Wetlands

In the 10+ years since the Cumberland Conservation Network was formed to stop habitat destruction in Western Sydney our group have been raising awareness of the global importance of this important waterbird refuge through advocacy, education and engagement with Politicians and Environmental organisations.



Above: (left to right)

Wetland Birds of Western Sydney and the Hawkesbury-Nepean. 12pp DL photo guide has Riverstone Wetlands cover; image with most species featured found at the Wetlands. In 2020, 4,000 print run, adding to the 2,000 previously printed in 2016. These popular photo guides have been distributed at various educational workshops and events run by Councils and environmental organisations to raise awareness of the plight of Riverstone Wetlands.

Save the Riverstone Wetlands booklet. This publication has been reprinted several times with updated information. It was designed to highlight the importance of the habitat and species of Riverstone Wetlands and has been distributed at many venues throughout the campaign.

Riverstone Wetlands Prospectus. Printed in 2017 and aimed at investors, outlining the environmental education, mental health, and recreation benefits for Western Sydney. Citing overseas examples, it also highlights potential eco-tourism benefits and opportunities for global partnerships.

'Riverstone Wetlands - A hidden gem that may be lost before it's discovered'. This article was published in the August 2022 Birding NSW newsletter. The article, along with presentations to bird clubs in Sydney and the Illawarra and recently the Capertee Valley Bird Fair; hosted by BirdLife, Southern NSW has helped to garner support from bird clubs across NSW.

Other actions, presentations and submissions

April 2014 Letter from BDEG, CBOC and other groups.

25th June 2015 Media release.

28th August 2015 Meeting with DP&E, Blacktown Council
Mayoral meeting with Stephen Bali.

Several presentations to Ed Husic at various 'Meet & Greets'

31st August 2016- letter from Historical Society re Bandon Rd

2nd September 2016 Letter to OEH (reply from Chris Hickey)

2016 Mehreen Faruqui (Greens) Notice of Motion - unanimously and successfully recognized the existence of the Riverstone Meat-works Wetland.

11th October 2016 Letter to Mark Speakman (OEH Minister)

10th January 2019 Penny Sharpe visit to support Anne-Marie Christie (Labour candidate/advocate for Riverstone Wetlands)

September 2017 Submissions from bird interest groups

4th February 2019 - visit to Riverstone by Cate Faerhmann

16th January 2023 - meeting with Prue Car; (member for Londonderry) at her St Marys office.

8th August 2023 - meeting with Warren Kirby (member for Riverstone) with the Animal Justice Party.

September 2025 presentation at BirdLife SNSW Bird Festival

November 2025 - presentation to Cumberland Bird Observers (CBOC).

December 2025/January 2026 - Current campaign to gain publicity and gather support to save the Riverstone Wetlands.

The trouble with Politicians...

Seeking any long-term commitment or solution is difficult when office bearers are continually changing. The only constant in our 10 year campaign to save the wetlands is the pro development stance taken by both major political parties once in office.

Federal Environment Ministers since the campaign started

Greg Hunt (Liberal) 2013-2016

Josh Frydenberg (Liberal) 2016-2018

Melissa Price (Liberal) 2018-2022

Sussan Ley (Liberal) 2019-2022

Tanya Plibersek (Labour) 2022-2025

Murray Watt (Labor) 2025-

State Environment Ministers since the campaign started

Gabrielle Upton (Liberal) 2015-2019

Matt Kean (Liberal) 2019-2021

James Griffin (Liberal) 2021-2023

Penny Sharpe (Labour) 2023-

...this doesn't include the Council and Local Members, Planning Ministers and others that have been informed over time.

Over 10 years observing the birds of Riverstone Wetlands

Around 2010, a local bird expert thought the wetland habitat at the Riverstone Meatworks looked 'interesting'. In the years following the wetlands exceeded all expectations with an abundance of species including migratory shorebirds, rare and endangered waterfowl and wetland species plus raptors other rarities.

Ephemeral Wetlands are depressional wetlands that temporarily hold water in the spring and early summer or after heavy rains. Periodically, these wetlands dry up, often in mid to late summer. They are isolated without a permanent inlet or outlet, but may overflow in times of high water.

Ephemeral systems dominate the landscape in Australia, although they are often undervalued both intrinsically, and in terms of their contribution of ecosystem services to the broader landscape compared to other wetland systems. In the face of climate change, a lack of understanding of how ephemeral systems function and their ecological resilience, the ability of the system to adapt to significant (directional) change, represent significant knowledge gaps.



When conditions are **full**, the large body of deep water attracts rare species of diving ducks and grebes, as well as providing a haven for other wildlife such as Turtles.



Shallow water and exposed mud of varying depths create ideal conditions for shorebirds and crakes, creating a nutritious 'soup' filled with insect larvae exploited by many species depending on bill/leg length.



In **dry or drought** conditions, good numbers of rare Sydney species such as (poss. breeding) **Brown and Rufous Songlark** have been recorded at Riverstone site and surrounds.

It was hoped the high biodiversity levels at Riverstone Wetlands could be used to 'offset' the draining of rural dams lost in the

construction of the Western Sydney Airport. The site was not considered due to its location in a Sydney Growth Centre.

(Below) It's not just birds, Eastern Snake-necked Turtles are in decline due to the draining of dams for housing developments. Riverstone Wetlands offers protection when full, but with no environmental management the population is regularly decimated by introduced Foxes as the water levels recede.



Another species of note, the Critically Endangered **Green and Golden Bell Frog** is documented in the small reed beds at the Riverstone Wetlands and now becomes another already threatened species to face local extinction.

(Below) Despite the high biodiversity levels recorded at Riverstone, Foxes, Dogs and introduced weeds continue to have a detrimental effect as the wetland has been ignored and overlooked and is now to be destroyed for urban development.

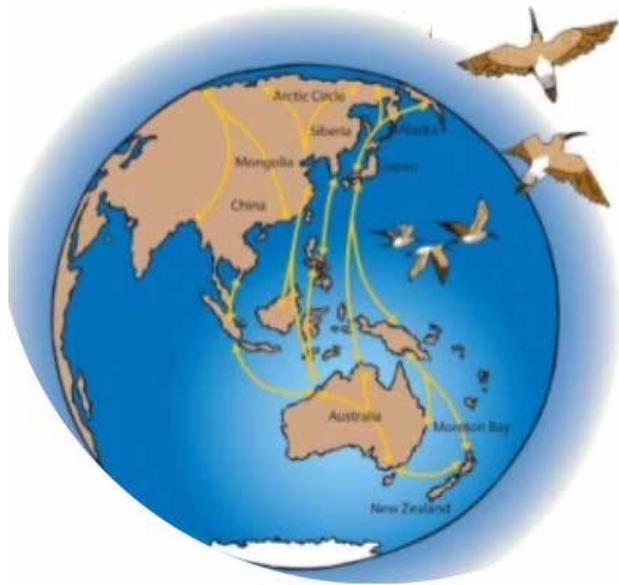


(Below) The latest addition to the Riverstone Bird List was this Eastern Yellow Wagtail (#176) photographed on 8th December 2024. An extremely rare Siberian vagrant that attracts 'twitchers' whenever an individual turns up on Australia's east coast.



Where practical, the vast majority of photographs on the following pages were taken at the Riverstone Wetlands, however, some are 'file photos' (such as heavily-cropped distant raptor photos) for purely aesthetic reasons.

The settlement ponds at the Riverstone Meatworks site provide suitable feeding habitat for over 10 species of **MIGRATORY SHOREBIRDS**



Australia is legally bound to protect these species under International agreements with China (CAMBA), Japan (JAMBA) and the Republic of Korea (ROKAMBA).

WHAT ARE MIGRATORY SHOREBIRDS?

Migratory shorebirds fly 1,000's of kilometres from breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere along the East Asian Flyway to Australia. These species are declining at a higher rate than anywhere else in the world due to destruction of habitat.

Many of these migratory birds arrive at their destination exhausted and close to starvation. Some of these long-distance travelers use the Riverstone Wetlands to rest and refuel prior to making their long return journey. The current plan to destroy the settlement ponds at Riverstone will add to the loss of critical habitat not only within Australia but worldwide.



ORIENTAL PLOVER *Anarhynchus veredus*
CAMBA, JAMBA, ROKAMBA

The Oriental Plover migrates from its breeding grounds in Mongolia to the dry open plains of northern parts of Australia. An erratic and occasional visitor to Sydney. The above photograph is one of three birds seen at Riverstone Wetlands on 2nd October 2017.



PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis fulva*
CAMBA, JAMBA, ROKAMBA

The Pacific Golden Plover breeds on the Arctic tundra and winters in South America, various Pacific Islands, India, Indonesia and Australia. An occasional visitor to Riverstone Wetlands. The highest count of six birds was recorded on 8th November 2015.



RED-NECKED STINT *Calidris ruficollis*
CAMBA, JAMBA, ROKAMBA

The Red-necked Stint breeds in north-eastern Siberia and northern and western Alaska. It follows the East Asian Flyway to spend the southern summer months in Australia. Five birds were seen on the 29th November 2015 and three birds recorded three weeks later (20th December).



CURLEW SANDPIPER *Calidris ferruginea*
CAMBA, JAMBA, ROKAMBA, Critically Endangered (Comm)

The Curlew Sandpiper has declined by up to 80% since the 1980s. It migrates from north-eastern Siberia and Alaska to Australia. The above photograph was taken at Riverstone Wetlands on 18th September 2016 with three different birds seen on 24th September.



SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER *Calidris acuminata*
CAMBA, JAMBA, ROKAMBA

The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper breeds in the Siberian tundra before flying along the East Asian Flyway to SE Asia and Australia. Flocks are seen regularly at Riverstone Wetlands from August through to December. The highest count of 187 birds was recorded on 20th December 2015.



PECTORAL SANDPIPER *Calidris melanotos*
JAMBA, ROKAMBA

A long-distance migrant that breeds in North Asia and Alaska, mainly wintering in South America but also across Oceania and Australia. A rare visitor to Sydney in low numbers, one individual seen among a group of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers was present from October to December 2015.



WOOD SANDPIPER *Tringa glareola*
CAMBA, JAMBA

Wood Sandpipers are widespread, breeding in Scandinavia, the Baltic states and Northern Russia, migrating southward to Africa, Asia and Australia. An uncommon visitor to Sydney, one bird was present at the Wetlands from February to March 2013, and 2nd December 2015.



MARSH SANDPIPER *Tringa stagnatilis*
CAMBA, JAMBA, ROKAMBA

Breeding occurs from east Europe to east Siberia. The non-breeding period is spent in southern Africa, the Indian subcontinent and southern Indochina. An uncommon visitor to Sydney, two birds were recorded at Riverstone Wetlands on 29th November, 5th and 13th December 2015.



LATHAM'S SNIPE *Gallinago hardwickii*
CAMBA, JAMBA, ROKAMBA

Latham's Snipe breed in Japan and on the east Asian mainland before migrating to the south east of Australia. Latham's Snipe are a regular visitor to Riverstone Wetlands with single birds recorded from August through to December on an annual basis.



RUDDY TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*
CAMBA, JAMBA, ROKAMBA

The most northerly breeding shorebird, using the Russian Arctic summer to raise its young, leaving to island hop on its way to Australia. The Ruddy Turnstone is usually found in coastal habitats. One bird was present at Riverstone Wetlands on 31st October 2015.

The settlement ponds at the Riverstone Meatworks site provide suitable breeding and feeding habitat for rare **WETLAND BIRD SPECIES**

Many Australian shorebirds and their allies may travel great distances to find optimum conditions. Several species are in decline, reflecting the loss and degradation of wetlands across Australia.



WHAT ARE WETLAND BIRDS?

Many Australian shorebirds breed in response to cyclic wet and dry conditions. Some of these 'inland breeders' are very enigmatic, with 1000's appearing 'from out of nowhere' when areas such as the Murray-Darling or Lake Eyre systems receive much-awaited water flow. Poor environmental management of Australia's river systems and wetlands is well documented with continued coastal and urban development adding to the pressure. Most important to wetland health are the invertebrates (food) and water depth - the differing beak and leg lengths of many wetland birds mean that access to, and availability of, food can be a matter of millimetres.



AUSTRALIAN PAINTED SNIFE *Rostratula australis*
ENDANGERED

An enigmatic species, they are hard to detect, uncommon, nomadic and widespread. All previous Sydney records were one or two birds until four birds were recorded at Riverstone Wetlands 7th October 2012 (3 males photographed together, an immature female was also present).



AUSTRALIAN PRATINCOLE *Stiltia isabella*
VAGRANT (Out of normal migration/distribution range)

A nomadic wetland species that breed in northern Australia, inhabiting the open plains and semi-arid inland regions of Australia. Two individuals were photographed at the Riverstone Wetlands on the 13th & 20th December, 2015, matching the record at Pitt Town Lagoon 40 years previous!



RED-NECKED AVOCET *Recurvirostra novaehollandiae*

An endemic species, found in suitable wetland habitats throughout Australia. They are now regularly seen at the Waterbird Refuge at Homebush Bay, with the largest count of 182 birds being seen in recent years. An occasional visitor to Riverstone Wetlands. Four birds were present, including the two photographed above, on 2nd December 2018, this record was eclipsed when 31 birds were observed on 14th April 2019.



PIED STILT *Himantopus leucocephalus*

A nomadic species which responds to fluctuating water levels and suitable wetland habitat in the Hawkesbury and Homebush regions. A regular visitor to the Riverstone Wetlands, individuals can often number in the 60's-70's with the highest count of 79 recorded on 7th October 2012 and a chick seen 20 days later. Many young birds (pictured above) have been seen on several occasions.



RED-CAPPED PLOVER *Charadrius ruficapillus*

A species often found in coastal habitats such as sandy undisturbed beaches that has declined sharply in the Sydney region due to human disturbance. They are regular Spring/Summer visitors to the Riverstone Wetlands. Eight birds were seen 3rd September 2017 with breeding activity (nest and eggs) observed on the 10th, 17th and 24th.



DOUBLE-BANDED PLOVER *Charadrius bicinctus*

A Trans-Tasman migrant that breeds in New Zealand spending March - September in Australia. Usually seen in non-breeding plumage, it is the only migratory shorebird that doesn't breed in the northern hemisphere. One bird seen at the Riverstone Wetlands on 20th April 2013 and 12th May 2019 are unusual sightings as this species prefers coastal habitats.



BLACK-FRONTED DOTTEREL *Thinornis melanops*

An attractive and relatively common shorebird found on most muddy lake margins and fringes of freshwater wetlands. They are regular visitors to the muddy edges of the Riverstone Wetlands with regular counts of 40-50 birds throughout August and September 2017.



RED-KNEED DOTTEREL *Erythrogonys cinctus*

This species is both resident and nomadic within its range, mainly in response to rainfall and water levels. The highest count at Riverstone Wetlands was 45 birds seen on the 21st April 2013. Eight birds were recorded on 24th September 2017 including a pair of adults with four chicks, with breeding activity observed throughout October of that year.



STRAW-NECKED IBIS *Threskiornis spinicollis*

Quite common but much less-urbanised than the Australian White Ibis, the Straw-necked Ibis is known as the Farmer's Friend as it feeds on grubs and invertebrates such as locusts in grasslands, especially after rain. The Straw-necked Ibis is a regular visitor to Riverstone Wetlands, sometimes occurring in large flocks. The highest count of 100 birds was recorded on 13th April 2013, with 80 present a week later.



GLOSSY IBIS *Plegadis falcinellus*

Widespread, with greater numbers in northern Australia and inland NSW where it responds to floods in semi-arid zones. The least common Ibis of the Sydney region, found in shallows and swamps in the Homebush and Hawkesbury wetlands. There have been two records of Glossy Ibis at Riverstone Wetlands. A single bird was seen on 7th December 2012 with another individual spotted on 23rd January 2016.

The settlement ponds at the Riverstone Meatworks site provide suitable feeding habitat for a large number of **WATERFOWL**

The Riverstone Wetlands are home to rarer and specialised species, ranging from grazing and dabbling types when the water is dry/shallow to large rare diving species when conditions are full. More common species occur often in huge flocks that other urban wetlands could not support.



WHAT ARE WATERFOWL?

These are the range of birds such as ducks, geese and swans but also coots, moorhens and their rarer, shyer relatives the rails and crakes. **Black Swans** have been recorded at the Riverstone wetlands on most months, with 33 seen on the 31st May 2015. The highest number recorded for an individual species at the Riverstone Wetlands goes to the impressive flocks of up to 400 **Grey Teal**. These large numbers have been seen on several occasions. There are also breeding records for both the Grey and **Chestnut Teal**. While the large water bodies support flocks of these birds (and tired individuals looking for a suitable place to rest and refuel) the small reed-beds provide possible habitat for all three species of Sydney crakes and the Buff-banded Rail.



BLACK SWAN *Cygnus atratus*

The Black Swan is an iconic, relatively common species that is widespread throughout Australia. Sydney breeding records are less common due to its requirements. The above photograph is a family group after a successful breeding attempt at Riverstone Wetlands on 5th September 2020.



MAGPIE GOOSE *Anseranas semipalmata*

This individual seen and photographed on the 25th April 2022 is only the third Sydney record in over 20 years, another rarity for the Riverstone Wetlands. The other additions listed here (2022/23) show the Riverstone Wetlands to be Sydneys premier birding hotspot.



PLUMED WHISTLING DUCK *Dendrocygna eytoni*

The Plumed Whistling Duck, from the northern and eastern tropics of Australia, was once a rare visitor to Sydney with more frequent records from the 1950's. A single record of (22) Plumed Whistling Duck seen at the Riverstone Wetlands on 10th March 2013.



AUSTRALIAN SHELDUCK *Tadorna tadornoides*

This large handsome duck is an occasional visitor to Sydney, sometimes found in the wetlands around Hawkesbury, the Richmond Lowlands and Pitt Town Lagoon. A late edition to the Riverstone list, this bird was photographed on 28th May 2023.



MUSK DUCK *Biziura lobata*

The Musk Duck is one of Australia's largest ducks and an uncommon visitor to Sydney, seen occasionally in ones or twos for brief periods of time. Once a regular at Centennial Park, now observed at large water bodies at Homebush Bay or in the Richmond Lowlands/Castlereagh area. This male was photographed at Riverstone Wetlands on 25th April 2022 with another record on 23rd March 2024, both in full conditions.



BLUE-BILLED DUCK *Oxyura australis*

There are around eight records of Blue-billed Duck in the Sydney region, half of those were at Pitt Town Lagoon, with four records elsewhere. A large diving duck, one or two birds usually turn up for a short period of time before finding suitable habitat elsewhere. The individual photographed was spotted at Riverstone Wetlands when conditions were full on the 14th May 2022.



AUSTRALASIAN SHOVELER *Spatula rhynchotis*

Sydney records vary depending on fluctuations in water levels inland with as many as 300 individuals seen at Pitt Town Lagoon in 1997. Small numbers of Australasian Shoveler are regularly recorded at the Riverstone Wetlands. The highest count of 38 birds was recorded on January 23rd 2016.



PINK-EARED DUCK *Malacorhynchus membranaceus*

Once a rare visitor to Sydney, Pink-eared Ducks have become more frequent visitors to western Sydney wetlands over the past 50 years. Pink-eared Ducks have been seen at the Riverstone Wetlands all months except April and May. The highest number of individuals (165) was recorded on 8th November 2015.



AUSTRALIAN (SPOTTED) CRAKE *Porzana fluminea*

An uncommon visitor, Australian Spotted Crane numbers/presence are dependent on water levels to provide optimum conditions. Three individuals were recorded in the Reed-bed from October to December 2012. The more common **Spotless Crane** is present in the reed beds all year round with the highest count of six birds recorded on 4th July 2015.



BAILLON'S CRAKE *Porzana pusilla*

Feeding on exposed mud and sheltering in reed-beds, Baillon's Crane are limited to a small number of suitable habitats within the Sydney region when conditions are right. The above photograph is one of several birds that were present in the Reed-beds from September to November 2012.

The settlement ponds at the Riverstone Meatworks site provide suitable breeding and feeding habitat for a wide range of **RAPTORS**

Native Eagles, Hawks, Kites, Harriers and Falcons have been recorded at the Riverstone Wetlands. Each species may use different hunting techniques to catch a range of prey. The large variety of raptor species recorded are an indication of a high biodiversity level and just how rich these wetlands are.



THE ROLE OF RAPTORS

Predation by native species which have evolved alongside our unique wildlife plays an important role and are a key part of a healthy ecosystem, ensuring fitness of populations and a structure of biodiversity levels. This is a very different role to various introduced predators such as Foxes, Cats and Rats which have had a devastating effect on Australia's native wildlife.

The skies above Riverstone Wetlands are regularly patrolled by a range of raptors looking for the opportunity to snatch large insects, reptiles and birds. Many of these hunters are seen circling high in the sky or glimpsed speeding low over open grassland, some images are 'file photos' of the species recorded at the site.



WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE *Aquila audax*

An iconic Australian species, Wedge-tailed Eagles can be regular visitors to the Riverstone Wetlands at certain times with a pair of birds seen in March and May 2013, twice in July 2015, and again on 27th August 2018.



LITTLE EAGLE *Hieraaetus morphnoides*

Listed as Vulnerable, Little Eagles are in decline over much of Sydney due to loss of suitable habitat.

A rare visitor, both light and dark morphs were seen in 2013 with another recorded on 2nd December 2018.



WHITE-BELLIED SEA EAGLE *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

Uncommon but widespread over Sydney dams and catchments. Adult and young White-bellied Sea Eagles have been seen at Riverstone Wetlands, with an adult recorded sitting on a large nest in 26 July 1993.



SQUARE-TAILED KITE *Lophoictinia isura*

This species is listed as Vulnerable in NSW but is becoming a more regular visitor to Western Sydney in recent years. There are four records of Square-tailed Kites in the area surrounding Riverstone Wetlands.

Whistling Kites and **Black-shouldered Kites** are both common species frequently seen hunting at Riverstone Wetlands.



SWAMP HARRIER *Circus approximans*

Swamp Harriers fly low over reed beds/wetlands with large wings and trailing legs. An occasional visitor to Riverstone Wetlands, there are four records of Swamp Harrier, with an individual bird sighted on the 15th and 23rd of September 2012.

There are three records of **Spotted Harrier** in total, with a pair of adult birds seen together on 6th April 2014.



BROWN GOSHAWK *Accipiter fasciatus*

Brown Goshawks are a regular visitor to Riverstone Wetlands with an adult pair seen on 23rd October 2016 and two immature birds on 19th March 2017 (possible breeding).

Collared Sparrowhawk include an adult pair and a juvenile seen hunting together on 24th September 2017. **Grey Goshawks** are rare visitors, with one bird seen on 23rd August 2014 and another on 17th October 2015.



BLACK FALCON *Falco subniger*

A powerful Falcon which can take down large birds but also feeds on carrion, known to associate with Black Kite when irruptions occur in inland/northern NSW. Black Falcons are rare visitors to Western Sydney, a single bird was seen circling over the Riverstone Wetlands on 25th August 2013, with another individual spotted on 8th October 2017.



BROWN FALCON *Falco berigora*

Brown Falcons have a range of colour phases ranging from pale cream individuals with dark speckles, through to dark brown birds that look similar to Black Falcons. Brown Falcons are a declining species in Western Sydney, during November 2014 a pair built a nest in the large Eucalypt near the Riverstone Wetlands, successfully raising two young.



PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus*

Peregrines are found worldwide and are an urbanised Falcon species, often found in city centres feeding on pigeons and nesting in high buildings. Single birds are regularly seen hunting and roosting at the Riverstone Wetlands at various times of the year.



AUSTRALIAN HOBBY *Falco longipennis*

Hobbies are an occasional visitor to the Riverstone Wetlands with two individuals seen on 6th April 2014 and 11th July 2015. The other small falcon, the **Nankeen Kestrel** is regular visitor to the Riverstone Wetlands with 2-3 individuals regularly seen hunting and roosting with a suspected breeding adult pair seen near a hollow.

Will a flood-free refuge be destroyed for offices and factories?

After over 50 years supporting our regions wildlife, the Riverstone Wetlands are now slated to be bulldozed for industrial estates. If approved, this will destroy the only flood-free waterbird refuge in Western Sydney.

What is Proposed

The Department of Planning initially supported protection of the wetlands but reversed its position following intervention by an MP and a developer. The Labour Government now seeks to replicate those flawed decisions and bulldoze the wetlands and 'relocate' (offset) them by creating new ponds on the nearby floodplain.

Riverstone Wetlands are the last flood-free haven for migratory shorebirds in Western Sydney and are irrefutably irreplaceable. The 'replacement' (offset) habitat proposed for migratory shorebirds is entirely floodprone, with a 50% chance of flooding over 20 cm depth every year (50% AEP event).

This proposed 'migratory bird habitat' will be just 4 hectares in area - less than half the 9 hectares destroyed. However, due to the steep terrain, only the shallow edges will be migrant habitat, with most of the 4 hectares as deep water unsuitable for waders.

The proposed habitat is located just 36 m from the development area, immediately beside massive flood defence walls built to enable a greater development footprint. What's more the structure will block the horizon line-of-sight critical for wetland migrant birds. Details can be found in the Marsden Park North Precinct: Migratory Shorebirds Assessment (pages 53-57).

“Once established (constructed wetlands) may be able to replace some of the biodiversity that was displaced or destroyed when they were lost.

This begs the question - if they are important for people and are now being constructed why destroy or degrade them in the first place?”

Professor Max Finlayson,

Wetland ecologist and international expert in constructed wetlands

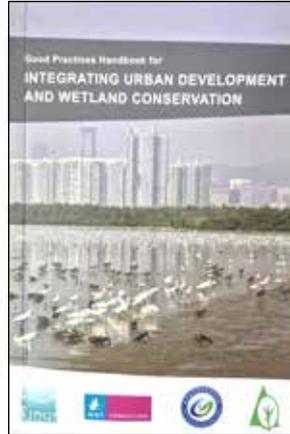
The value of the Riverstone Wetlands is in being fertile, flat and flood-free. A 'replacement' wetland in the floodplain will be of little value to our precious wildlife. The Riverstone Wetlands proposed fate only serves to highlight the failures of biodiversity protection in NSW and Australia.

The development is proposed by the Marsden Park North Precinct, an instrument under the Sydney Growth Centres. The Commonwealth biodiversity approval for the Growth Centres is made via a Strategic Assessment (2012) which does not assess or offset impacts on migratory bird species. The government at the time had no knowledge that these wetlands existed.

As a result, there is no valid Commonwealth approval for impact on these species. The 'replacement' proposed is grossly unsuitable, and will not support the precious migratory birdlife and Green and Golden Bell Frogs.

The Riverstone Wetlands are currently an irreplaceable part of Western Sydney's natural heritage and should be retained for their outstanding value to our wildlife.

Global Solutions for Global issues



Industrial expansion and land reclamation in China and Korea has resulted in a loss of 50% of wetlands along the East Asian Flyway. Australia has also experienced significant losses of wetland habitat.

A major difference is that many Asian countries are reversing this trend with research applied to constructed wetlands with world class facilities in recognition of the booming domestic and international birdwatching and eco-tourism industry.

Blacktown's sister city is Daegu City in the Republic of Korea (South Korea). It boasts the internationally significant Dalseong Marshes a short drive from Suseong Gu. Each Winter, wetland birds migrate from these wetlands to feed in Australia including at the Riverstone Wetlands. These migratory birds (including the Latham's Snipe, Marsh Sandpiper, and Pacific Golden Plover) are protected under the Republic of Korea- Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (ROKAMBA).

The birds of the Riverstone Wetlands and Daegu City have undertaken this 'cultural exchange' for generations. The conservation and management of the Riverstone Wetlands presents opportunities for added engagement between the governments of these two cities. A particular opportunity is the potential to tag migratory birds. Birds tagged in Suseong Gu may be observed when arriving in Riverstone and other local wetlands and visa versa.

This would present a novel opportunity for connecting local communities between these geographically distant sister cities. The addition of recreational infrastructure including trails, shelters and hides would activate this natural area bringing new economic activity to the region.

Birdwatching is pouring billions of dollars into Australia's tourism industry and prompting calls for more to be done to promote this "undervalued" sector. Australia is home to the second-highest number of endemic bird species in the world, attracting birdwatching enthusiasts from across the globe.

International visitors spent \$2.6 billion on travel that involved birdwatching in the year to June 2024, according to data from Tourism Research Australia, while domestic overnight travellers spent \$636 million over the same period, up from \$414 million in 2021 - a 53% increase. *Kirsty Sexton-McGrath, ABC*

Recognition of this financial opportunity not only benefits the environment but could mark a change into long-term investment in societal well-being and mental health benefits for future generations. With the 'Growth and Houses' agenda pushed by the development lobby now appearing to be a little thin when the public are asked what do they want a 21st century Sydney to look like.

How can you help protect our endangered birdlife.

The Riverstone Wetlands highlight a broken and corrupted planning process in NSW. The wildlife of this irreplaceable habitat needs your help. The Riverstone Wetlands are essential as the only flood-free refuge for local and international waterbirds in the region.



Above: A statue of Sir Peter Scott at the entrance to the London Wetlands Centre, managed by the World Wildfowl Trust.

A GOOD BIRD HIDE IS A POWERFUL EDUCATIONAL TOOL
In the UK and US, hides are often an important feature of many wildlife reserves. Many are well-equipped, providing a comfortable and rewarding experience for visitors, often with informative educational materials and/or birdlists. The public are encouraged to contribute, they also make great venues for school excursions.

“The Conservationist’s most important task, if we are to save the Earth, is to educate”

Sir Peter Scott 1909 - 1989, Founder, World Wildfowl Trust

The various UK County Wildlife Trusts and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) form a network of well-managed reserves throughout the country, with a range of well-designed bird hides and well-equipped educational/reception centres.

Below: A bird hide at the RSPB reserve at Leighton Moss.



How does Australia compare?

Despite having some of the most unique wildlife on the planet, Australia, and Sydney in particular, has the shameful record of most extinctions than any other country since European settlement. A trend that looks set to continue while ignorance prevails.

Cuddly Koalas, often in zoos, are a major tourist drawcard, along with captive Kangaroos while habitat loss ensures a continued loss of Australia’s unique biodiversity. Saving (and developing) the Riverstone Wetlands offers the first step to help Australia lift its game to achieve environmental outcomes that will benefit us all.

Please make a submission calling for the protection of the exceptional biodiversity of the Riverstone Wetlands and against the proposal to replace the wetlands in the floodplain.

<https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/ppr/under-exhibition/marsden-park-north-precinct>

To see the technical documents, click the ‘State Assessed Rezoning Proposal’ tab (this is the private proposal initiated and paid for by the owner/developer Leamac/Mirvac for the Riverstone Wetlands)

Submissions are due 5:00pm 30 JANUARY 2026

Key Submission Points:

- The Riverstone Wetlands are an irreplaceable part of Western Sydney’s natural heritage and should be retained
- The ‘replacement’ proposed is grossly unsuitable and unable to support the precious migratory birdlife and Green and Golden Bell Frogs:
 - is half the size of the habitat removed
 - is deep not shallow for wading birds
 - is floodprone not floodfree
 - bird flight paths are impeded by high flood defence walls
- The Marsden Park North Migratory Bird Assessment is grossly inadequate
- Fails to undertake suitable survey or meet survey guidelines for Green & Golden Bell Frog and for migratory shorebirds
- Fails to assess three EPBC listed migrant species present (Oriental Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Eastern Yellow Wagtail)
- Fails to provide repeat survey evidence to reject the site as Nationally Important for Sharp-tailed Sandpiper according to EPBC Act Policy Statement 3.21

Please also contact the decision makers directly.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT:

- Federal Minister for Environment Murray Watt
<https://www.murraywatt.com.au/contact/>
- Chifley MP Ed Husic Ed.Husic.MP@aph.gov.au

NSW GOVERNMENT

- NSW Minister for Planning Paul Scully
<https://paulscullymp.com.au/contact/>
- Londonderry MP Prue Car
<https://www.pruecar.au/contact-prue/>
- NSW Minister for Environment Penny Sharpe
penny.sharpe@parliament.nsw.gov.au

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- Blacktown Mayor Brad Bunting
brad.bunting@blacktown.nsw.gov.au

Bird species recorded at Riverstone Wetlands (176 ssp. at 31.12.25)

Stubble Quail	Australian Hobby	Musk Lorikeet	Golden Whistler
Brown Quail	Black Falcon	Eastern Rosella	Rufous Whistler
Magpie-goose	Peregrine Falcon	Swift Parrot	Grey Shrikethrush
Plumed Whistling-Duck	Nankeen Kestrel	Red-rumped Parrot	Black-faced Monarch
Musk Duck	Buff-banded Rail	Pallid Cuckoo	Leaden Flycatcher
Blue-billed Duck	Baillon's Crake	Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Restless Flycatcher
Black Swan	Australian Crake	Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo	Magpie Lark
Australian Shelduck	Spotless Crake	Shining Bronze-cuckoo	Grey Fantail
Australian Wood Duck	Purple Swamphen	Australian Koel	Willy Wagtail
Pacific Black Duck	Dusky Moorhen	Channel-billed Cuckoo	Black-faced Cuckooshrike
Australasian Shoveler	Eurasian Coot	Australian Owlet-nightjar	White-bellied Cuckooshrike
Grey Teal	Painted Buttonquail	Tawny Frogmouth	White-winged Triller
Chestnut Teal	Latham's Snipe	Azure Kingfisher	Olive-backed Oriole
Hardhead	Australian Painted Snipe	Laughing Kookaburra	White-browed Woodswallow
Pink-eared Duck	Red-necked Stint	Sacred Kingfisher	Dusky Woodswallow
Australasian Grebe	Pectoral Sandpiper	Dollarbird	Grey Butcherbird
Hoary-headed Grebe	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Superb Fairywren	Australian Magpie
Australasian Darter	Common Greenshank	Spotted Pardalote	Pied Currawong
Little Pied Cormorant	Curlew Sandpiper	Striated Pardalote	Australian Raven
Little Black Cormorant	Marsh Sandpiper	White-browed Scrubwren	White-winged Chough
Great Cormorant	Wood Sandpiper	Weebill	Eurasian Skylark
Australian Pelican	Ruddy Turnstone	White-throated Gerygone	Yellow Wagtail
White-faced Heron	Black-winged Stilt	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Australian Pipit
White-necked Heron	Red-necked Avocet	Yellow Thornbill	House Sparrow
Great Egret	Pacific Golden Plover	Striated Thornbill	Zebra Finch
Intermediate Egret	Red-capped Plover	Red Wattlebird	Double-barred Finch
Cattle Egret	Double-banded Plover	Noisy Friarbird	Red-browed Finch
Nankeen Night Heron	Oriental Plover	Bell Miner	Nutmeg Mannikin
Glossy Ibis	Red-kneed Dotterel	Noisy Miner	Chestnut-breasted Mannikin
Australian White Ibis	Black-fronted Dotterel	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	European Goldfinch
Straw-necked Ibis	Banded Lapwing	Fuscous Honeyeater	Mistletoebird
Royal Spoonbill	Masked Lapwing	White-plumed Honeyeater	Welcome Swallow
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	Australian Pratincole	Black-chinned Honeyeater	Tree Martin
Black-shouldered Kite	Feral (Rock) Pigeon	Brown-headed Honeyeater	Fairy Martin
Whistling Kite	Spotted Dove	White-naped Honeyeater	Red-whiskered Bulbul
Square-tailed Kite	Crested Pigeon	New Holland Honeyeater	Australian Reed-Warbler
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	Peaceful Dove	White-cheeked Honeyeater	Tawny Grassbird
Swamp Harrier	Bar-shouldered Dove	Eastern Spinebill	Little Grassbird
Spotted Harrier	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	Scarlet Honeyeater	Brown Songlark
Brown Goshawk	Galah	Rose Robin	Golden-headed Cisticola
Grey Goshawk	Long-billed Corella	Eastern Yellow Robin	Silvereye
Collared Sparrowhawk	Little Corella	Eastern Whipbird	Common Blackbird
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Varied Sittella	Common Starling
Brown Falcon	Rainbow Lorikeet	Crested Shrike-tit	Common Myna